‘Can a narrative approach to Paul’s epistles help to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings?’

An engagement with the narrative theology of Stanley Hauerwas, 1 Corinthians and the Methodist Churches of Bude and Holsworthy Circuit.

Submitted by John Paul Henry to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theology, July 2015

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(Signature) ..........................
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Abstract

This thesis explores the inter-relationship between a narrative trajectory in Pauline studies, and an ecclesiological hermeneutical reading of Paul encompassing the writings of Stanley Hauerwas and the contemporary Methodist Church. I explore whether or not the idea of a narrative/ecclesiological hermeneutic might shed any light on a reading of 1 Corinthians as ‘scripture’ for the Church. The work involves a three-way dialogue between a Pauline text, the theology of Stanley Hauerwas and my own context as a Methodist Minister. I explore whether or not any or all of the ‘voices’ in the dialogue will bring fresh understanding in the hermeneutical process, add anything in interpretation or bring major critique to bear on any of the other ‘voices’ within that three-way dialogue.

My work combines diverse approaches in new ways to investigate how scripture can be fruitfully appropriated in the contemporary Church. Building on the narrative approach to Paul I explore, through a series of Contextual Bible Studies, how 1 Corinthians can be read through the Hauerwasian lenses of vision and narrative. My conclusions are that Hauerwas’s ecclesial perspective remains too distant from the particularities of specific church communities, and that their engagement with scripture is best enriched by a combination of historical-critical exegesis and Contextual Bible Study methods.
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Introduction

Over a number of years I have held an interest in hermeneutics, narrative theology, the theology of Stanley Hauerwas, Pauline literature and ecclesiology – all lively areas of contemporary scholarly discussion, in nuanced and different ways. This thesis attempts to bring these concerns together within a creative synthesis. I explore a dialogue of these interests as a practitioner and with the specific concern for Christian formation within my work as a Methodist Minister. At the outset of the journey I wanted to explore whether a narrative approach to Paul, incorporating the work of the theologian Stanley Hauerwas and voices from my own context of ministry would bear any fruit in terms of discipleship formation.

As a result of my research I shall argue that a narrative reading of a Pauline text is an innovative, creative and fruitful way of reading Paul’s letters for an ecclesial community; furthermore I argue that it opens up the possibility of a resource for the drawing out of a Christocentric orientation, which in turn holds possibility for contemporary discipleship. I make this case by developing a three-way encounter, (a) reading Paul within a narrative hermeneutic and methodology alongside two themes of vision and narrative from (b) the theology of Stanley Hauerwas and in (c) my own context of ministry through Contextual Bible Study. I will argue that these interests, commitments and the relationships between the different elements of my thesis enhance a reading for a particular Christian community.

I test out the thesis that the different components of the hermeneutical process as outlined above all hold potential significance within the process of reading a text for the purposes as noted above. The different
elements within the process are sustained by and engage the other parts of the whole; each element within the hermeneutical process would be poorer without the others; paradoxically, I will note that the different elements within the process also bring critique to bear upon the other related elements. The relationship between the various elements of the thesis can be illustrated and I attempt to offer a cursory depiction of these things in Figure 1. This diagram sets out the general direction of thesis.

Figure 1

[Diagram showing the relationship between various elements, including The World Behind the Text: Ecclesiology in the New Testament, The World in Front of the Text, Narrative/Story, and particular elements like Corinth—explored through historical critical exegesis (chapters 4 and 5) and Bude and Holsworthy Circuit—explored through the CBS Methodology, i.e. West/Lawrence/Riches et al (Chapters 3—5).]
I will observe that a number of biblical scholars have argued for a narrative reading of Paul (Hays et al), making the case (through a critical engagement of the arguments) that a narrative hermeneutical reading does indeed throw fresh understanding upon the Pauline texts. Hays initiates the narrative hermeneutical approach to Paul within Galatians, however, the narrative approach to Paul increasingly offered something of a wider applicability as the scholarship developed; therefore a number of Pauline scholars have argued for a narrative hermeneutic across the Pauline corpus: Petersen in Philemon, Wright and Campbell in Romans etc. (see below). Many of the arguments about Paul’s implicit story of a saviour predicated and perceived initially within one of the epistles (for Hays in Galatians) can be brought to the broader spectrum of his writings as a whole. Furthermore I will assert that this particular hermeneutical methodology lays a foundation and an underpinning for an ecclesiological and contemporary reading of Paul; on occasion implicitly expressed and at other times stated openly.

Yet, it is within the particular that this wider hermeneutical strategy makes sense; and indeed by exploring specific texts we can extend its application. Therefore I will argue that Paul’s implicit story of Christ makes most sense within an exploration of the particularity of an exegetical approach to 1 Corinthians (or Romans, Philemon, Philippians etc.).¹ Similarly within the theology of Hauerwas there is a claim toward a broad applicability that I argue

¹ Though it goes beyond the work of this thesis I wonder if a similar approach as to the one I am suggesting might bear fruit within the other Pauline epistles. I make a similar assertion to one I have already made: there are hints of a Christocentric pattern for the purposes of Christian formation within work done on other parts of the Pauline corpus, but in my opinion these hints are suggestive of further development.
makes more sense within a particular and focused interpretative commitment (thereby noting once again that Hauerwas offers a too generalised approach to ecclesiology). Therefore, I am arguing for a rootedness of the universal within the particular in terms of biblical scholarship, contemporary ethical concerns, ecclesiology and discipleship. This is what the diagram (Figure 1) attempts to show – thereby suggesting within the thesis a synthesis of a four-fold creative interpretative mix.

Drawing on these various perspectives and approaches, my project is designed to test the hypothesis that a narrative approach to Paul (and engaging the theology of Hauerwas) is fruitful for contemporary ecclesiological purposes and the building of Christian identity and discipleship within a particular context.

At this stage in my introduction I wish to map the direction of my thesis. Chapter One seeks to demonstrate certain stories can be identified within the Pauline corpus; the stories suggested vary according to the fruits of the scholarship; however I suggest that they point towards and hint at Paul encouraging the embodiment of a Christocentric story in the communities to which he writes.² The literature review attempts to explore the beginnings of an identified and specific Christocentric story fruitful for Christian formation and as a first order step toward engaging that story in a particular context of ecclesiology.

The identification of the story of Christ as a model for Christian discipleship is a key theme in the work of Stanley Hauerwas, whose work I will

² I think this is also implicitly true in the work of Petersen who seeks to show how Paul maps a story for the characters within Philemon to inhabit (see below).
explore in more detail in Chapter Two. However, while Hauerwas makes an argument for a narrative paradigm based on Christ (at least initially, see below); he does not define it sharply enough. I therefore develop a critique of Hauerwas: his work is weak exegetically. He argues that the model of Christian identity is to be found primarily within the faithful community of ‘the’ church. However, Hauerwas’ definitions of the story of Christ and ‘the’ Church are too general and universal; his formation of both of these stories has a tendency to play down the scriptural story of Jesus.

My thesis takes these criticisms seriously and attempts to address them by reading Paul’s theology in 1 Corinthians (hitherto a largely neglected text in narrative readings of Paul, perhaps because of its specifically contextual/responsive concerns) to discover the story of Christ and then attempts a reading of the same material for contemporary Christian discipleship concerns. The concept of the implicit story of Christ, gleaned through Pauline scholarship can appear too broad and generalised; therefore in order to engage this observation critically, I take two of Hauerwas’ theological categories, namely vision and narrative, and explore them in terms of the Corinthian context, developing them for a dialogical engagement with my own setting. I argue that a Pauline hermeneutic engaging the use of story and which goes on to a dialogical engagement within this particular ecclesiological context is a much more fruitful hermeneutic for the purposes I am pursuing. I am presupposing that 1 Corinthians is ‘scripture’ and that we can read it for ecclesiological and discipleship purposes.³ To engage these concerns I therefore propose a reading within a local context using the CBS

³ I define ‘scripture’ further below, see note 34.
methodology; therefore Chapter Three sets out the methodology and a rationale for its use.

My project concerns itself with reading Paul and Hauerwas using a narrative hermeneutic to explore whether and where this interpretive dialogue is productive for the interests and concerns of an ecclesial community in the present day. In this sense it poses a three-way dialogue between Paul, Hauerwas and an ecclesial community, while acknowledging a fourfold conceptual framework and interpretative matrix. In pursuing this dialogue I also aim to consider the relationship between historical-critical exegesis and contemporary reading groups, comprising of lay and clergy reading groups. This leads to some conclusions about the contribution that historical exegesis can make to contemporary appropriation of selected Pauline texts – this is the subject matter of Chapters four and five.

Only two Pauline scholars (David Horrell and Douglas Harink) hitherto, have extensively engaged the work of Stanley Hauerwas within biblical studies (Harink 2003; Horrell 2005; cf. also Hays 1997a: 253-66). This is surprising, given the interest in narrative interpretation in biblical studies, and represents an opportunity to explore in bringing a contemporary theologian into dialogue with biblical studies, and the narrative approach to Paul in particular. Hauerwas has argued for a narrative understanding within his work, that we are storied people and that we draw upon the story of Jesus as a paradigm for the story of the contemporary church. I believe that Paul draws upon the story of Jesus for his theology and the church in antiquity; therefore I suggest that there is a correlation to be made between Paul, Hauerwas and the contemporary church.
While there are a number of critiques of Hauerwas, two primary ones are significant for my work. First of all, Hauerwas generalises and oversimplifies 'the' church, writing and theologising in sweeping ways with no apparent recognition of different expressions of church. Secondly, his theology is lacking in exegetical depth; for all his focus upon concepts drawn from the Bible he has neglected or at least ignored an extensive usage of exegesis as a resource for his theology.

I use CBS methodology to root and ground my work in a specific context (and thereby attempt to address one of the concerns raised about Hauerwas). I will argue that the two themes of vision and narrative underpin and reinforce a broader narratively shaped hermeneutic and remain true to a perceived implicit pattern in 1 Corinthians.

In engaging local readers comprising two groups, I use the CBS methodology to explore how ordinary/intuitive readers (laity) and readers that have some training in Biblical scholarship (clergy) respond to texts that I identify as having some correspondence to the key Hauerwasian themes. I compare and contrast the responses from the CBS groups with Hauerwas’ theology and with what emerges from a historical critical exegesis. In engaging the responses from the CBS methodology permission from the Ethics Committee was obtained and each contributor was made aware of my use of the research, a consent form being signed by each participant (see appendices).

I argue that the CBS methodology in and of itself is left wanting without some input from historical critical exegesis. The contemporary engagement produced vague responses which lacked the specificity which
historical insights into the Corinthian context could give them. I argue that the development of a dialogue between the CBS methodology and the historical critical exegetical method enhances both. Similarly I argue that a dry academic approach to the text bears no fruit in the terms I am outlining without the contribution from people within a particular context and without the ‘Word’ being read in place (Lawrence 2009).

In exploring the Contextual Bible Study methodology I shall argue that a further exegesis of the text (combined with the findings of the CBS groups) will develop and enhance a reading of a Pauline Epistle in a creative hermeneutical relationship. At the same time this will address the second critique of Hauerwas, namely that his work is lacking in exegetical depth. In order to explore these research interests I engage each group i.e. the laity group and the clergy group twice, first in a CBS method focusing entirely on intuitive reader-responses ‘in front’ of the text, and then for a second time in light of critical insights drawn from ‘behind the text’ through historical-critical exegesis.

At its heart, this thesis concerns itself with exploring a narrative understanding of Paul as a way of explicating an on-going exploration of his theology as a resource for the church. I will be testing out whether the model has any prospect for a narratively generated discipleship and the forming of Christian identity in a dialogue involving Hauerwas, a contemporary ecclesiological context and a Pauline text. Therefore, in Chapters Four and Five, I set out the groups’ reactions to two texts in 1 Corinthians and related discussion questions: one text focused on the theme of vision and the other on narrative or story. I also offer the historical exegesis I presented to each of
the groups after their initial discussions and note my observations on how this changed their engagement with the text and its relationship to the contemporary ecclesial situation. Finally, in *Chapter Six*, I draw together the main conclusions from the investigation.
Chapter One  
A Narrative Approach Within Pauline Studies.

In the last two or three decades there has been a shift toward a narrative reading of Pauline texts. In this opening chapter I outline the major features of this development; I will argue that this hermeneutical shift creates a foundation for and enables an interpretation of Paul for the purposes of Christian discipleship and formation. However, I also argue that this particular interpretative strategy cries out for expansion if it is to be developed for these specific purposes.

Beginning with *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Hays 2002), I carry out a literature review, exploring the different ways a narrative hermeneutic in Paul has been explicated and critiqued.\(^4\) This is purposive, moving toward my interest in developing the concept for the purpose of identifying a Christocentric pattern for the *expressed purpose* of its application for Christian discipleship and formation.

As I explore two Pauline texts from 1 Corinthians, engaging a dialogue with the work of Hauerwas and my own context of ministry, I ask: Can a narrative approach help to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings.

**A philosophical base for the use of a narrative paradigm.**

A narrative approach to Paul has its foundation in the use of story in other forms of human expression.\(^5\) This initial exploration into the use of

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\(^4\) Limitations of space dictate broad analysis.  
\(^5\) I will argue that a narrative approach to understanding Paul and his theology can enable an understanding of contemporary ecclesiology and the stories of the individuals caught up in the
narrative more broadly is important as it draws out many of the themes and premises of a developed narrative hermeneutic in Paul. The theoretical paradigm has been structured in a variety of patterns some of which have been incorporated into theology and biblical scholarship.

Stroup offers a justification for a narrative approach: “Every philosophical anthropology, Christian or not, which claims to offer a full description of human being must come to terms with the narrative structure of human identity” (Stroup 1981: 89, emphasis mine). Similarly Barthes suggests: “There does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives” (cited in Hinchman 2001: 235). Narratives shape life and understanding, constitute community, explain group identity, legitimate action and provide markers for community understanding (Hinchman 2001: 120). Some narratives are constructed as a means of ordering understanding, some narratives might be perceived as already being in existence. People construct, deconstruct and interpret narratives. In his famous essay ‘The Narrative Quality of Experience’ Crites defines how human experience is narratable (Crites 1971). His work is foundational for understanding narrative in the humanities.

Crites compares lived experience analogically to music; this is illustrative of one of the key roles of narrative; it is “capable of expressing coherence through time” (p.28).6 Life may be defined like a musical piece, larger story of their involvement with the church. This narrative approach will employ two different ‘reading’ methodologies (see below).

6 A helpful metaphor, a piece of music does display coherence; the musical piece can be appreciated as a whole or in its deconstructed parts. As a guitarist I appreciate a piece as a whole but love to dissect it to learn what chords and single note fills are being used etc.
seamlessly, and without breaking the temporal flow. We comprehend music not by dissecting it but hearing it as a whole; however, it can be deconstructed. We can see the narrative as a whole, a ‘meta-narrative’, or we can distinguish its component parts discretely. This has implications for both Pauline study and for ecclesiology. We may perceive the discrete parts of Paul’s theology or the whole; similarly, with ecclesiology, exploring the church within particular foci or as a fuller picture.  

For Crites, stories become like dwelling places, informing “people’s sense of the story of which their own lives are a part” (p.30); indeed stories are a part of the fabric of our lives. Sometimes we inhabit stories subconsciously and Crites calls such implicit stories ‘sacred stories’ which orient the life of people (p.31). Of course we can recollect experience in non-narrative forms but these images then become abstracted, generalised data and this can then become unhelpful (p.46). Picking out parts of the story as discursive language loses the meaning of those fragmented parts within the disintegration. Mundane stories are implicitly ‘held in’ the sacred story; they take soundings in that sacred story (p.32). However, there is a mediating form between sacred and mundane stories, ‘the experiencing consciousness’: “The form of active consciousness, i.e., the form of its experiencing, is in at

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7 This will be important later in the thesis when I consider the narrative of my own particular context of ministry.

8 The idea of ‘orientation’ will become important in my thesis.

9 Crites makes an impassioned plea that we keep alive the narrative quality of experience in the university and particularly in the humanities (pp. 46-47). He argues that narrative is an indispensable part of communicating truth as opposed to trying simply to abstract truth apart from narrative. Paul communicated truth by the use of the implicit narratives he and his readers shared. I will of course return to this point.

10 We can separate out the individual parts of the story, but still they remain a part of the whole, (Dunn 1998: 18; Witherington 1994: 5); Dunn’s categories, or discreet parts of the story Paul assumes and presents become suggestive of further narrative exploration (see Longenecker 2002a). Crites suggests the idea that we can deconstruct the narrative.
least some rudimentary sense narrative” (p.32). Experience is determined by the fusion of the three modalities of past, present and future, thereby making experience narratable (p.38). I suggest that Paul ‘reads’ and articulates the present in reference to the modalities of past and the future, therefore this is suggestive of a narrative dimension in his writings.

Crites’ argument is invaluable in arguing a philosophical basis for narrative and his work is suggestive of a narrative analysis of Paul, the category of narrative in Hauerwas and the story of a modern ecclesiological context. To what extent does Paul draw on or presume certain (Jewish) narratives or to what extent is he creating a new story? Similarly how does Paul draw upon the story of Christ and how might that story be perceived, albeit sometimes implicitly within his writings? How has Paul used existing stories; or how is a narrative articulated, legitimating a particular sense of being? 11 Do these things have contemporary ecclesiological significance? Indeed they have, and similar questions can be asked of a contemporary ecclesial context: What existing narratives are in existence and how are they being utilised and are legitimating praxis? How do we articulate our stories and do the ways that we articulate them open up the possibility of challenging existing stories?

As Crites suggests, we dwell in narratives, we note that Paul calls the recipients of his letters to dwell within the stories he offers (see below). My work concerns certain stories in particular: the story of Jesus, Paul’s primary implicit story, and how the community at Corinth were being invited to dwell in

11 Paul articulates a story in different ways according to a particular context (for example see Adams 2002: 41 ff.)
that story; by extension and in reflection upon the story of the Church at Corinth, our own contemporary story, how are we the present readers of the story at Corinth and Paul’s story of Christ to ‘live and move and have our being’? How were the Christian communities and individuals being invited to dwell or participate within this story as articulated by Paul? How might we, the contemporary interpreters of Paul and within our own context also dwell in the Pauline story of a Christocentric paradigm?

**A new paradigm for theology and Pauline study**

I have hinted at ideas of narrative as an interpretative tool for Pauline scholarship. Before I move toward this paradigm shift in Pauline scholarship I consider the move toward ‘narrative’ as a heuristic methodology in constructing a specifically ‘Christian’ theology.

> In theology, narrative has been appropriated in a variety of ways. One can distinguish between the following emphases in this respect: An emphasis on Scripture as the story; [and] an understanding of the importance of our communal story for theology (Bartholomew and Goheen 2004: 145 - 46).

In this citation Bartholomew and Goheen identify two stories: the Scriptural story and an ecclesiological/communal story. We discover a scriptural story in Paul, inscribed in the Christocentric story, this in turn can be a rich theological resource for the communal story, enabling a call towards a particular shared narrative and an expression of ecclesiology based upon that description.

Dan Stiver identifies three ‘schools’ of narrative theology, defined broadly as the ‘Chicago’, the ‘Yale’ and ‘Californian’ schools (Stiver 1996).^{12} I

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^{12} Stiver’s analysis of three narrative schools of thought is invaluable (see p. 135 ff.).
consider two of these paradigms as illustrative of positions at opposite ends of the spectrum. The ‘Chicago’ school makes the broadest claim for narrative. Biblical narratives are important but are ‘always’ related to wider concerns. The key figure is Paul Ricoeur (Stiver 1996: 135). Stiver notes in this model the use of narrative to disclose a world in front of the text, with its concerns of contemporary theology and a created narrative. Carr summarises a Ricoeurian approach:

Narrative takes up certain features of the pre-narrative world, but its primary function is to transform it [the pre-narrative world] into something new …. In the end, its function is ethical rather than epistemological (Carr 2008: 27).

Narrative is perceived as a literary construction unconcerned with discovering a world behind the narrative, but rather with creating order, through constructed narrative. Vanhoozer likewise echoes Ricoeur’s work when he writes:

By abbreviating, selecting and condensing, the painter enhances certain colours and shapes. The writer of fiction does the same for

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13 Stiver notes that other proponents of narrative in the ‘Chicago school’ are David Tracy and Langdon Gilkey (for Tracy’s work see pp. 139 and 149 and for Gilkey pp. 139, 143 and 149). Stiver labels these two other theologians as ‘revisionist’ they were seeking to “correlate the theological symbol system with contemporary experience”, part of the theological symbol system would have been narrative, possibly even biblical narrative. I also note at this point that Ricoeur becomes an important conversation partner for Hays (see below).

14 A particular technical terminology in hermeneutics; ‘In front of the text’ hermeneutics implies that the ‘reader’ and her/his concerns take priority, the reader collaborates with the text (not the author), and this exercise creates meaning, in turn constructing a particular narrative in interaction with the text. The reader brings interests, acknowledged and prior presuppositions to the text. Illustrative of this methodology might be Contextual Bible Study (see below). I focus here on a construction of narrative as I will go on to show that sometimes people construct narratives in an ecclesiological context, on occasion in an engagement with scripture, many times not (see below); see also Tate (Tate 1991), he explores readings that go behind the text, i.e. historical readings; readings that are concerned with the text itself, i.e. literary readings; and readings that are biased towards ‘reader response’, a set of readings beginning with the concerns of the reader e.g. feminist or liberationist readings; thereby, he notes three strands in hermeneutics – historical, literary and reader response concerns

15 There are shades of Ricoeur in the work of Petersen (Petersen 1985), see below. He constructs a narrative in order to understand Paul’s social world. In contrast Hays perceives a narrative embedded in or rather behind Paul’s writing (Hays 2002).
time and human actions… Fictions therefore ‘magnify’ certain aspects of reality (Vanhoozer 1990: 97).

Any epistemological view of history is subject to a particular nuance of perception, we ‘understand’ history by the construction of story. History is accordingly seen by Ricoeur as a ‘literary artefact’ (Thiselton 1992: 356; cf Ricoeur 1978:191). Ricoeur is “fond of speaking …of the way our ‘world’ is textually construed” (Stiver 1996:137, emphasis mine).\(^\text{16}\) We create narrative to explain and interpret reality; the narrative helps in our understanding. However, has Ricoeur simply transposed subjectivity into a new key (Thiselton 1992: 358)?\(^\text{17}\)

The ‘Yale School’ reverses this trajectory. Starting with the biblical narrative, we, rather than the narrative, are ‘being constructed’ through reflection on a prior existing story, we are drawn into and shaped by that story. A key figure in this movement is Hans Frei.\(^\text{18}\) Frei notes what had happened in relation to narrative:

> It is no exaggeration to say that all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world … rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story (Frei 1974: 130).

Frei’s project can be seen as a reaction to eighteenth century interpretive methodologies where the meaning of the narratives found within

\(^{16}\) As we approach Pauline hermeneutics Hays makes much of the fact that Paul configures a narrative while drawing on historical events (see below). While Paul’s theology is rooted in historical reality, he was deploying and perhaps even manipulating the ‘image stream’ for his own rhetorical concerns (see Crites 1971: 35-36). Configuration differs from creating a story. Paul draws upon the historical story of Christ and configures that story for his own paradigmatic concerns.

\(^{17}\) One wonders whether this compares with the radical reader response criticism of Stanley Fish (Fish 1980). Fish asks the pointed question “is there a text within the class!” His radical suggestion is that there isn’t – we create texts.

\(^{18}\) Stiver identifies George Lindbeck, Paul Holmer, Brevard Childs, David Kelsey, and Ronald Thiemann with the Yale School. Hauerwas is also connected with this school. I shall engage this connection critically below.
the Bible were thought to be conveying *eternal* truths about God and human nature, or were perceived as a source of *historical information* which could be critiqued and analysed as any other historical source (pp. 105 and 124-125). This distorts the text; the meaning is its ‘realistic narrative’.19 The meaning emerges from the story rather than simply being illustrated by it (p. 280). “The historical critic mistakenly looks for what the narrative *refers to*” (p. 135, emphasis mine); he cannot see what a narrative interpretation might yield (p.135).

The biblical story began to fade as the inclusive world whose depiction allowed the reader at the same time to locate himself and his era in the real world rendered by the depiction (p. 50).

Frei and following him the Yale school theologians were appealing for a new reading of narrative whereby readers were ‘constructed’ by *the narrative* and not vice-versa as in the ‘Chicago school’ and exemplified by Ricoeur. Similarly I wish to argue that Paul re-reads his experience in light of his experience of Jesus and calls for congregations to do the same. Do people who are part of North Devon, Cornish Methodism construct a story, or are they formed by a prior story, a Pauline story of Jesus? I explore this further below.

While Hauerwas in his earlier writings points to the story of Jesus as being all important as a paradigm, as I will show, he goes on to develop a theological position that seems to suggest that the community of the Church is the bearer of revelation. Similarly, I will argue that the people within my

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19 The project could appear naïve theologically, however, this would be far too simplistic a judgement, in fact his work is quite sophisticated; certainly he and his colleagues were arguing from a post liberal context but they were offering thought out and sophisticated arguments to bear upon their work.
current context of ministry have developed a similar impasse: they argue a position whereby the story of Christ is all important while in many ways bypassing that story. They might consider the story of Christ rather than creating a story of their own; this is particularly true if the epistemological challenge of the story of Christ is to have any relevance for Christian formation.

**The Narrative Hermeneutic In Paul.**

I now explore the Pauline narrative paradigm in five ways: First I note the way that the model was initially suggested in the early work of Hays and Wright, thereby noting its initial use in interpreting a Pauline text, using the narrative paradigm as a heuristic methodology; secondly I note its use in terms of the social analysis of an early Christian communal matrix, thereby proposing a further development in exploring community; thirdly I will note the model’s potential in terms of theological ethics and Christian formation; fourthly I will engage some critical questions of the paradigm, before finally arguing *in preliminary fashion* that it is an authentic methodology in reading Pauline material explicitly for the use of Christian formation.

**A Narrative Paradigm – A Model for Understanding a Pauline Text.**

The early stages and genesis of a narrative paradigm in Pauline studies are to be found in Richard Hays’ ground breaking book *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Hays 2002). It is within this early work that the themes, questions and concerns hinted at above are explored creatively for the first time. Longenecker highlights the importance of Hays’ work for the narrative paradigm in Pauline study:
Much of the impetus for the contemporary study of narrative ingredients in Paul’s thought can be traced ... in particular to Richard Hays. Hays’ two main works in the 1980s can almost be thought of as companion volumes in a single narrative project (1983, 1989) (Longenecker 2002c: 90).

Hays’ introduces the idea of interpreting Paul as a result of the particular hermeneutical paradigm of narrative. Through a particular reading of the Greek phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, (as a subjective genitive) ‘the faithfulness of Jesus Christ’ (rather than faith in Jesus Christ), Hays stresses the story of Jesus as “a generating feature of Paul’s theology” (Longnecker 2002d: 6).

Hays considers Frye, Ricoeur and Funk, in order to inform his reading of Paul; they provide him with his methodological substructure. He then goes on to explore the actantial model of narrative analysis sketched out by A. J. Greimas as a theory for the study of narratives. Drawing upon ideas he finds in Frye, Hays writes:

The ‘scene of exceptional intensity’ which dominates Paul’s retrospective perception of the story of Jesus Christ is summarised in the phrase ‘Jesus Christ Crucified’ and this image becomes the centre of his critical attention. Nonetheless, the image receives its particular significance only because allusions

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20 I will suggest below that The Moral Vision also can be seen as a contribution to the narrative methodology, albeit more implicitly. Longenecker cites an earlier edition of The Faith of Jesus Christ.
21 It could be argued that the subjective/objective reading argument is peripheral to a narrative understanding, but I believe that this is a first step that perhaps (particularly for Hays) is so important. It is foundational to Hays’ narrative understanding of Paul.
22 The actantial methodology is a model used in structural semantics, developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas; the model reveals the structural roles of actants held in storytelling, for example the actants might be ‘hero’, ‘villain’ (the opposite of the hero), the ‘object’ of the hero’s quest, a ‘helper’ who aids in the quest etc. The actants can be seen as binary opposites such as the dragon and the dragon slaying sword. Hays writes “One of Greimas’ most important contributions to the study of narrative texts is his exposition of the ‘actantial model’, which attempts to define a constant network of relations among the ‘actants’ (agents and objects) of the story” (Hays 2002: 90; cf. Wright 1992: 69 ff.); Wright's analysis of the actantial structure of stories is very helpful. I find the actantial model less than helpful, Hays has now suggested that this is not so important (Hays 2002: xxvii).
to it evoke the structure of the entire story within which its meaning is rooted” (Hays 2002: 23-24, emphasis mine).

Hays points out that Ricoeur finds in narrative two modes or dimensions, one chronological, the other non-chronological. The first the episodic dimension, the other a construal of significant value out of the scattered events; therefore, the art of telling and following a story means that a configuration (or construction) is necessary (cf. Ricoeur 1978: 183-84, cf. Hays 2002: 24).

We see that the ‘configuration’ of narrative elements into a significant pattern is integral to the narrative itself… a Pauline letter could be understood as a ‘new speech act’ that attempts to rearticulate in discursive language the configurational dimension of the Gospel story (Hays 2002:24-25, emphasis mine).

Hays makes the point that Paul utilises the story of Jesus in a new context and generates his theology through the use of this story. The narrative becomes a new speech act for his communities, a reconfiguration bringing new meaning, and a new articulation of the story. Hays also draws upon Funk’s insight into the mode of Paul’s letters (pp. 26-27), “Paul is reviewing the destiny of the story about Jesus Christ which is expressed most clearly in the hymnic and confessional passages of the letters” (p. 27). The epistles suggest that the message (or story) has suffered distortion or non-understanding, Paul recapitulates the story, attempting to enable it to be heard again while at the same time having “ears attuned to the auditory range of his readers” (cf. Funk 1966: 247; cf. Hays 2002: 27).

Paul writes in the mode of recapitulation…He hammers home his interpretation of the story… and unfolds the implications of the

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23 I suggest that a similar thing happens in 1 Corinthians.
The work of Frye, Ricoeur and Funk is Hays’ theoretical basis for understanding Paul in narrative terms. Appealing to these thinkers Hays begins to build a case for a narrative reading of Paul; his conversation partners helping him to understand Paul in a way that hitherto had not been previously perceived. He then develops this foundation by turning to the actantial methodology. I now turn to this concept.²⁴

Narratives, Hays notes, can be analysed just like sentences according to their laws of syntax: “Greimas seeks to elucidate a ‘narrative grammar’ which would, in similar fashion, enable us to ‘diagram’ the ‘narrative syntax’ of all possible stories” (Hays 2002: 83). ²⁵ Hays then makes a bold claim: “if my hypothesis is correct, we should find Paul, in his argumentative recapitulations of the gospel story, writing summary sentences that manifest an obvious actantial structure” (pp. 92-93). Hays recognises an actantial structure and therefore a story in Galatians 4: 3-6, 3: 13-14 and 3: 21-22.

Through a careful analysis of the story he begins to note the different actants as espoused by Greimas; his argument is convincing. Hays concludes:

_Reflective discourse may be rooted in and shaped by a story_… the task of the present investigation is to identify allusions and manifestations of this sort in the text of Galatians and to map them coherently within the framework of the narrative model (p. 95, emphasis mine).²⁶

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²⁴ Hays sets out the methodology from pp. 82 ff, note especially his analysis of the actants (agents and objects) of a story on pp. 90-91.
²⁵ Hays goes into some complex methodological features of the model on pp. 85-95; readers can look at these pages for a technical analysis of the methodology (cf. Wright 1992:69 and 71). I will come back to the idea of ‘grammar’ within Pauline study below.
²⁶ Hays sets out a summary of the narrative that is manifested in Gal. 4: 3-6 on pages 101-102; Gal. 3: 13-14 on page 106 and Gal. 3: 21-22 on pp. 112-116. Again, I refer the reader to these pages for a detailed view of Hays’ argument.
How does this narrative pattern inform or constrain the logic of Paul’s argument in Galatians (p. 117)? Does a narrative construal affect how we understand Paul and inform the wider logic of what Paul is writing and offering to his churches?

Hays answers these two questions in two ways, first by exploring the function of πίστις in the narrative structure of Paul’s Gospel (p. 119 ff.) and then by exploring how that narrative model informs the logic of Paul’s wider argumentation (pp.163 ff.).

The meaning of πίστις and how it is translated takes us to the root of Pauline thought and forces a reevaluation of several of Paul’s key statements (p.119). Becoming aware of a narrative pattern in Paul’s Christology “the usual understanding of πίστις becomes problematical” (p.122); however this is a difficulty only if the genitive is read as an objective genitive and thereby as faith in Jesus, rather than the faith of Jesus.\(^\text{27}\)

Hays argues: “two of these narrative summaries (Gal. 3.14, 22) seem to speak of πίστις as the power or quality which enables Christ to carry out his mission of deliverance” (p.122). The narrative substructure in Galatians 3: 1–4:11 makes a difference in how we interpret Paul’s theology. Paul places no emphasis on the salvific efficacy of an individual’s act of believing and “nowhere in Galatians 3 does Paul speak of Jesus Christ as the object toward which human faith is to be directed” (p. 124). A new

\(^{27}\) The faithfulness of Jesus is at the heart of Hays’ argument. A similar subtle argument is found in my friend and colleague Martin Keenan’s work on Romans (Keenan 2013: location 1003).
interpretation of Galatians 3 is required: depending “upon a story in which Jesus acts by the power of faith to bring salvation to humanity” (p. 124).

After much detailed and convincing exegetical work Hays draws some ‘actantial’ conclusions:

God is the Sender whose purpose to convey blessing to humanity is carried out through the action of a single ‘Subject,’ Jesus Christ… we have argued that πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ may be understood as a reference to the faithfulness of ‘the one man Jesus Christ’ whose act of obedient self-giving on the cross became the means by which ‘the promise’ of God was fulfilled (pp. 160 and 161).

A narrative understanding of the text seems apt, “‘the faith of Jesus Christ’ provides a better and more satisfying sense than the traditional ‘faith in Jesus Christ’” (pp. 161-62). Paul is opening out for his readers something that is already so significant and familiar that he need not recount it in detail. Jesus enacts a pattern of redemption “which determines the existence of others” (p. 203). People participate in him through being baptized in him (3:27). Hays asserts, “it is futile to ask, in a formulation such as ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν (3:24), whose faith is meant. It is of course ‘the faith of Jesus Christ,’ but it is also the faith of the Christian” (p. 203, emphasis mine). Thus Hays concludes:

I have sought to show that Paul returns repeatedly to a narrative structure that operates as a constant factor in his efforts to wrestle through the practical and theological issues raised by the Galatian crisis (p. 205, emphasis mine).

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28 Faith is defined in the terms of faithfulness in Hays’ argument.
29 There are obvious connections and parallels with the work of Campbell below. Hays is suggesting a dual interpretation fruitful for further exploration.
Hays anticipates the ‘inevitable’ criticism that he is positing an *a priori* narrative structure ‘behind’ the text and then manipulating the text to fit. However, the structure, Hays maintains, is in the text, its shape and its sequence determined through specific passages. Hays argues: “I would contend that the interpretation proposed here offers the most satisfactory way of reading Paul’s argument as a coherent piece of thinking” (Hays 2002: 206).30

I have explored Hays’ initial work in some detail in order to set up an exploration of a particular paradigm. ‘The Faith of Jesus Christ’ was in many ways groundbreaking and pioneering and it is because of this work that a number of Pauline scholars began to perceive the potentiality of a new methodological approach. Hays’ work is cumulative: his use of the literary and philosophical figures and the actantial methodology should be taken together (Hays 2002: 95); they complement each other enabling interpretation; clearly and demonstrably his work helps us to better grasp the meaning of the epistle. I now turn to another work by Hays as illustrative of a further engagement of a narrative reading of Paul.

In his book, *Echoes of Scripture in The Letters of Paul* (Hays 1989), Hays defines his central thesis as follows: “[Paul’s] faith, in short, is one whose articulation is inevitably intertextual in character, and Israel’s Scripture is the determinate subtext that plays a constitutive role in shaping...

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30 There are clear points of contact with literary and new critical approaches to the Bible in Hays’ approach.
his literary production” (p.16).\(^\text{31}\) I offer just one example from the book: Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian Church asking for a contribution toward the relief offering for the Jerusalem church (pp. 88 ff.). Paul cites a proof text from Exodus 16:18 (2 Cor. 8: 15), and Hays asks, “How exactly does the Exodus quotation support Paul’s argument” (p. 88)? The Exodus story neither commands nor narrates any sharing of goods among the people (p. 88). To make sense of Paul’s interpretation a greater attention to the original narrative is required (p.89). Noting that Paul ignores a trajectory of Torah observance for one that develops inferences of dependence (p.90), Hays pushes home the point:

Paul can use the manna story to good effect in depicting the Corinthians’ material ‘abundance’ (2 Cor. 8:14) as a superfluous store that could and should be made available to supply ‘the wants of the saints’ …Thus, his application of the story taps and draws out hermeneutic potential that is already fairly oozing out of the Exodus narrative (pp.90-91, emphases mine).

Paul uses the Hebrew Bible and the narratives therein, to draw inferences for his Corinthian ‘hearers’.\(^\text{32}\) However, “If Paul’s Spirit-led readings treat Scripture as trope, do they in fact overturn it” (p.156)? Not at all:

This way of reading the Bible through the lens of a narrative hermeneutic has far-reaching consequences for Paul’s weighting and interpretation of particular elements in the story…Thus, the Torah is neither superseded nor nullified but transformed into a witness of the gospel (p.157, emphasis mine; cf. Keesmaat 1999).

\(^{31}\) Herein then is a very subtle difference, in The Faith of Jesus of Jesus Christ Hays determines a story within the letter to the Galatians; in Echoes he determines the prior story Paul drew upon from the Hebrew Bible.

\(^{32}\) Clearly I could have illustrated the point much more extensively. I am simply offering a hint at this point and noting Hays’ hypothesis that Paul found a backdrop for many of his assertions, being the ‘Echoes within Scripture’, and thereby the Hebrew Bible. Hays turns to a number of ways in which Paul interprets scripture, exploring theodicy and the righteousness of God in light of the fact that gentiles were being offered salvation (pp.34 ff.), reading Paul’s ecclesiocentric hermeneutic (p.84 ff.) and reviewing Pauline hermeneutics in light of 2 Cor. 3 (pp.122 ff.). These are topics worthy of further exploration.
In his scriptural text Paul discerns a narrative that is foundational of a new identity forming narrative offered to the churches as they are called to live within it (p.120 ff.; cf. p.177). Ultimately this way of reading Paul is to understand that “His tireless efforts to read Scripture rightly are always directed towards forming a church into a text that glorifies God” (p.192).

I will go on to suggest that reading Paul we can discern a Christocentric perspective and orientation. The reader may well ask how this is to be perceived within this particular volume of Hays since I have suggested that Hays explores Paul’s use of the narratives in the Hebrew Bible; however, a Christocentric shaping follows from these conclusions: it is not a legitimate exercise unless it shapes the readers “into a community that embodies the love of God as shown in Christ” (p.191, emphasis mine).

For a similar pattern of interpreting a Pauline text I now turn to N.T. Wright’s The Climax of the Covenant (Wright 1991). Wright’s work has a similar exegetical approach to Hays. In a similar way to Hays, Wright alludes to an implicit story within the text, so that he can make the assertion that “the role traditionally assigned to Israel had devolved to Jesus Christ” (p. 26). Jesus fulfils Israel’s failed vocation:

The climax of the exile had been reached… and now the true restoration was beginning… Because the Messiah represents Israel, he is able to take on himself Israel’s curse and exhaust it (pp.151-52, see also p.35).

The covenant has been redrawn, redefined, and rethought in Christ but certainly not abrogated (p.195).
Wright’s reading of Paul builds on the methodology of Hays for an understanding of Christ as ‘the climax of the covenant’, once again developing a Christocentric perspective; once again an actantial methodology is in evidence:

The ‘Opponents’, being flesh and sin, have been overcome; God achieves his purpose through the law, since the Son and the Spirit have come to its aid, enabling its δικαίωμα to be fulfilled for his people, ‘those in Christ’ (pp. 206-208).33

In a similar way to the work of Hays, Wright’s exegesis evidences the fact that a narrative approach makes a difference to understanding (cf. pp. 209, 73-74, and p.75 note 2). Wright argues, Paul has re-presented the story before him with the “fresh understanding he has of Israel’s story, the world’s story, and ultimately even God’s story, on the basis of the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the gift of the Spirit” (p.215, emphases mine).

Further examples of this kind of work held within the narrative paradigm can be seen in the work of James Dunn (Dunn 1998; cf. Longenecker 2002b:89) and Ben Witherington (Witherington 1994; cf. Longenecker 2002a:106). They explicate the theology of Paul in a manner similar to that of Hays and Wright, seeking to uncover Paul’s thinking on particular issues through the hermeneutical model of narrative (see Witherington 1994: 325; Dunn 1998:18).

I have noted an appropriation of the narrative methodology in shedding light on Pauline texts in the work of Hays and Wright (and pointed towards the trajectory in Dunn and Witherington). While they are creative and

33 Wright turns to the actantial analysis in a similar way as Hays has done outlined above (207 ff.).
fine instances of Pauline interpretation, the hermeneutic is underdeveloped in terms of contemporary application and this is the development I suggest as being important for my research interests. If we wish to use these texts as influential and as a resource for a contemporary ecclesiological community, I argue that there has to be a further reflection upon what these interpretations might mean for present-day Christian formation under a view of Paul’s epistles as Scripture. My work concerns a development of these inferences and implications from the Christocentric story held within a Pauline epistle for the purposes of contemporary discipleship.

The model has offered rich possibility for the opening out of what the text meant for Paul and the congregations that he was writing to, however I suggest that it offers potential for what the text means for contemporary readers. Thus far within the literature review there is still little in the way of paradigmatic development for the creation, and formation of contemporary Christian identity. I now move on to other examples that move toward further possible developments thereby seeking to advance my argument.

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34 I am using the term ‘Scripture’ to refer to the Bible. In using the term ‘Scripture’ I am consciously noting a particular sense of importance for the Christian tradition contained within a set of canonical books. I am also well aware that there are different versions and permeations of the Bible; I refer to the Protestant Canon. The Methodist Doctrinal Standards are contained within a document known as The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, and referring specifically to the Bible CPD says “The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures” and notes that “The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice” (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2013 :213)
A Narrative Paradigm – a Model for Understanding an Ecclesial Community.

In Rediscovering Paul (Petersen 1985) Norman Petersen constructs a narrative to understand Paul, to determine Paul within his social relationships instead of the Paul hidden behind the theological and comparative religious accretions of the years of Pauline scholarship (p.302). Calling upon the fields of sociology and literary criticism, Petersen seeks to ‘rediscover’ Paul through a particular focus on the short letter to Philemon.

A non-narrative Pauline text is transposed into a narrative, for understanding Paul’s complex relationships. The “letter renders or implies a narrative world” (Meeks 1986: 557, emphasis mine). Petersen seeks to unveil the symbolic universe of Paul’s world by the configuring of a narrative. In a careful mapping of the complex relationships that Paul has with the characters in the constructed story, Petersen notes that a sociological construct emerges (p.165), a ‘map’ which is constructed under a narrative hermeneutic (p.168). Petersen turns the idea of an existing narrative within the text on its head and wishes to map a narrative onto Paul’s epistle to illustrate Paul’s social world and the future possibilities for the actors within that world.

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35 I am not persuaded by Petersen’s rejection of theological purpose (cf. pp. 28-30, and pp. 201-202). Indeed Petersen edges up it on p. 202, “the knowledge [Petersen’s sociologically defined symbolic universe] is expressed in the form of concepts or ideas that can refer to a theology” (emphasis mine). Petersen concedes that it might lead on to theology, I concur and it is this theological analysis framed by a concern for the sociological that could contribute further in the ways that I am suggesting. There are major criticisms of Petersen’s work, he goes to great lengths to sever his narratively constructed world from antiquity (pp. 10 and 14), refusing to draw historical conclusions from his narrative construct (1987: 174); however, he transgresses his own prohibition on historical enquiry (Porter 1988: 114; cf. Petersen: 133; cf. Hays 1987: 174).
Petersen defines the ‘project’ as a case study for ‘rediscovering’ Paul: the constructed narrative also enables a discovery of Paul within his social relationships. However, what is important for my purposes is the way Petersen perceives Paul implicitly constructing a narrative for the actors within Philemon to inhabit:

His theologizing is a means of securing certain kinds of behaviour from the other actors by appealing to their shared symbolic universe…. this universe…has the form of a narrative, or at least of a drama that Paul represents in narrative form—as a story about what God and Christ have done, are doing, and will do in connection with the earthly sphere of the other actors in the story (p.30)

While Petersen defines his work as working ‘through’ Paul’s theology for the purposes of constructing a symbolic universe (pp. 202, 302), Hays asks:

Can Petersen’s sharp distinction between “symbolic universe” and “theology” be maintained? Although Paul is not a systematic theologian, he does engage in extensive reflection about the interpretation and application of the symbolic elements of his own narrative world (1987: 174, emphasis mine cf. Porter 1988: 114).

A key component of Hauerwas’ theology is the exploration of a shared community; the social matrices people form and engage. The hermeneutic Petersen proposes may indeed prove to be fruitful for a similar exploration of contemporary ecclesial contexts shaped by the Pauline literature, or by a narrative world mapped onto a community utilising Paul’s narrative paradigms for the purposes of growth and formation; conceivably using the potential social patterns endemic within a Pauline epistle and Paul’s theological shaping of those patterns to draw parallels for contemporary
purposes (see below). Indeed, I suggest that this is a distinct possibility. In reflecting upon the social matrices in Corinth there is material fruitful for reflecting upon Christian community and through further development for consideration of contemporary ecclesial communities based upon Paul’s communitarian ethic. Petersen’s work is suggestive of a similar narrative ‘mapping’ of the world of 1 Corinthians and the context of contemporary ecclesiology.

Petersen utilizes a narrative reading for sociological purposes, whereas the main focus of Hays, Wright, Dunn and Witherington is on theological readings; clearly a narrative reading of Paul or his sociological world can indeed be purposive and with a further aim in mind. I argue that these exegetical tools can be perceived as preliminary steps toward further contemporary reflection and/or as working in partnership with a more localised contextual hermeneutic.

I acknowledge that what I am defining as initial and first-order steps might be perceived by some to be absolutely adequate in and of themselves as contributions to a descriptive and historical task. While I accept this logic, as a Christian minister and a theologian I want to take the journey further, while acknowledging the debt to scholarship (see the Contextual Bible Study chapter below). In attempting this further development, I will draw on Hauerwas’ theological categories and Pauline Scholarship as foundational work for more contemporary purposes; however before I come to these things I now turn briefly to scholarship where there are hints towards using a Pauline
narrative hermeneutic for the purposes of ethics and spirituality within a Christocentric orientation.

**A Narrative Paradigm – a Model for Theological Ethics and Christian Formation.**

Up to this point in my survey, as well as presenting the major developments in a narrative hermeneutic of Paul, I am suggesting that an exploration of the theology of Paul and a rediscovering of Paul’s social matrices can feed into and inform a model of contemporary Christian discipleship; I now turn to instances of work that are suggestive of such moral formation and development. Once again I propose that the suggested direction of this work toward a development for contemporary purposes is a fruitful one.

Douglas Campbell seeks to identify an interpretative strategy for reading Paul (Campbell 2005). He argues for the “pneumatologically participatory martyrological eschatology” or PPME model. Seesengood summarises Campbell’s approach: “individuals are called to imitate both Paul and Christ in Spirit led witness (which often entails suffering) to the end-of-time arrival of God’s kingdom” (Seesengood 2006: 199). Many of Campbell’s arguments are detailed and relate to other issues; however, my concern lies in how Campbell utilises a narrative methodology to make his argument for his PPME interpretation.

According to Campbell, a story emerges from Paul’s letters out of ethical and rhetorical concerns (Campbell 2005: 21); defined as a tale of two phases, a problematic first phase, the situation we now find ourselves in and
the glorious solution (Campbell 2005:57). The narrative shape of Paul’s theology begins to unfold:

Sin enters creation permanently, taking up residence within the very constitution of humanity, that is, in the Flesh. ... Paul's solution to this plight centres on the story of a protagonist, God's 'Son', Christ Jesus, who enters the oppressed state of humanity in obedience to his Father's wishes assumes its enslaved nature, and then dies (Campbell 2005: 57-58).

Herein is the fusion of two Jewish narratives: one of descent and ascent, a martyrrological narrative being joined to one of royal enthronement and glorification, a narrative that is proleptically eschatological (p.58). However, this part of the narrative offers very little in terms of soteriology, according to Campbell’s interpretation thus far “we still languish in our enslaved Adamic condition” (p.59). Paul’s solution to the idea of soteriology is in terms of the Spirit and the *participation of believers in the work of Christ*:

The Spirit configures people to the template of Christ …they too are thereby delivered from their present oppressed and corrupted condition by means of its termination in Christ's execution and their recreation in a new liberated and transformed condition that is grafted onto his resurrected existence (p. 59).

Within Campbell’s suggestion that the Spirit “configures people to the template of Christ”, Campbell is offering a dual story, a story of Jesus and the story of those participating in him; the narrative found within the story of Jesus can become paradigmatic, for those sharing in Him, through the Spirit’s work. Commenting on Romans 8: 29, Campbell writes:

Implicit throughout this argument … is the notion that the *Spirit is creating Christians at the behest of the Father but using the template (literally 'image') of the Son* (see v. 29). …Christians are currently being ‘mapped onto’ [this image] by the activity of the Spirit (p.77, emphasis mine).
Here is an approximation of the narrative of Christ with the narrative of those participating in Christ; clearly Campbell is making an argument for the potentiality of ethics within the story that Paul offers; this once again holds the possibility of Paul’s theology as having on-going and contemporary relevance. Although Campbell is not explicit in how he is using the word ‘currently’, in the citation above, in keeping with the themes and focus of my project ‘currently’ might well have contemporary application.

Similarly Stephen Fowl argues:

Paul’s aim is to present each community with a story of its founder – a story to which they are committed by virtue of their community membership – and then to spell out the implications of this story for their everyday life and faith and practice (Fowl 1990: 190, emphasis mine).

Once again, we find a similar argument in another narrative exegete of the Pauline material. Fowl is tying the story of those in Christ to the story of Christ. Here we notice a concrete example of the relationship between narrative and ethics – a ‘current topic’ in scholarship (p.190). Explicitly Fowl notes that ethics are “sustained by the narratives employed by a given community” (p. 200), and that the power of a community’s moral discourse is directly related to a community’s narratives (p. 200). Paul utilises the pictures he is offering and “relies on these poetic pictures of Christ to support what might be called ethical positions” (p. 20, emphasis mine). While Paul writes to disparate situations, in each one there is a ‘similarity in difference’ (p.202). I would argue that our contemporary context suggest something akin to this, some sense of this similarity in difference. Paul’s ethics can be applied in contemporary situations within a contextual and contingent hermeneutic.
Fowl goes on to unpack how this paradigm might be used: Paul must make connections between the traditions by drawing proper analogies. He provides a concrete portrayal of Jesus, then he sets alongside that portrayal the experience of the church that he is writing to, and finally he spells out the implications for their moral practice. Fowl clearly points out the potentially contemporary application of what he is pointing to in the epistles of Paul:

Moral discourse does not draw its coherence from its relationship to ahistorical, universally recognized concepts such as goodness and justice. Rather, these concepts, and the moral discourse which they sustain, are themselves sustained by the narratives employed by any given community (p.200, emphasis mine, cf. p.197).

The foundational narrative for each of Paul's communities is that of the story of Jesus. I will show that Paul seeks to propose the story of Jesus as foundational for the Corinthian community; furthermore, by means of dialogical reflection on this call to the embodiment of the story of Jesus within the Corinthian community there is potential for the application toward contemporary Christian discipleship.

While Paul's ethical discourse is contingent and contextual the grammar remains the same. It is because some people see the Pauline

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36 My broad analysis of Fowl's work does not do justice to his fine and careful exegetical work of the hymnic passages in Paul. While Fowl has concentrated on the hymnic material he looks at other material also; for example he writes, “The practice of offering an interpretation of traditions about Christ as an exemplar, which is extended analogically to the life of believers in order to guide their practice, is not the only way in which a community's foundational narratives relate to ethics. One need only look as far as Rom. 6.1-11 to see this. Here Paul uses a series of metaphors to narrate how Christians have been transferred from the realm of sin into Christ, and to identify what this new identity entails for their relationship to the realm of sin” (p. 207, emphasis mine).

37 This is strongly in keeping with Hauerwas’ thoughts. Again there are implications for a contemporary ecclesial reading community.

38 See the work of Matera, (Matera 1999: 83-84): “Paul's Christology is embedded in an underlying narrative just as the Christology of the Gospels is encoded in the narratives they relate. This underlying narrative gives coherence to the several christological and
literature as scripture and because the grammar rooted and grounded in the story of Jesus remains much the same within the Pauline corpus that we can bring some sense of contemporary application. Just as Paul applied the story of Jesus contingently to disparate situations (e.g. to Corinth), so too we can apply the story of Jesus to a new and particular contexts, notwithstanding the necessity of a process of re-interpretation.

A Pauline hermeneutic grounded on narrative can also feed into a further contemporary concern, that of spirituality. Most accounts of Paul pay insufficient detail to his spirituality (Gorman 2001: 3); however, as Gorman states:

Paul wanted his life and ministry to tell a story, a story that corresponded to the 'story of the cross', to his gospel. His spirituality was therefore a narrative spirituality an experience of representing in living form the word of the cross (Gorman 2001: 30).

In a similar way to my argument thus far, this pattern can be repeated:

*This power enables the exalted crucified Christ to take shape in and among those who belong to him and live in him. It enables the narrative of the cross to be retold and relived (pp.49 f., emphasis mine, cf. p.58).*

Therefore, the Christian community’s experience of Jesus is a ‘pattern of correspondence’ (p. 76). While Paul’s narrative of the death of Christ on the cross has a polyvalence noted in twelve distinct narrative patterns (see 82 ff.), one narrative pattern held within a particular passage has importance:

In this text [Phil. 2: 6-11] …we find nearly all the patterns and images of the cross noted above: obedience, love, grace, sacrifice, altruism, self-giving, voluntary self-humbling, culmination of a story

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soteriological statements Paul makes in his letters…consequently; we must uncover and reconstruct the narrative of each letter as best we can." (p. 87).

39 Again while Gorman is not explicit at this point surely this can have contemporary application.
of incarnation and suffering, liberation for new life, and prelude to exaltation/resurrection. (p.88).

Herein is a narrative for Christian community. I choose my wording carefully, not ‘the’ Christian community, but rather ‘Christian community’. I will argue below that one of the critiques of Hauerwas is his generalization of ‘the’ church. However, I am persuaded that the kind of ethical formation I am noting is useful for the development of Christian spirituality/discipleship much more broadly, perhaps perceived as the ‘grammar’ of Christocentric experience and discipleship. This story was held out as generative of the story of the communities Paul wrote to; they were being called to a cruciform narrative spirituality offered to them by Paul in the pattern of Jesus’ faithfulness (pp.116 and 133).40

In a similar manner to these writers Hays develops his earlier work and ‘unpacks’ the relevance of his narrative construction of Pauline theology in The Moral Vision of the New Testament (Hays 1997a). In a comparable configuration to the patterns developed in the work of Campbell, Fowl and Gorman, Hays develops his thinking in terms of the ethical outworking of narrative discourse.41 Hays therefore asks: “Is Paul a sort of early Christian advice columnist…Or is his advice distinctively shaped by the gospel?” (Hays

40 Gorman considers, albeit briefly, the ‘faith in’ or ‘faith of Christ’ debate (110 ff.), and notices the importance of that debate “Paul's experience of Christ and of faith, and his narration of that experience, will be understood quite differently from traditional interpretations by those many interpreters of Paul, including the present writer, who find the “faith of Christ” translation compelling. The "stakes" are quite high in this debate” (p. 111).

41 The work has been seen as being three projects in one: as a description of the New Testament’s vision of the moral life, as a critical engagement with scholars who have reflected upon the New Testament ethically and an engagement with ‘five hot topics’ (see Hütter 1998). This tripartite pattern in itself could be interpreted in terms of narrative, noting the New Testament story or stories ethically, noting the story of how the New Testament has been interpreted ethically and noting the way that the New Testament can inform the story of our lives in considering some of the ‘hot topics’.
1997:18, emphasis mine); Hays argues for the latter. The church community is a “sneak preview of God’s ultimate redemption of the world” (p.24).\textsuperscript{42} Proleptically Paul calls his readers toward this eschatological story (p.27), the cross becoming a paradigm for the life of faith (p.27). Paul’s readers are called to a life of fellowship grounded in the story of Jesus (p.27). “The meaning of ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’ comes into focus when we perceive that Paul understands \textit{the cross as a pattern for the life of Christians}” (p.31, emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{43}

As Paul reflects on the life of Jesus, the reference point is over and over the cross (p. 27, see 1 Cor. 2:2); “an act of loving, self-sacrificial obedience that becomes \textit{paradigmatic for the obedience of all who are in Christ}” (p. 27, emphasis mine); this focus points towards ‘new creation’. The “redemptive power of God has already broken into the present time”, so that “the Spirit-endowed church stands within the present age as a sign of what is to come, already prefiguring the redemption for which it waits” (p.21). This reverberates with themes from Hauerwas, who also makes reference to a new eschatological community – the church, see below (cf. Hauerwas 1983:87; Hauerwas 1985:77); I would argue it also resounds with a theme for the contemporary church.

\textsuperscript{42} Albeit tempered by an already/not yet eschatological framework.
\textsuperscript{43} It is telling that in this regard Hays points to the work of Fowl in a footnote (note 35, p.29, see below). Christ is the exemplar for the life of faith.
The Moral Vision, might indeed be seen as explicating *The Faith of Jesus Christ*.\footnote{While Longenecker sees *The Faith of Jesus Christ and Echoes of Scripture* as companion volumes I feel that *The Moral Vision* has important links with the earlier volume, albeit implicitly.} In conclusion regarding Paul Hays writes:

In sum, Paul sees the community of faith being caught up in the story of God’s remaking of the world through Jesus Christ (p. 45).

Once again Hays is none too specific about the identity of the Church Community, however in keeping with my argument, I perceive that this might well be applied to a contemporary Church community. Hays is offering a pattern that might be fruitful for present-day discipleship.

**A Narrative Paradigm – Critically engaged.**

Thus far I have made the assumption and hypothesis that a narrative paradigm will be fruitful in interpreting a Pauline text. I now engage a critical and analytical exploration of the model. The most developed critical review of the paradigm is in the book *Narrative Dynamics in Paul* (Longenecker 2002a; cf. also Gaventa and Hays 2008; Gaventa and Hays 2010; Riches 2010a).\footnote{While Riches argues that Paul’s theology is not cast in the genre of narrative but is rather argumentative (Riches 2010a:357), this is to introduce a false dichotomy, “Paul’s discourse is a form of ‘primary reflectivity’ in which he articulates arguments based on a *narrative substructure* that finds only partial and allusive expression in his letters” (Gaventa and Hays 2010:369, emphasis mine). Hays work is suggestive of allusions to an implicit wider narrative (p. 369, emphasis mine).} The purpose of the book is stated as “the first attempt by a group of Pauline scholars to assess the merits and demerits of the narrative approach to Paul” (Longenecker 2002d:11). The book raises a number of critical questions. Some of those questions are peripheral to my concerns while some remain important.
The question arises as to where and how the narrative is to be located. Do we impose a narrative on the text, or is there a pre-existing narrative either within or behind the text? This matters for my purposes as I argue that a story of Christ lies behind Paul’s articulation and implied use of that story (Adams 2002: 41 ff.; Campbell 2002: 108) and that through exegesis we seek to uncover a narrative shape to Paul’s writing. In making my argument of an orientation within Christian discipleship shaped by the story of Christ, the implicit story of Christ lying behind Paul’s articulations becomes all important. 46 Adams argues:

We must also admit a ‘behind the text’ dimension to narrative existence, since such allusions require anterior texts and traditions and prior stories (p.42, emphasis mine).

It is important to discover the prior and anterior story if, as I am arguing, the story of Christ discovered within Paul’s theology addresses the story of the Church both in Paul’s time and in ours. That story can never be a construction we or indeed Paul generate; it must come from beyond us and we uncover the sub-structure within Paul’s delivery of that implicit story held within a specific epistle through a careful and close reading of the text. 47

Paul’s articulation of the ‘voice’ of Jesus must stand apart from us, and our own conceptions. This is important as we consider Hauerwas’ concept of vision and my argument for partnership between exegesis and the CBS methodology which seeks to generate a story in a particular setting (see

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46 While Watson argues that “Paul is simply not a storyteller” (Watson 2002:232) he concedes that there “may be a narrative substructure to Pauline Theology” (239; cf. Wright 2013: 462 ff.; 535 ff.).

47 Of course it might be argued that we might be shaped by a story that Paul generates and creates, but I am arguing for a story lying behind and as a substructure to Paul’s theological programme.
based upon a different but no less particular setting. I am arguing that Paul perceives the story of Christ and draws upon this story in his epistles albeit in contingent application; we, the interpreters of Paul, articulate Paul’s story of Christ for our own contemporary and relative application.

Another concept highlighted in *Narrative Dynamics* pertinent to my thesis is that of continuity or discontinuity. If the story of Christ is in continuity with the story of salvation contained within the Hebrew Bible, it is not such a leap to suggest that the story of contemporary ecclesiological expression might also be in continuity with Paul’s articulation of the story of Christ in some measure. I find convincing and tremendously appealing a suggestion by Wright on the concept of continuity. He argues that the biblical story consists of five acts: creation; fall; Israel; Jesus and then the writing of the New Testament which forms *a first scene* in a final and fifth act (Wright 1992: 141). Wright goes on to suggest that the task of ‘historical theology’ and ‘theological history’ is “mandated upon the followers of Jesus from within the biblical story” (p. 142); part of the task of Act five – the task *begun* in the earliest post-Easter church – “is to reflect upon, draw out, and implement the significance of the first four Acts (p. 143, emphasis mine). Wright’s argument is in part, the work of any Pauline scholar seeking to interpret the epistles for contemporary application.

Criticizing the idea of finding a narrative in Paul, Watson writes:

If the ‘vertical’ construal of Paul’s gospel is correct, then the event of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection *cannot* be located on the same horizontal plane as the events of (for example) exodus, conquest, and exile or even the creation and the fall. These events
are susceptible to linear narration, whereas the event that Paul announces is not (Watson 2002: 234-35, emphasis original).

This is simply to misconstrue the point, for, as Horrell argues, Paul's Gospel is “the culmination of a story rooted in time” (Horrell 2002: 163). Perhaps the concept of culmination needs further qualification; I argue that the culmination point does not end with Paul; the contemporary church ought to be re-engaging, renewing, and augmenting the story of Christ we find in Paul, the point being that the story goes on.\footnote{48 I want to ask (contra Watson), are we really saying that we have to label Paul a ‘narrative theologian’ in order to interpret him through a narrative matrix. I have noted above that the methodology is used in different ways. Surely therein lies the point, a broad narrative methodology brings nuanced approaches to the interpretation of Paul.}
The title of Watson’s chapter within the volume is very revealing; ‘Is there a story in these texts?’ We might easily rephrase the question: Do these texts shape an on-going story, are these texts related in continuity with God’s salvation history anchored in the story of Jesus? If, as I am arguing, the contemporary church stands in continuity with the story Paul seeks to articulate, then the argument can be made that the contemporary church furthers and expands the story in some sense of linear development (or perhaps an approach that involves a hermeneutical spiral). It follows that it is an important exegetical exercise to discover that story as precisely as possible, as a foundation for an expansion, development and reflection upon that story.\footnote{49 While acknowledging that the task may at times be imprecise, and being open about the fact that we bring our presuppositions and bias to the text.}

Ultimately, the key question to ask is whether the methodology of a narrative hermeneutical approach to Pauline study makes any difference to the way we interpret the letters. Longenecker questions the whole project:
I am not aware of any significant way in which a heightened attentiveness to narrative dynamics has resulted in new exegetical insights or the profiling of certain textual features in unprecedented ways (Longenecker 2002d: 83).

However Hays challenges this:

Paul's theological language is grounded in story …his letters must be interpreted as theological reflection on the first-order kerygmatic narrative about Jesus (Hays 2004: 221, emphasis mine).

Similarly Horrell writes, that Paul is writing “reflective discourse based on an underlying story, glimpsed but not narrated in the text” (Horrell 2002: 221). I concur and reiterate that a contemporary application of the Pauline story of Christ is about reflective discourse within community. If a narrative approach facilitates that hermeneutical process it is one approach (among others) useful for the reading of Pauline texts. Paul is re-presenting the story of Jesus in a hermeneutical project which engages the needs of the congregations he writes to (Hays 2004: 222; cf. p. 227, 233). It is perhaps as a result of the narrative hermeneutical lens that the story can be discovered and if as I am suggesting that story is to be used for contemporary purposes this narrative shaped hermeneutic becomes all important. Therefore pertinent for the direction of my thesis are the ecclesial and participatory themes that spring out from a narrative paradigm:

Salvation always has an ecclesial character: we are not saved as solitary individuals, but we become incorporated in Christ, so that our fate is bound together not only with him, but also with our brothers and sisters in him…participation in Christ entails conformity to the pattern of self-sacrificial love that he embodied and enacted on our behalf (Hays 2004: 234).

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50 It is interesting to observe that Longenecker qualifies this, a narrative approach can offer stimulating results “with significant implications for reconstructing Paul’s theology and mission” (p.83). A narrative approach can also offer an exegetical control (pp.83-84).
Hauerwas attempts to say something very similar, in broad terms, however, to reiterate, the details of his project can be expanded through an exegetical approach and an engagement which a contemporary and a particular ecclesial context, which in turn demonstrates and quantifies his thought. Ultimately, a narrative approach to Paul highlights the ethical imperative of being ‘in Christ’; “our lives become shaped in accordance with his pattern of action” (Hays 2004: 234-35), once again I suggest a pattern of action discovered, through a close exegetical reading in dialogue with the themes suggested by Hauerwas and the CBS methodology, thereby reading texts in community for the purpose of Christian discipleship.

**Conclusion**

I noted above that any anthropological description must come to terms with the narrative structure of human identity (page 16, citing Stroup). As Hays has influentially shown, Paul articulates a new story for the churches and the individuals he writes to in drawing upon the story of Christ as a paradigmatic pattern for formation. I have reviewed the pertinent literature in order to show that there is a strong foundation for the hermeneutical process I am suggesting.

The initial work of Hays and Wright showed that a narrative shape can be perceived within the texts, the work of Petersen demonstrates that a narrative understanding can shape our perception of a Pauline community, and the work of Campbell, Fowl and Gorman is suggestive of an ethical development of the story of Jesus for the purposes of discipleship formation. Furthermore I argue that narratives shape understanding and
constitute contemporary communities; similarly Paul seeks to shape understanding and create community along the lines of the Christocentric love at the heart of the cross. As will be noted below Hauerwas proceeds in a similar way, yet I suggest that his theology lacks a pattern and a model for this formation to take place authentically and with any great depth. While I would not go so far as to say that a similar thing happens within my context of ministry, I will argue that a CBS and exegetical methodology that incorporates a named presupposition of a narrative approach offers a pattern and a model for contemporary Christian formation.

I observed that Hays began the narrative trajectory of reading Paul in his *magnum opus* *The Faith of Jesus Christ*. However, I argue that this paradigm requires development, calls out for further reflection and argumentation. Similarly, as we shall see in the next Chapter, Hauerwas’ articulation of the story of Jesus and the story of the Church cries out for critique and expansion.

I considered the question whether the narratives should be constructed or are already in existence. Parallel to this, as I consider the concept of vision in Hauerwas, I will show that he argues (following Murdoch) that our vision, the things that shape us and form us, come from beyond us in some measure. Paul was drawing upon the story of a crucified messiah, he was of course shaping that story, developing and restating it, but most certainly not creating it *ex nihilo*. His was a continuation of the scriptural story he knew from the Hebrew Bible and the story of Jesus. Similarly, I will argue
that the Church stands in continuity with Paul's re-articulation of the story of Christ.

My thesis is an attempt to explore 1 Corinthians with two aims in mind: first to extend the narrative approach to the Pauline literature within a text that hitherto has not been explored (at least, not extensively) and secondly to interrogate the text for contemporary Christian identity and formation in the ways I have suggested. Having set out the main elements of the narrative approach to Paul, reviewed the major proponents of this approach, and considered some of the gaps that remain to be filled, I now turn to the work of Hauerwas to engage his conceptual framework as expressed in vision and narrative. I turn to his work as he relies on the story of Christ as a vision for the Church. I will probe his articulation of these two key concepts to show that they need further development and reflection, particularly when our focus is on particular and local ecclesial communities.

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51 I acknowledge that there are other concepts in Hauerwas' theological framework other than just vision and story but limitations of space require a selective engagement with his extensive work.
Chapter Two
Engaging the Work of Stanley Hauerwas as a Conversation Partner within a Pauline and contextual Hermeneutic.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: first, to note the inspiration for and influences upon Hauerwas’ theology and from these influences to introduce the two themes I engage within Hauerwas’ theological framework, namely vision and narrative. Secondly, to explore these themes and Hauerwas’ theology critically. Finally to set out why I have selected Stanley Hauerwas’ as a dialogue partner, and offer my reasoning for the use of the two themes chosen.

Who is Stan the Man, what are his inspirations within theology and ethics? 52

Stanley Hauerwas was born on the 24th July 1940 in Pleasant Grove on the Southern Eastern Side of Dallas (Wells and Nation 2000: 22); the son of Joanna and Coffee Hauerwas.53 Hauerwas is proud of the fact that he is a Texan and notes that our stories are integral to who and what we are as people, a major theme of a narrative hermeneutic (Hauerwas 1988: 36-37); in turn the idea and concept of story is integral to my work as outlined below.

Other biographical details are important to who he is today: the influence of a number of thinkers; his personal ecclesiological journey; his

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52 This question is far from being simplistic, I have noted through my research the complexity of ‘Stan the Man’; and indeed, there are a number of influences that have shaped him. William Cavanaugh suggests this sub-title ‘Stan the Man’ (Cavanaugh 2001: 17 ff). I am exploring these biographical details for a purpose i.e. working toward the two themes of vision and narrative.

53 For an incisive and revealing account of his father and mother see Hauerwas’ own biography (Hauerwas 2010: 22 ff. and 38 ff.). This book is an extremely helpful biographical resource, setting out in detail Hauerwas as a person and the influences that have made him who is today.
experience of a loved one’s mental illness;\textsuperscript{54} and his wrestling with Christian identity. I note three influences in particular.

First, I note Hauerwas’ early Christian experience, part of \textit{his story}. He writes somewhat negatively about this time: “by the time I was twelve I had enough [religious] experience to last me a lifetime” (Hauerwas 1998: 108). He amplifies this experience: “I sat Sunday night after Sunday night, thinking I should be saved, but it did not happen” (Hauerwas 2010: 1-2). At this time (and through this early experience) Hauerwas also began to form the belief that pietism, an individualistic experience \textit{if} set apart from a shaping of the person \textit{by and within a church context} was inadequate and incomplete. Paradoxically he notes the early \textit{individual} sense of vocation through the \textit{particular community of the church at Pleasant Grove}, the beginnings of his own ecclesial formation (see Wells and Nation 2000: 23, n. 11).\textsuperscript{55}

At this point I am drawing out the fact that it was within a particular expression of Church that Hauerwas was receiving his early Christian formation, later in his journey he would be influenced by other particular and focused stories. The important thing to note from this is that his individual vocation and theological development was instantiated through the community of a particular expression of the Church and it is this sense of communitarian formation which drives a specific component of his theology; it is part of this story that he draws upon, moving from this to argue that we are all shaped by stories.

\textsuperscript{54} Hauerwas’ account of this struggle in ‘Hannah’s Child’ is very moving (Hauerwas 2010: 186 ff., 97 ff.).

\textsuperscript{55} Hauerwas writes, “I have no desire to rid myself of my particular background as an evangelical Methodist. Rather it is my conviction that Methodism, like other Christian traditions, with its limits and its possibilities, helps awaken all of us to being members of Christ’s whole church” (Hauerwas 1983: xxvi).
It was at Pleasant Mound that Hauerwas first learned to identify *community* as that group of people with a claim on him… acknowledging the fact that *Christ is revealed in those with whom we have the great good fortune to be stuck* (Cavanaugh 2001: 18, emphasis mine).

Consequently the concept of an ecclesial community shaping Christian identity is an important topic within Hauerwas’ theology. For Hauerwas, Christian communities and the stories they embody are important in shaping who and what we are; as I will note below this then becomes a major theme in his theology and one that jeopardises an engagement with scripture in seeking to discover the story of Jesus therein. However, as I have noted above the forming of community is also an important dimension in the interpretation of Pauline texts and also an important dimension to the exploration of any ecclesial context. I will show that communitarian formation is particularly relevant to my chosen texts from 1 Corinthians (Horrell 2005: 243), but this communitarian formation is premised on the story of Christ to be discovered behind the text.

A second and related influence on Hauerwas was ‘The Job’56 (Hauerwas 2010: 27 ff); here he learned to ‘lay brick’.57 Through this experience the idea of careful learned discipleship alongside an artisan became important in Hauerwas’ conceptual framework. A simple sentence from *Character and the Christian Life* reveals this important concept: “my father taught me that *you get somewhere by laying one brick at a time*” (Hauerwas 1975: ix, emphasis mine).

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56 Hauerwas uses this title ‘the job’ to talk about his early working experience on building sites.
57 The phraseology belongs to Hauerwas (Hauerwas 1991: 101).
Hauerwas captured the idea that character is formed as if laying
one brick at a time; formed in a person day by day, through and in community,
according to a particular vision and narrative. I will go on to explore how we
are shaped and formed by particular narratives, sometimes growing alongside
others who have instantiated those narratives to us. The concept of a
disciplined step by step process will become important as I conclude my work
(see below). What is of paramount importance within this concept of learning
discipleship alongside others is that this could never be instantiated through
some general and all-encompassing notion of Church. Hauerwas’ experience
is once again suggestive of a development within the particular and the
focused.

Finally, I note that Hauerwas came under the influence of a
number of philosophical and theological ‘craftspeople’, influential in shaping
his theology and ethics and in particular the two themes of vision and
narrative. Gustafson was a major influence: “Hauerwas was struck by
Gustafson’s suggestion that theological ethics might best focus on character
and the virtues for displaying the nature of Christian moral existence” (Nation
and Wells 2000: 28). While disagreeing sharply with Gustafson later in his
career (see below), he nevertheless notes his appreciation of ‘Jim’:

I am his student, and I owe him much. I am sure it was from Jim
that I first began to think that character and the virtues were crucial
for understanding the moral life (Hauerwas 2010: 58).

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58 While I will critique Hauerwas for being far too general and broad in his definition of the
church I passionately believe that if the Church catholic is to bear the title ‘Christ-ian’ it must
relate somehow to Christ. Of course it is a moot point as to how different expressions of the
church articulate these things.
59 Nation notes Julian Hartt, Paul Holmer, James Gustafson, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck
as influences (Nation 2000: 27).
It is important to note that Hauerwas felt the need to ‘fill out’ and develop the notion of how characters are formed and indeed what influences shape them and it is in the philosophy of Iris Murdoch that he first finds resources for this development. It was through Murdoch that Hauerwas first began to explore the idea of vision as a way to perceive the ethical life.

Kantongole notes Murdoch’s critique of the prevailing models used in ethical philosophy:

Murdoch saw the prevalent popular trend in moral philosophy under the dominant metaphors of autonomy and choice, to be both unrealistic and unambitious (Katongole 2000: 72).

Murdoch writes, “We need a new vocabulary of attention” (Murdoch 1983: 49).

In other words Murdoch was suggesting that we need to focus our attention on something beyond us and our own creations. While attention is not the same as vision, to concentrate one’s attention on something, whether physically or conceptually, is to attend to phenomena which are gleaned through an act of perception of things beyond us; and perhaps in this sense it is to have a sense of vision; indeed Murdoch discovered this ‘new vocabulary of attention’ and the ‘enriching’ of the ethical life in and through the concept of vision (Katongole 2000: 73). This concept struck Hauerwas as constructive in the building of Christian community and identity (Katongole 2000: 77).

Murdoch’s thinking was a major influence within his thought (Hauerwas 1981a: 30 ff.; cf. Hauerwas 2010: 85ff).

Another influence is the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (Hauerwas 2010: 16). Wells writes:

A number of theologians and ethicists have embraced the bolder claims of narrative to describe human existence. Perhaps the most significant such author for Hauerwas is the moral philosopher
Alasdair MacIntyre… MacIntyre sees narrative as a claim for intelligibility (Wells 1998: 43).

Hauerwas turned to narrative as a conceptual tool, fruitful for the shaping of morality (Horrell 2005: 68; Wells 1998: 44). Following MacIntyre he has no time for a morality that has no specificity but rather argues that we are formed by certain stories, and formed in particular communities shaped by those stories (Rasmusson 1995: 259; Wells 1998: 1, 22, 30).

I note one more influence, perhaps the major influence upon his thought in the person of John Howard Yoder.60 It was Yoder who first brought to Hauerwas' attention the significance of the visible Church. “Hauerwas comes to establish that significance in his own terms…The community is shaped by the Christian story, and in turn it shapes the character of its members” (Wells 1998: 11, emphasis mine). Yoder notes the narrative of Jesus as important for the Christian community, and in turn Hauerwas applies this thinking to his own work (cf. Hauerwas 1981b: 201; 1983: xxiv, 112; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 47; Thomson 2003: 10 - 11; Wells 1998: 95; Yoder 1994: 130-33). Indeed, Yoder’s and Hauerwas’ thinking were to develop along similar lines in terms of ontology, Christology and Ecclesiology (Wells 1998: 97).61

One can discover development in Hauerwas’ thought. He begins his theological and ethical journey with the idea that character and the virtues are all important (Hauerwas 1975: xxiii, 2-3, 11 ff., 35 ff); from this he makes a

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60 Indeed Hauerwas speaks about his first meeting with Yoder in Elkhart Indiana in life changing terms noting that “I had no idea that a trip to Elkhart, Indiana, was going to change my life” (Hauerwas 2010: 116). However, see pp. 75 (particularly note 82) and 79 for subtle differences between Hauerwas and Yoder.

61 Wells notes that Hauerwas and Yoder’s ecclesiology are so close as to be almost interchangeable (Wells 1998: ibid.). However see page 75 and Hays’ observation.
journey conceptually, theologically and ethically to the view that a character is developed through the moral determination of the self, and that this self can only be developed in relation to a particular vision beyond oneself (Hauerwas 1981b: 2 ff., 30 ff.). Finally the vision is mediated to us through narrative and story embodied in community (Hauerwas 1983: 21, 24-25, 27). I now concentrate my work on the two concepts of vision and narrative within Hauerwas' theology.  

**Vision in Hauerwas.**

Writing in 2001, Hauerwas cited Murdoch as being influential in his work. Quoting her directly he writes:

> I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort.

He then goes on:

> How I love that sentence from Iris Murdoch’s The Sovereignty of Good. Actually, that is to put the matter in misleading fashion. Not only do I love that sentence, I have made a career out of that sentence. Indeed I sometimes wonder if I have ever said anything of importance that was not stolen from Dame Iris (Hauerwas 2001: 155, emphasis mine).

This quote suggests an on-going indebtedness to Iris Murdoch and the concept of vision she had offered him in her writings. Here are the two related concepts, namely vision and moral imagination. Our ethics are determined by our moral point of view or vision and imagination involves a creative reflection.

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62 While I limit my research to the explorations of the two themes, in what follows I am assuming character and community, two more of Hauerwas’ themes, to be present in the background; so for example being shaped by a particular vision is about the formation of character; characters are very often formed through being in community; similar things could be said about the Pauline literature, I will argue that Paul offers a vision and expounds that vision in story; however, this is all against the backdrop of Paul’s goal of communitarian formation within the Church at Corinth.
up upon the vision as we have perceived it.\textsuperscript{63} I will suggest that Paul offers a particular vision to the Corinthian Church and that he invites the Church to reflect on that vision with the aim in mind that they embody the story of a Crucified Messiah revealed within the vision he puts forth; I go on to state that I believe this is suggestive of a vision and narrative for the contemporary Church.

Hauerwas notes that, "Miss Murdoch is extremely critical of those philosophers who assumed man's [sic] only alternative … is to become the creator of his own self and values" (Hauerwas 1981a: 37). For Hauerwas (following Murdoch) our ethical motivation should be a reflection upon something beyond us and our own limited creations. The concept of vision is a seeking after and reflection on transcendence, and for the purpose of drawing upon the categories of the good (p.37).\textsuperscript{64}

The concept of imagination needs further definition. Imagination normally involves an inventing of worlds (Hauerwas 1985: 51). As a norm the task of the artist is to "create fabulous worlds unconstrained by our normal habits" (p.51). The use of the imagination is about focusing on the creative processes of the individual and not as a reflection on something beyond us, something transcendent (p.52). For Hauerwas we do not merely ‘imagine’ with our ‘minds’ for we act with imagination on the prior world we grasp (p.53).\textsuperscript{65}

Schneider proposes a particular understanding of vision:

We all know that the mind does not have an eye, and yet we find it difficult to avoid the language of vision in speaking of mental processes. So deeply embedded in philosophical tradition are the

\textsuperscript{63} This will become important as I explore my own context of ministry (see below).

\textsuperscript{64} There is a distinct impression of transcendence in Murdoch’s work.

\textsuperscript{65} Hauerwas uses the word grasp to suggest the process by which we perceive a vision of something beyond us and furthermore as something we hold on to as we begin to shape who we are according to that vision.
idioms of ‘speculation,’ of ‘points of view,’ of ‘seeing’ truth, of ‘introspection,’ ‘circumspection,’ and ‘inspection’ (Schneider 1949: 399).

Vision amounts to so much more than focusing on particular physical and material phenomena, such as gazing upon a scene or looking at a painting. I can ‘see’ truth, but certainly in a different way that I ‘see’ my computer screen as I type. I ‘see’ the importance of giving proper time to my academic work, but this contrasts to the kind of vision I experience when bird-watching. I am intimating that under this understanding vision can be something akin to discernment and perspicuity. In line with Schneider’s thought Hauerwas uses the idea of vision in leading to a point of view, a particular ethical stance promoted by a deliberate decision to use a certain range of reasons for our actions (Hauerwas 1981b: 59).

It is a failing for the Christian to be unsuccessful in imagination; “to abandon or forget the resources God has given us as the means of calling us to his kingdom” (Hauerwas 1985: 59, emphases mine). Imagination involves a reflection on the given, on the gift, the vision becomes as a lens for the development of a particular embodied story. Therefore the Christian faith becomes an exercise in helping people to see in a way that is ethically prior to rules, laws and decisions (Rasmusson 1995: 286). This does not constitute a single moment, rather coming to see is the gradual dawning of truth, and the development of a growing awareness, reflection on and faithfulness to a particular vision that has ethical possibilities and potential.

Hauerwas writes much concerning training (Hauerwas 1981b: 2, 42; 1985: 52; 91: 98; cf. Katongole 2000: 31; Wells 1998: 89); and the formation of individuals within a particular community (Hauerwas 1981a: 96;
1991: 105, 107; cf. Wells 98: 1). This indeed implies on-going development and reflection upon vision; undeniably Hauerwas speaks specifically of the “slow training of our vision … as we have the story mediated to us by masters who have learned what the story says” (Hauerwas 1988: 103, emphasis mine).

There is a certain amount of paradox within Hauerwas’ work. While he speaks of a range of possibilities, hinting at plurality and multiplicity for ethical choices, he also speaks of ‘a’ moral vision – which clearly points to ‘a’ particular focus of perception. Three quotations from Hauerwas define this particular process:

We do not come to see, however, just by looking but by training our vision through the metaphors and symbols that constitute our central convictions (Hauerwas 1981a: 2, emphases mine).

The metaphors that determine our vision must form a coherent story if our lives are to have duration and unity (p.3).

A Christian does not simply ‘believe’ certain propositions about God; he learns to attend to reality through them. This learning requires training of our attention by constantly juxtaposing our experience with our vision (p.46, emphasis mine).

While there may be a multiplicity of ethical responses to a given dilemma and problem, for Hauerwas those choices are necessarily

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66 Hauerwas is open to the ethical concept of casuistry: a case-by-case reflection on moral choices. However, he writes, “Casuistry, therefore, cannot be limited simply to consideration of “cases” or situations, but also requires imaginative testing of our habits of life against the well-lived and virtuous lives of others” (Hauerwas 1983: 121, 31, emphasis mine). “Casuistry is a necessary activity of any moral position, but its status and way it is done depends on prior communal presuppositions about the kind of people we should be” (Hauerwas 1988: 70, emphasis mine). The point is that while Hauerwas is open to a case-by-case review of our actions those actions are to be informed by whom we are, our moral vision and our training. There is perhaps something of an anomaly here, Hauerwas wants to speak about the ‘gazing’ on the ‘well-lived and virtuous lives of others’ but also notes the story of Jesus as being important as a theological resource (see above). It might be said that the story of Jesus is embodied in the well lived and virtuous lives of Christians (however, note the critique of idealism, below).
determined by a very particular vision. Therefore, it becomes necessary to outline what Hauerwas would define as ‘the’ moral vision, based upon ‘the’ reasoned story. What is it that Christians reflect upon that comes from beyond them, what is the particular vision? I now turn, then, to how Hauerwas begins to embody that sense of vision through story.

**Narrative in Hauerwas.**

Wells identifies a narrative slant within Hauerwas’ work; he is “concerned to identify the Christian community with the distinctive vision of the world narrated in the Bible” (Wells 1998: 55, emphasis mine).67 He has no time for vague, propositionless truth; truth is related and offered to people in the narratives held within a community’s corporate memory. When a community moves from asking the question what should I do, to asking the question what I should be, story becomes all important (p. 41).

Wells notes three important dimensions to this concept of narrative in Hauerwas. Firstly, Hauerwas argues that the self is contingent, and therefore this self asks the narratively based question “how have I come to be here?” (p. 42), therefore, what is my self contingent upon; secondly, existence in society is historical, “a person who can thread together separate events and realities in his or her life has identified an identity; a community which can do the same has identified a tradition (p.42), and finally connected to these things Wells argues that for Hauerwas:

The heart of revelation is the story of the covenant with Israel, its recapitulation first in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and over again in the history of the church. Narrative is thus the shape

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67 Here are clear connections with another ‘Yale Theologian’ Hans Frei (see above and Wells 1998: 54).
of the Christian life which seeks to conform to the character of God's salvation (p. 42) ⁶⁸

Again, Wells defines Hauerwas' occupation with vision as a very particular 'orientation': “the Christian vocation [is] to imitate God's way of dealing with the world as disclosed in the incarnate Son” (Wells 1998: 117, emphasis mine). The reality of Christ as a crucified saviour helps in building our lives truthfully (Hauerwas 1981a: 5).

Moral vision for Hauerwas can never be a creation ex nihilo but rather is based upon something given and from beyond us; and this material accessible from beyond our own individual lives is presented to us in a particular story or narrative: “The imagination is a pattern of possibilities fostered within the community by the stories and correlative commitments that make it what it is” (Hauerwas 1994: 179, emphasis mine).

Ultimately Christian life “ought to be the progressive growth of the self into the fuller reality of God's action in Christ” (Hauerwas 1981b: 67). Clearly the fuller reality of God’s action in Christ is gleaned from the story we receive about and concerning him. We only build our ethical lives correctly when we build them according to a carefully attended direction and for Hauerwas that direction is Christocentric (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 75, 102), based on the story of Jesus; ⁶⁹ indeed Hauerwas speaks of the overriding significance of Jesus (Hauerwas 1983: 72; cf. 25), and repeatedly

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⁶⁸ Perhaps it needs to be said that this is reflective of Hauerwas' early thought, he moves ever more to the primacy of the Christian community in his later theology.
⁶⁹ Hauerwas speaks of a very definite story with a determinative content, (Hauerwas 1983: 29-30). Katongole notes Hauerwas' preoccupation with certain stories: "archetypal stories are normative by containing paradigms of what a person ought to become" (Katongole 2000: 111, emphasis mine). Although archetypal stories are models and how we embody them is far less fixed, for the purposes of my work I take this to be a Christocentric paradigm.
defines the vision useful to the Christian community as being reflection on Christ.

Hauerwas (with Willimon) writes, “The Gospel writers were able to begin training us to situate our lives like his life” (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 55, emphases mine; cf. Hauerwas 1983:83). However, the narrative of Jesus takes a particular shape and identity-forming character; the cross is the ‘summary’ of Jesus’ life (Hauerwas 1985: 76, 81, 87) and it is this motif that has powerful identity-forming value:

The cross is Jesus' ultimate dispossession through which God has conquered the powers of this world. The cross is not just a symbol of God's kingdom; it is that kingdom come...Thus, our nature, our true end, is revealed in the story of this man in whose life, we believe, is to be found the truth (p. 87, emphasis mine).

Hauerwas highlights the importance of ‘telling’ this story repeatedly in his work:

The church is where the stories of Israel and Jesus are told, enacted, and heard, and it is our conviction that as Christian people there is literally nothing more important we can do...The telling of that story requires that we be a particular kind of people if we and the world are to hear the story truthfully (Hauerwas 1983: 99-100, emphasis mine; cf. p. xxi, 25, 26, 117, 119, 125; 1975: xx; Hauerwas 1981b: 67; 1985: 64; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 63, 67).

By recovering the narrative dimension of Christology we will be able to see that Jesus did not have a social ethic, but that his story is a social ethic... the social and political validity of a community results from its being formed by a truthful story...The truthfulness of Jesus creates and is known by the kind of community his story should form (Hauerwas 1981b: 37, emphases mine; cf. Hauerwas 1985: 56; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 38).

Hauerwas argues that the Gospels are offered so that we can situate our lives in relation to the life of Jesus (Hauerwas 1983: 74). One of Hauerwas’ most famous maxims is that “the first social task of the church –
the people capable of remembering and telling the story of God we find in Jesus – is to be the church” (Hauerwas 1983: 100); Hauerwas seems to be suggesting that the Church can only be faithful in its social task when it is faithful to the story given to it in the story of Christ. However, it is in relation to the Christian community’s *embodiment* of the story of Jesus that cracks begin to arise in Hauerwas’ work.

Clearly the Christian community is the place where character is developed in accordance with a vision and a particular narrative, and indeed there is no problem with this notion; however, critically Wells identifies a move to *the precedence of the community* in Hauerwas’ theology. In Hauerwas’ later work he begins to make “a claim for *the epistemological priority of the Christian community*” (Wells 1998: 74, emphasis mine) and slips into the danger of anthropocentrism (Wells 1998: 83). An increased emphasis on the ecclesiological community as bearers of the narrative becomes problematic and it is to this that I now turn in critique of Hauerwas and his position.

**A critique of Hauerwas**

Hauerwas moves ever more to *the priority* of the Christian community as the conveyor of the narrative of Jesus. As early as *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas was writing:

> We have failed to see that the virtues needed can only be displayed by drawing on a *particular community’s account of the good* (Hauerwas 1983: 22, emphasis mine).\(^{70}\)

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\(^{70}\) I think a subtle point needs to be made here. A community’s account of the good may well be the embodying of certain *received* truth, where that truth has antecedent priority; in my opinion this becomes problematic when a community’s lived narrative takes precedence over what might be termed a given narrative resourced from beyond itself; I shall say more about this below.
Herein is the subtle danger of giving precedence to the ‘community’s account of the good’ over and against any revelatory discovery of a vision and a narrative. Of course it could be argued that a particular community’s interpretation and description is in keeping and parallel to some external story from beyond itself and is but an expression of that story, therefore:

The self is subordinate to the community rather than vice versa; we discover the self through a community’s narrated tradition (p. 28; cf. p. 33, emphasis mine).\(^{71}\)

However for Hauerwas Christian ethics become more and more dependent upon a community’s wisdom deriving its character from that community’s convictions (p.54); beliefs and convictions only making sense when they are embodied in a community’s discourse (Hauerwas 1991: 26; cf. 101 ff.; 108).

In an effort to develop the importance of the Church, Hauerwas makes truth dependent upon the Church (Hauerwas 1985: 41 ff.). Herein we perceive the tension within Hauerwas’ work. He wishes to hold to the story of Jesus as the story for the Church but slips into the danger of making the church the place of the revelation:

I have suggested that the church is the community that is at once the storyteller as well as a character in the story that is required by Christian affirmation of God’s redemption of the world (Hauerwas 1975: 61, emphasis mine; cf. Hays 1997: 254 ff.).

Within this citation Hauerwas is very clearly noting the church as the narrator and the subject that is narrated; I will argue below that the church does become a character within a particular story but that this story always

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\(^{71}\) Again this is subtle: a community’s narrated tradition might well be the passing on of scripture seen as revelation and held within an embodied community. However, see below for a problem with the emphasis on a community.
draws upon a story from beyond itself, held in the story of Jesus. Wells comments that in Hauerwas “the church is the source and location of Christian ethics” (Wells 1998: 76, emphases mine). Pointedly Wells goes on:

He appears to be making truth a prisoner of the practice of the Christian community. This certainly takes narrative, incarnation, particularity and embeddedness seriously, but it does seem to underplay the otherness and the sovereign prevenience of God. It seems that the truth of God’s presence in action in the Christian community is subject to the community, rather than vice versa (p. 83, emphases mine).

I now highlight a number of ways why this prioritising of the church then becomes problematic.\(^72\)

**Hauerwas has a very particular view of Christianity.**

For all his disavowal and repudiation of ‘universal’ categories, Hauerwas is prone to talking about ‘the’ church, as if there were but one expression of church or one expression of Christianity (Smith 2003: 118 and 21; cf. Wells 1998: 130);\(^73\) clearly this is not the case!

Presumably, Hauerwas is aware that his is not the only version of the ‘Jesus story.’ But, at least as is evidenced in A Community of Character and The Peaceable Kingdom, he does not write accordingly (Miscamble 1987: 70).

The sharpest of critiques comes from Gloria Albrecht.\(^74\) Hauerwas argues from a particular social location and therefore:

He chooses not to see the difference that historical particularity makes within the church and its narrative(s), differences caused by

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\(^72\) I am grateful to Wells for his concise and yet perceptive summary of the principal criticisms of Hauerwas (Wells 1998: 130 ff.). For reasons of space my critique is limited, however I have tried to note the salient points.

\(^73\) Smith writes: “Hauerwas’s various exhortations are not directed to a particular, nominal group of Christians somewhere who should live out their linguistic rules more consistently. Instead, he writes as though he knows how all Christian should live” (Smith 2003: 192, emphasis mine).

\(^74\) For a well thought out response to Albrecht’s critique see Hauerwas’ article in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (Hauerwas 1997); in turn Albrecht responded to Hauerwas’ response (Albrecht 1997).
race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation...his narrative-based ethics becomes the new foundation for the assertion of universal truth (Albrecht 1995: 26).

His particularity is in danger of becoming too generalised (p. 32). The further problem is the pernicious danger of oppression and imperialism. Albrecht repeats the criticism that Hauerwas’s social location shapes his understanding of the Church a number of times (for example, pp. 99, 108, 115-16, and 137), and then makes her critique explicit and pointed:

Positing a new universal theological ethics results in the defence of white male social privilege against the stirrings of subjugated voices (p. 137, emphases mine).

Clearly, Hauerwas is in danger of highlighting ‘the’ social ethic of ‘the’ church, and yet there are many ‘different’ versions and expressions of church (Smith 2003: 85; cf. Hauerwas 1981b: 101 ff.). What about those Christians:

Who are deeply conscious of inhabiting and being committed to more than one community? ... The concept of the community is not univocal and has probably not been subjected to sufficiently rigorous analysis (Fergusson 1998: 8, emphasis mine).

Therefore Hauerwas “makes universal claims that purport to be normative for all Christians” (Smith 2003: 113). A focus on the story of individual lives shaped in a particular community “leave unexpressed an almost indefinite range of alternative articulations of the same story” (Ogletree 1980: 29, emphases mine).

I am all too aware that North Devonian and Cornish Methodism has certain particular characteristics and traits and that it also shares some common ground with other ecclesial contexts. I am also aware that even within my own context there is a breadth of opinions as to what might constitute the true Church. My work will seek to develop a focused exploration
of the application of the story of Jesus for the formation of particular communities, (or even a micro community within the circuit), while also attempting to explore the *particularity* of those communities. These concerns bring two emphases together, that of ‘place’ (see Lawrence below) and that of a focused exegesis, drawing out the story of Jesus for a particular expression of that story within a context.

**Hauerwas has an idealised view of the Church.**

“The *real* Church is generally *rather unlike* the church Hauerwas envisages” (Horrell 2005: 75, emphases mine), it is a ‘fantasy community’ (Fergusson 1998: 66). For all his writing about *the community of character* the history of the Church has not always been whiter than white! Duncan Forrester reflects on this, considering the ‘little church outside the camp’ at Dachau (Forrester 2000):

> Perhaps a doctor carrying out experiments on inmates, or even the governor might happen by. What would the worship of the life of that church say to them? Would it give them solace, allowing them to carry on their activities with a quiet mind? Would it transport them to a different world enabling them to evade responsibility for what they did in this world? (p.193)

Of course, we will never know, yet:

> What we do know without a shadow of doubt is that people engaged in unspeakably evil courses of action often find solace in religion (p.193).

The Church outside the camp at Dachau and other instances of Church poses the empirical *refutation* of Hauerwas’s heady portrayal of the
church as it is today. Hauerwas, "writes in the present rather than the future eschatological tense and in the indicative rather than imperative mood" (p. 206). This is problematic as it creates a false empiricism:

Hauerwas is prepared… to appeal to a pragmatic test of the truth of Christianity, namely, its ability to produce people of moral character. This is, however, a precarious claim, since the Christian tradition has 'produced' a fair mix of villains and hero(in)es (Horrell 2005: 74, emphasis mine).

To be equitable to Hauerwas The Community of Character is perceived as an incomplete and unfinished project (Hauerwas 1983: 236-37; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 86 ff.; cf. Wells 1998: 29-30, 146 ff. ). The ‘Community of Character’ offers the opportunity for an on-going training in discipleship; however, he needs to be clearer about this and sharper in portraying the story of Jesus as a challenge to communities that are on a journey but have not yet ‘arrived’; Wells notes this and writes both negatively and at the same time constructively:

Many of the hermeneutical problems associated with postliberal hermeneutics appear very different when attention is paid to the end of the story…it would help him greatly if he underlined that this community is eschatological in its understanding of revelation (Wells 1998: 162-63, emphases mine).

If Hauerwas emphasised much more concretely the proleptic nature of his assertions this would be helpful.

I argue that a modern ecclesiological community is a community on the way, held within a journey toward Christocentric identity and formation. I will argue below that the story of Jesus is clarified and gleaned through an

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75 Other examples might be the ‘Apartheid Church’; the ‘Patriarchal Church’; the ‘Colonial and pro-slavery Church’.
76 I have chosen this phrase purposively drawing upon the story of ‘The Church on the Way’ in Van Nuys, California, captured in Jack Hayford’s book (Hayford 1982). The book tells the story of one congregation ‘learning to live in the promise of biblical congregational life’ to coin the book’s subtitle.
interaction between scriptural text and readers reading that story and that the
story of Jesus stands as an encounter with the Christian community; this
encounter is made real when we read the Pauline epistles to discover the
story of Christ.

A stress on character can lead to a neglect of the resources for
principle and moral choice.

Hauerwas looks to the formation of character within the social
context of the church, however, in his stress on character and virtue
Hauerwas is in danger of overlooking the principles undergirding decisions
(Wells 1998: 131-32). By asserting the promotion of a moral self-agency
(Hauerwas 1975: 16, 18, 20-21; 1981a: 56; 1983: 10, 63), he runs the
danger that self-agency is severed from the antecedents available from
beyond the community.

Ogletree believes Hauerwas to be in danger of a voluntarism
apart from “the various dynamics which make up human sociality”
(Ogletree 1980: 26, emphasis mine). Beliefs and convictions “are effective
in shaping lives only by way of the social processes which mediate,
confirm, modify, and reinforce them into human life” (p.26, emphases
mine). Ogletree concludes: “Hauerwas is not preeminently concerned with
the concrete dynamics of character formation” (p. 26, emphasis mine) and
therefore the burden of proof is for Hauerwas to show how character (and
agency), qualifies and transforms the conceptualizations of the moral life (p. 26).

Ogletree’s critique is paradoxical. If I have understood his critique correctly, Hauerwas stands accused of a voluntarism apart from societal principle and the mores created and agreed upon within culture. However, as I note above, Hauerwas is interested in a ‘Community of Character’, surely a place where certain principles and proposals for ethics are generated. However, simply put, what are the concepts of the moral life, how are they revealed to us and how might we embody those concepts; at the risk of repetition I argue that initially they come from beyond us: for the Christian held within the story and teachings of Jesus. It seems to me that there is a certain amount of circularity within this concept, the moral life needs to be articulated within community, but where does that community find its resources for the moral life and vice versa. However, Ogletree absolutely right when he makes the observation concerning Hauerwas’ use of narrative, “he is still much too sketchy in his general account of archetypal or exemplary stories and of their normative bearing on moral reasoning” (Ogletree 1980: 29, emphasis mine). Herein is the point: What resources does Hauerwas use for his biblical account of the

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77 Ogletree notes the difference between Hauerwas and another ethical thinker Frankena. For Frankena the moral framework ‘consists in a ‘theory of obligations’. He analyses the principal ways in which such obligations can be articulated; for Hauerwas, the framework is provided by a basic orientation to reality articulated as ‘narrative’’. However, “the decisive difference between Frankena and Hauerwas is not that the former lacks a moral psychology while the latter is seeking to develop one... The decisive difference is the nature of the normative framework within which actions lives are to be morally assessed” (p.27; cf. Hauerwas 1977: 50 ff.). Hauerwas’ normative framework is of character or ‘virtue ethics’ however, he seems not to be able to negotiate the principles and resources for moral action and discourse.

78 Outka asks a similar pointed question, while somewhat of a tongue twister, he asks “which narrative should I adopt...What, more precisely is the descriptive and normative status of the “I” which is not dissolved into the social – now narratively articulated – “me”? (Outka 1980: 115).
story of Jesus and how are they negotiated and conveyed for a community's reflective discourse?

An additional problem arises in his use of Murdoch: the concept of vision can seem to jar with and be at variance with the idea of character and agency; it is in fact a 'sea change' within the thought of Hauerwas (cf. Hauerwas 1981a: 30, 31; cf. Outka 1980: 114).

What I find perplexing is that Hauerwas commences such an ethics of vision without asking whether this calls for any modification in his account of character... Is it consistent within his ethics of character to define moral progress as awareness of transcendent reality and, more especially, as submission to its purposes (Outka 1980: 114)? This is only problematic if moral agency and character formation is severed from the antecedents held within a community's foundational narratives and corporate memory.

If there is an emphasis on character to the exclusion of the resources given in developing character, the question must be asked whether Hauerwas is in danger of playing down the importance of a scriptural story and, in keeping with my concerns, neglecting the story of Jesus as to be found in the Pauline literature. Of course it could be argued that Hauerwas need not pay attention to the Pauline story to be faithful to the scriptural story, he may well rely upon the Gospels (cf. page 73, note 82); however, I believe he neglects a major resource held within Pauline theology for the development of the story of Jesus (see below). For all his calling for the Church to embody the story of Jesus, there is a danger that he neglects that story by his emphasis on the moral agent. This brings me onto yet another further critique.
Hauerwas is a fideist and his theology lacks epistemic grounding.\textsuperscript{79}

Wells writes:

Unless one \textit{details the ontology behind one's theological statements}, one looks like a fideist – one who believes without rational grounds. Hauerwas does not speak much about revelation or ontology, and thus he has been called a fideist (Wells 1998: 130, emphasis mine; cf. 77 and 82).

As we have noted Hauerwas has pragmatic approach to truth (i.e. truth is embodied in people and communities in contrast to being held in a ‘body of knowledge’). This generates the danger of severing truth from the resources for truth (Wells 1998: 77-78). Actualised forms of truth speak “not so much of \textit{the truth of Christian doctrines} but \textit{more of the truthfulness of Christians’ lives}” (p. 86, emphases mine). I have already noted the danger implicit in looking for the truthfulness of Christian lives. Hauerwas' particular development of truth creates the conditions ripe for fideism:

He develops and emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Christian story - focusing on its own \textit{internal criteria} for truth \textit{without reference to publicly accessible criteria of common human experience and rational inquiry} (Muray n.d.)

Hauerwas believes there to be “no point outside \textit{our history} where we can secure \textit{a place to anchor our moral convictions}” (Hauerwas 1983: 62; emphases mine; cf. 67-68). However, this then becomes problematic because narrative ensues from a localised community, and the narrative is held within it (Smith 2003: 5; cf. 74); \textit{and} because language and world are closely and internally related, those communities \textit{“make their respective worlds by their use of their language”} (p.85, emphases mine). Hauerwas can sometimes

\textsuperscript{79} Hauerwas himself accepts that his work may appear this way (for example, Hauerwas 1985: 4 and 5).
appear as if it has no basis for reality other than within the community’s linguistic creation (Ogletree 1980: 25).

Very pointedly Hays poses some sharp diagnostic questions to Hauerwas’s work (Hays 1997: 258 ff.). According to Hays, Hauerwas rarely proceeds to detailed exegesis or seeks to “develop theological insights from careful analysis or structure” (p.259).

In the end, Hauerwas’s hermeneutical position comes unravelled in the midst of the pragmatic task that he deems essential for the intelligibility of Christian ethics. The New Testament falls mute…Hauerwas finds himself with no theoretical grounds for an appeal to Scripture against the church’s practices (pp.266-67, emphases mine, cf. Horrell 2005: 75).80

Of course, Hauerwas has challenged the idea that he is a fideist (Hauerwas 1985: 4-5; 1988: 8 ff.), and others have made the argument that he has been misunderstood (Wells 1998: 150); so for example Harink defends Hauerwas:

Hauerwas has in no sense rejected rationality, but he has rejected the notion of universally available rationality by which Christian convictions are to be judged (Harink 2003: 100, emphases mine).81

This may be true, but I will argue that in utilising a story-shaped vision within a particular Pauline epistle we discover a resource for Christian discipleship; clearly not the only resource, but an important one and certainly something of a rich source of revelation as highlighted in chapter one.

In an effort to be distinctive there is reticence on Hauerwas’ part to enter into a reasoned argument for Christianity (Katongole 2000: 184). God,

80 Hays describes Hauerwas’ interpretation of Biblical texts as ‘freewheeling’ and notes “he has shifted – partly under the influence of Stanley Fish – into an aggressively postmodern phase, denying that texts, including the Bible have meaning save as they are constructed within particular interpretive communities” (Hays 1997: 254).
81 Fideism is described by Harink thus, “the refusal to hand faith over to the rationality of its wider context, seeking instead to isolate it within its own particular primary language, tradition, and community” (p. 99), on these terms I think Hauerwas might be happy with the charge!
the incarnation and the resurrection become *internal to language* and border upon idolatry in as much as Christians ‘*make*’ God through the use of language (Smith 2003: 180-81).

Whereas Yoder maintains that a right reading of the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus must provide the norms for the life of the Church, Hauerwas characteristically puts the matter the other way round: the church must be a truthful and peaceable community in order to read the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus rightly (Hays 1997: 254). 82

**Hauerwas borders on Sectarianism.**

Holland defines an interaction of theology with its wider context thus:

Beyond sectarianism the central signifiers of the Christian faith God, revelation, faith, love, and justice might be seen to be held in the language and culture of general experience (Holland 1992: 166; cf. Gustafson 1985: 92 -94; Horrell 2005: 73).

Without these things there is a danger for a sectarian expression of faith:

Sectarians are then faced with … articulating only *among themselves* the truth *to which they bear witness*…This sort of sectarianism inevitably *falls back on fideism and voluntarism* (Quirk 1987: 81-82, emphases mine).

While it is true that Hauerwas argues that the church should not promote a withdrawal ethic (Hauerwas 1983: 102), he has nevertheless promoted an enclosed Christian community in danger of being unable to engage with society. He adopts too readily from Yoder the label

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82 Hays suggests that Hauerwas’ biblical interpretation is synthetic, “he has made no systematic attempt to work the full range of the canon into his synthesis” indeed, he neglects Paul (Hays 1997: 260). Hays also notes that Hauerwas concentrates on the Jesus of the Gospels rather than the cross, this being in comparison with Yoder, who makes the cross a focal point (p. 261); following Hays (chapter 1) I will argue that the cross becomes a focal point in a narratively based hermeneutic; furthermore exegesis of Pauline texts can be an important resource within this venture.
‘Constantinianism’ in describing the mainstream church’s engagement with the world (Wells 1998: 131). This becomes problematic in that:

The challenge is to engage the world, to engage in dialogue with it, to contest its prevailing ethos... to transform our world so that in whatever small ways it may more nearly approximate the life of the Kingdom of God (Miscamble 1987: 76-77, emphases mine).83

Sectarianism isolates the church from the world (Gustafson 1985: 84); for Hauerwas “Christian morality is not based on a concern to be responsible participants in the ambiguities of public choices” (p. 88, emphases mine; cf. Hauerwas 1985: 1, 15; Rasmusson 1995: 234).84

In terms of my research, why should the charge of a separation from and disengagement by the Church from the world matter? It matters in as much as I identify a need by the Church of which I am part to engage with the world on the basis of a call to Christocentric living and loving (see below), and in a call to offer an alternative vocation and calling worked at through dialogue with and service to the world. In fact during the process of interacting with the focus groups the point of view was articulated that a Christ-centred orientation necessitates service and engagement with the world.

In summary then, in many ways Hauerwas is in danger of severing his theological project from some external resources; from a vision and a story which is prior to and in some instances standing over anthropocentric expressions of being.

83 It is interesting to note here that Miscamble believes that the Church should engage the world beyond the Church to ‘contest’ it. One of the critiques of the CBS groups was that we too readily adopt the ethos of the world within our current expression of Methodism (see below).
84 For a response to Gustafson see (Hauerwas 1988: 2 ff.).
The reason for the use of Hauerwas and the two themes of vision and narrative.

In light of the above criticisms, it might well be asked why I have chosen to work with the theology of Stanley Hauerwas. This is an important question as it sets the agenda for a critical juxtaposition of his theology with the Pauline literature and my own context of ministry.

All interpreters come from a particular place and carry with them presuppositions (Bultmann 1952: 241-42). For a number of years I have been fascinated by the theology and ecclesiology of both Hauerwas and Paul. In addition, my own ‘living experience’ is that of being a Methodist Minister, and of wanting to make sense of Paul (and indeed of Hauerwas); employing their theologies for an engagement with contemporary ecclesiology. Paul’s writings and Hauerwas’ theology are at times controversial, at times frustrating and not without critique, yet I consider there are some points of convergence between Paul, Hauerwas and the contemporary church.

Other interpreters of Paul have engaged different theologians as ‘conversation partners’; their groundwork in coming to the Pauline text has in some measure utilised additional and supplementary understanding and thought. These conversation partners bring critical thought and analysis to bear upon the text and in so doing open out the meaning of the text either for scholarly and contemporary concerns (Bultmann 1952: 22; Ford 1989: 133; Hays 2002: 22; McGrath 1994: 193). However, these engagements have often been analytical and probing, bringing a critical dialogue to bear within the discourse. I argue that a similar dialogue can be established resulting from
the concerns of Paul, Hauerwas and my current experience of the contemporary church.

An engagement between these three sources of theology, Paul, Hauerwas and my own context of ministry was a thought-provoking, a fascinating and enlightening exercise, exploring a three-way dialogue within this basic narrative hermeneutic and interpretative framework in the ways that I have already highlighted. It now falls to me to make the case for this three way dialogue.

There is a dearth of scholars engaging a Pauline/Hauerwasian hermeneutic; as far as I am aware only two scholars have engaged this dialogue specifically: Douglas Harink and David Horrell (Harink 2003; Horrell 2005). Horrell notes some points of convergence between Paul’s theology and Hauerwas’, so for example, he writes: “it should be clear that the material surveyed above illustrates especially clearly the closeness of Paul’s approach to ethics to that of Hauerwas” (Horrell 2005:243, emphasis mine; cf. 98, 132, 164-65). Similarly, Harink writes:

I am convinced that reading Hauerwas in the light of Paul’s letter to the Galatians enables us to understand Hauerwas better. Further, it enables us to gain a better understanding of Paul’s letter. In the light of this mutual illumination, I hope to show that Hauerwas’s struggle with liberalism is a thoroughly and authentically Pauline affair (Harink 2003:68; cf. 14, 15, 74).

For all of this, Hauerwas only alludes to the story of Jesus and to cite the work of Hays again he notes that his “account of this story and the community whose life is rooted in it is more suggestive than systematic” (Hays 1997: 256). Hauerwas rarely engages in a close reading of Biblical texts, he is

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85 In fact at one point, Harink describes Hauerwas as a ‘formidable Pauline Theologian’ (74). This is mistaken as we have already noted, he rarely explicitly draws upon Pauline material, particularly in any systematic manner.
“unlike Yoder, who emphasizes the community’s task of analogical reflection in modelling its life after the paradigm of Jesus” (p. 262).

In his exploration of Paul’s ethics Horrell notes the rejection of an emphasis on moral quandaries and notes that Paul prefers to explore the formation of human communities (Horrell 2005: 3); I concur with this analysis and suggest that particular Christian human communities might be formed by a particular Christocentric vision and narrative embodying of the story of Jesus expedited through a particular exegetical and hermeneutical approach. I argue that this is thoroughly in keeping with the themes of vision and narrative as stated in Hauerwas; however Hauerwas neglects a major source of theological reflection within the Pauline literature to further his project and as a resource for his theological categories.

I argue that Paul is seeking to build a community of character at Corinth, by drawing upon a particular vision. Similarly Hauerwas seeks to build a community of character according to a specific vision. However, I have argued above that this vision has become centred upon ‘the’ church and has moved away from the resources available within the Pauline corpus for the articulation of that vision; similarly I will show below that this can also happen in contemporary ecclesiological contexts.

There are other points of convergence: we note in both Paul and Hauerwas the integration of theology and ethics. Hauerwas speaks of his work as being ethical theology and rejecting the idea that he is an ethicist doing theology (Hauerwas 1975; 1988: xviii), a subtle and yet important difference. While on occasion Hauerwas has defined himself as a Christian ethicist (cf. Hauerwas 1983: 2), it is I believe interesting to note that in his
later *Christian Existence Today* he disavows the title. This is down to a development in his thought and a developing understanding that he is a theologian involved with ethical enquiry. Of course, it could be argued that this is just semantics, however, I think not, and I believe that it reflects a deeply theological question. What we believe about God affects how we embody a particular story within the world. I believe that it can be argued that the same phenomena can be seen in Paul (Horrell 2005: 22). I hope for a similar integration of ethics and theology within contemporary ecclesiology.

Long has the debate run concerning indicative and imperative in Paul. I argue that the Christians in the community at Corinth were being challenged to behave in a certain way through an engagement with a vision of the story of Christ. Hauerwas builds a theology and in so doing his theology informs ethical enquiry. Paul does much the same. Engberg-Pedersen writes:

> All through Paul will be ‘theologizing’ in the sense of spelling out the meaning to human beings of what God has done (to them) through Christ...he will also be concerned with what is the ultimate goal of his ‘theologizing’: practice. Nothing must be torn apart here. It all hangs intrinsically and inextricably together (Engberg-Pedersen 2000: 295).

One of the key motivations for my work is to try, in some small measure, to take this reflection of Paul, Hauerwas and Christian formation a little further and in dialogue with my context.86

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86 As far as I am aware no one has attempted a three-way dialogue in the terms I am suggesting.
Finally, and to be explored further in the thesis, mine is a somewhat pragmatic task. I wish to explore whether the theological ethics of Paul and Hauerwas work! Would there be any sense of correspondence between what they write, ‘theologize’ about and ‘practice’ within a contemporary context; would there be competing and contradicting stories and theology? Will any of the criticisms of Hauerwas (and perhaps of Paul) ring true in my situation and a contextual understanding of ecclesiology? I also hope that if the dialogue does work it might be a contribution to contemporary ecclesiology and in particular Methodist ecclesiology.

A reasoning for the use of the themes

Having argued for the use of the theology of Hauerwas, I now need to make an argument for the use of the themes. Hauerwas notes the importance of vision for the building of ethics in contrast to the concept that ethics should oriented by other ethical concerns such as deontology, utilitarianism, consequentialism or teleological themes. A very definite and specific narrative informs and gives substance to this vision. Hauerwas goes on to argue that it is in explicit communities that a vision informed by the narrative is worked out in praxis, and in these communities, these concepts are applied in the formation of character.

I would argue that the themes Hauerwas offers are relevant and are worthy of exploration and I will argue that the themes and theological

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87 I choose the word ‘praxis’ advisedly as that ‘practice’ which is informed, and which is mediated, theologically.
categories of vision and narrative can be perceived within 1 Corinthians. However, against Hauerwas I am arguing for a position that states the priority of the text of Scripture (in contrast to Hauerwas' priority of the Church). However, I will also argue that this must always be in dialogue with the concerns and the backdrop of the ecclesiological community (see next chapter) and that any exegesis that does not engage with concerns of 'place' when engaging the Bible for contemporary discipleship concerns remains a mere academic exercise (Lawrence 2009).

I suggest that the categories of vision and narrative necessitate an exploration within a particular ecclesiological context for the very reasons that I have brought critique to bear upon Hauerwas above. I identified some of the dangers implicit in Hauerwas’ prioritising of the Church; I now briefly set out why I believe an exploration of Hauerwas’ themes within a particular context while in dialogue with the biblical text will be an engaging one and how it may address some of these concerns.

Hauerwas poses a generalised view of the Church; I am suggesting an exploration of the themes of vision and narrative within a very particular expression of the Church. What would they have to say within a particular context? How might that particular context challenge and bring critique to bear upon the themes from Hauerwas and the Pauline text?

Hauerwas suggests an idealised view of the Church; I am all too aware of the fallibility of my own context of ministry. Might the themes and the Pauline text, address, stand over against and critique this context? A

88 And indeed of my own fallibility as a Methodist Minister.
similar thing might be said about the resources for the theology i.e. a
scripturally generated and revelatory ontology might address any sense of
fideism in my own context. I will argue below that Paul’s narratively
constructed story of Jesus and indeed the story of the Church at Corinth
address and speak to North Devon and Cornish Methodism.

Finally, the critique was made that Hauerwas’ theology leads to
sectarianism. I will explore how a Pauline text and an ecclesiological
context challenge and critique a separatist Christian identity, asking how
the particular themes of vision and narrative engage a wider context and
perspective and an engagement with the world.

While the idea of narrative has been a conceptual and
hermeneutical tool for the interpretation of Paul (as evidenced in the last
chapter), this has not been applied to the Corinthian correspondence in any
thoroughgoing manner. I suggest that this is a neglected area in Pauline
studies and particularly for contemporary exploration. Paul addresses a
*particular* ecclesiological context as in no other Pauline epistle; I will argue
that much of what he writes can be re-interpreted for a contemporary
ecclesiological context and towards present-day ethics; I will argue this case
further below.

I believe that the vision Paul holds before the Corinthians is
generated by certain narratives; the narratives of Jesus, Paul’s ministry and in
contrast to the distorted narrative of the Corinthian community. I will show that
these themes have contemporary relevance and significance.

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89 Richard Hays points to some ‘Corinthian’ hints of a narrative of Jesus in ‘The Story of God’s Son: The identity of Jesus in the Letters of Paul’ (Hays 2008), however, these are nothing more than hints. Horrell engages Paul and Corinth in arguing for a communitarian ethic; I wish to develop this trajectory by linking it to specific contemporary ecclesial contexts.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the key themes in the theological ethics of Stanley Hauerwas, focusing in particular on vision and narrative. The centrality of narrative (and the ecclesial focus) in Hauerwas’ work link it closely with the narrative approach to Paul, reviewed in Chapter One. I employ Hauerwas’ work in order to develop a specifically theological and ecclesial approach to narrative in both Paul and in contemporary churches. But one of the major criticisms of Hauerwas has been that his engagement with both the biblical texts and the contemporary church remains at too general a level. In this thesis I therefore want to engage with both a specific Pauline text (1 Corinthians) and a specific ecclesial context (my own Methodist Circuit in North Devon and Cornwall). In order to find resources for this contemporary ecclesial engagement, in my next chapter I explore the Contextual Bible Study methodology as an initial way of coming to the text and the themes identified in Hauerwas. I will then suggest – returning to the detailed exegesis of 1 Corinthians – that the CBS methodology necessitates a supplemental historical-critical exegetical approach within my context of ministry.
Chapter Three

Contextual Bible Study in North Devon/Cornwall

In this chapter, I wish to proceed in three ways: first to set out the theoretical basis of the comparatively new hermeneutical movement Contextual Bible Study; secondly to note why I utilised it as a research methodology in my own context of ministry (alongside exegesis of the passages from 1 Corinthians and an engagement with Hauerwas); thirdly to note the practical ways in which I facilitated CBS as part of my research.

CBS as a creative research methodology.

For well over twenty years I have been involved with Biblical scholarship in one way or another, I have been broadly committed to a view which states that we should not merely allow the biblical text to say what we want it to say, but rather should seek some sense of objectivity and impartiality within scholarship. I believe that we should come to our scholarship using the tools of philology, social and historical criticism etc. to gain as much of an understanding of a text’s context, its argument and discourse as possible and that we shouldn’t create a meaning for the text plucked out of thin air or simply from our own experience.

90 While acknowledging that this ‘new movement’ has its roots in previous underlying and implicit ways of interpreting the Bible as ‘ordinary’ readings (see Lawrence 2009: location 2620). I will qualify the term ‘ordinary’ below.
91 As a Methodist Local Preacher in training, then as a ministerial student studying both at undergraduate and then post-graduate levels. My Masters degree made an argument for broadly historical-critical approaches and I studied both Mark’s Gospel and 1 Corinthians. I have maintained a strong interest in hermeneutics for a number of years, being fully aware of hermeneutical theories of ‘behind’, ‘within’ and ‘in front’ of the text methodologies. This chapter marks a fresh sense of engagement in approaching the text from the reader’s perspective, while balancing this with an argument for scholarly contributions and partnership within that process.
92 I am fully aware of the ‘modern turf war’ identified by Schüssler Fiorenza between historical-critical and theological-doctrinal studies (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009: 5) and that historical-critical methodologies are still dominant. I will return to Schüssler Fiorenza’s work.
However, I have increasingly come to the view that we read from a particular place and the aspiration toward objectivity is at best idealistic, perhaps even misguided and fails to understand and appreciate other hermeneutical trends such as textual (i.e. literary readings apart from socio-historical concerns) and reader-response hermeneutics, thereby taking seriously the reader’s concerns etc. (Hesse 2001; Möller 2000: 148 ff.; Thiselton 1992: 1, 15, 17, 35, 55 ff., 92 ff.). Loren Wilkinson writes:

Christians have long regarded biblical hermeneutics as the set of rules or the method by which the truth of a text can be made plain. Secular hermeneutics, on the other hand, increasingly seems to challenge the reality and the objectivity of that very truth that hermeneutics once was supposed to illuminate (Wilkinson 1997: 116; cf. pp.19, 33 ff, and particularly 35)

West also puts it rather pointedly:

The past couple of decades have destroyed any lingering notion of an ‘objective’ interpretation of the Bible (or any text for that matter). Some still stamp their feet and shout, ‘but the Bible says...’ However, the Bible itself says nothing. A reader is required before the Bible says anything, and once we acknowledge a real reader as an active participant in the process of interpretation, we must abandon any strict claim to neutrality and objectivity (West 2012: 399).

At this point in my journey (both academically and in the life of the Church), I find myself drawn to and engaging an approach to reading the biblical text that engages the reader, rather than an approach that merely uses the historical critical paradigm; although on reflection I have always held these convictions instinctively. I am rediscovering that which I knew intuitively (at least within an ecclesiological context), that there are readings

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93 I think that West overstates the case, I think on occasion the Bible does ‘say’ something (see below); there are times when the Bible almost seems to address us. Then there is the whole question of ‘revelation’; I have a theology that wants to hold onto the idea and concept that the Bible does indeed address and speak to us, albeit through a process of hermeneutical enquiry.

94 I am thinking in terms of the broadest definition of historical criticism (Powell 1993: 2)
that are based on other resources beyond and alongside historical-critical scholarship.\(^\text{95}\)

This is the story of many of the readers of my current context of ministry – a reading in terms of their interests and the concerns of Christian discipleship, reading for ecclesiological and life interests and not just for what might be considered to be a dry academic exercise.\(^\text{96}\) Well I am learning (again!) the ‘genetic’ and ‘referential’ fallacies (West 1995: 23; 2012: 400). However before I engage the CBS approach within the context of my work, I wish to give a short analysis of the methodology.

Brian Blount writes the following concerning the sense of a New Testament text, it “must have a meaning that is not confined to the reality of a single interpretive ideology” (Blount 1995: 3, emphasis mine). It has been argued strongly in the past that if one was to interpret a text meaningfully then the prevailing Eurocentric methodologies were correct, being either historical-critical or literary approaches (p.3). This hegemony has been challenged by the Contextual Bible Study approach (Lawrence 2007: 531).

The Contextual Bible Study movement has its roots in Postcolonialism and Liberation Theological readings. So, for example, Sugirtharajah defines Postcolonialism as a resistance discourse furthering two concepts, first analysing the strategies of the colonizers and then proclaiming the indigenous voice to: “study how the colonised themselves made use of

\(^{95}\) I put it like this ‘rediscovering’ because I have always had an intuitive belief that readers can read the writings within the Bible and hear its voice prior to and in a way that does not always require a contribution from historical critical methods; however in my thesis I am making an argument for the concept that historical critical methods can contribute to and facilitate the hermeneutical process.

\(^{96}\) Particularly for many of the participants reading the Bible for contemporary Christian discipleship.
and went beyond many of those strategies in order to articulate their identity, self-worth and empowerment” (Sugirtharajah 2006: 7, emphasis mine).

Sugirtharajah also notes that “there has been a remarkable unwillingness to mention imperialism as shaping the contours of biblical scholarship” (p.17).

Postcolonial readings are then a way of challenging this imperialism. Applying all of this to my own context, I passionately believe that readers ought to be empowered to read the Bible for their concerns and interests, to read the Bible without someone standing over their shoulder ‘correcting’ their interpretations in some patriarchal or imperialistic manner.

However, I will go on to argue that a methodology that involves a partnership between ‘trained’ and ‘ordinary’ readers bears fruit; I suggest that there is all the difference between ‘correcting’ and contributing to understanding and application, all the difference between domination and partnership; indeed I will argue that the role of the trained or scholarly reader is that of service and empowerment and not of oppressive denunciation and criticism. Of course power is a very subtle process; while I would argue for a methodology where ‘trained readers’ are serving intuitive readers due care must be taken to avoid any sense of patriarchy and dominance.

In his contribution to the Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology Gerald West notes the commitments at the interface of Contextual Bible Study, a commitment to begin with reality within the base community; a commitment to read the Bible in community; a commitment to read the Bible critically and a commitment to socio-political transformation through the Biblical reading (West 1999: 137-38). Louise Lawrence writes:

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97 However, see Schüssler Fiorenza’s comments about ‘empowerment’ below (p.216).
While many Western readings are explicit in proclaiming their ‘reading agendas’ (liberation, feminist, ecological etc.), still very few of these readings, within the West, are informed by work within local communities on the ground. The majority modus operandi of the Western exegete is still dialoguing with printed texts, not people in their own environments (Lawrence 2009: location 572, emphases mine, Kindle Edition; cf. locations 454, 589 ff.).

While I will set out my rationale for the use of this methodology in a more focused way below, I simply wish to note in passing that this particular emphasis, i.e. creating a dialogue between people in their own environments and the Biblical text, seems to ‘fit’ the particular hermeneutical goals and interests of my thesis; it would also be certainly true of Hauerwas’ engagement of scripture, he argues that we make sense of and embody the story of Jesus in community.98 I believe that the story of the Bible (and specifically the story of Jesus) ought to and should impact upon the story of the Christian disciple and Christian communities; furthermore I will argue that this story of Jesus is discovered richly when communities can be shaped toward contexts where there is a creative matrix of intuitive and trained readings.

The questions I held as a background to my work were many and varied (and I will engage them more fully within my conclusion). Those questions included, for example: Would the stories of my ecclesiological context interrogate the story/ies that Hauerwas and Paul assume? While I believe Paul relates a narrative (held implicitly as a subsurface layer) to

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98 Taking into consideration the critique and the qualifications noted above. Part of my rationale for employing the CBS methodology is to root and ground the two themes I argue can be perceived in 1 Corinthians in an engagement with a localised and particular community. Having said this, I am all too aware that in fact Bude and Holsworthy Circuit could indeed be made up of twenty-two distinct communities (made up of twenty-two Chapels in particular contexts); I could go even further with this… however, I simply restate the problem with Hauerwas’ generalisations.
influence the story of the Church at Corinth can the same be said of the contextual story I know? Do certain narratives influence the church and are those narratives best discovered through the tools of historical-critical research or through contextual Bible study and was it a case of either/or, or rather both/and?

If the interpretative method is to break free from ideology based in modernist/scientific (i.e. historical-critical and literary) approaches to the Biblical text then a new point of view and new interests must guide biblical interpretation. Blount suggests a way through the impasse in what might initially be seen as a dualistic hermeneutic:

We propose neither an apology for socio-linguistic interpretation nor a naive acceptance of historical-critical procedure. Instead, we are concerned about a comprehensive use of language that includes the grammatical-textual and conceptual-ideational as well as the social-interpersonal functions of language. Only when all such implications have been considered can it be said that the text has been interpreted fully (Blount 1995: 7, emphases mine).

Similarly and in outlining some of the principles of Contextual Bible Study, Gerald West suggests an integrative approach in coming to the text of scripture. He suggests a three-stage process:

1. Choosing a Theme.
2. Finding a Biblical Text.
3. Questioning and Reading (West 2007: 7-8).

The third stage is defined as, “‘community/folk consciousness questions’, which draw on the experience and feelings of the participants,” and secondarily can involve “‘critical consciousness questions’, which include reference to literary, historical and sociological paradigms” (Lawrence 2009: location 515). A completely and radically different approach is being
suggested, one that *privileges* the reader and yet one that *might well include* historical critical questions further into the hermeneutical process.

I suggest a more integrated approach including and utilising three dimensions, thereby enabling a reading of the text which involves a creative dialogue; those three dimensions involve an approach that looks behind the text and thereby focusing on the socio-historical world that produced the text; an element focusing on the text itself as a literary composition, looking for clues within the text that might extrapolate meaning; and finally an aspect that focuses on the world of the readers reading a text (West 2007: 8; cf. Riches 2010: location 684 ff., Kindle Edition). While CBS prioritizes the latter focus I argue that a creative hermeneutic would draw on the other two dimensions for an authentic retelling of the story. These were my interests as I approached the groups.

What is of vital importance to my argument is the observation that West (and others) do not *exclude* historical-critical or literary questions (West 2007:9; cf. Riches 2010: location 176), West advocates “fusing community consciousness with textual consciousness” so that “the text speaks anew to our realities” (West 2007:9); textual consciousness might involve an awareness of how the text came into being. Similarly Riches writes:

> The personal, social and political problems *of the text’s context* may find analogies in our contemporary context. And similarly, what the writer/text *was saying* in such a context, the way those problems were being addressed, may have something to say to us in our contemporary context (Riches 2010: location 691, emphases mine).99

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99 I am taking Riches to mean the texts’ original context; this therefore would introduce the concept of historical-critical exegesis. This being the case, I couldn’t agree more. I will argue that paying attention to the original context of 1 Corinthians *and* a present day context will indeed open up a meaning for contemporary application.
This has been my understanding and experience thus far in my academic journey, that the text, its context, and the possible theological concerns of the author (as far as these things may be uncovered), might express something for contemporary concerns. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (and his theological statements, addressed to a particular context), might well speak to us today. However, what was vitally important for me, and indeed for the CBS methodology, is that CBS begins and ends with the particular community’s questions and concerns (Lawrence 2009: 15; Riches 2010: location 185; West 2007: 7-8); this close reading will speak into and inform particular contextual questions.

Therefore as I considered vision and narrative I was concerned to know what these things might mean in Bude and Holsworthy Circuit, how might they impact upon our Christian formation both as individuals and within community; furthermore how might a reading of Hauerwas’ concepts and what I believe to be Paul’s concept of vision and narrative speak into and inform that formation.

It may be that there is a world of distance between academic and ordinary readings of the scriptures. Paula Gooder, citing the work of Gottwald and Horsley, identifies four key chasms in Biblical Studies (Gooder 2009: 160-61):

- Religion and the rest of life.
- The past as ‘dead history’ and the present as ‘real life’.
- Thought and practice.
- Biblical academics and popular lay Bible study.
CBS seeks to address these chasms. As a Methodist Minister I argue that religion or indeed Christian faith (articulated in and through scripture), ought to influence and be concerned with the rest of life. I also presume that the past (or rather a depository from the past i.e. the Biblical Text), might impact upon and interface with the present, particularly if we are to argue for a position that proposes the text as ‘scripture.’ In keeping with my research, I passionately believe that thought (i.e. what we believe about particular passages of scripture and the faith issues they might raise as a result of a 'reading'), ought to critically engage with our practice. Finally, as a Biblical Scholar and a Methodist Minister with one foot in academia and one foot in a context dominated by a lay popular Biblical Study it is was and is my conviction that there should be an engagement between the two (however, more about this below).

The more I reflected upon these issues and for the reasons highlighted above, (i.e. my commitment to academic research and my ‘own’ rediscovery of the privileged place of the reader), the more I was heartened to discover that this process – the reading of a biblical text – can indeed be a shared one and a partnership between ordinary and trained readers. The proponents and advocates of the CBS methodology were not dismissing and rejecting the place of the ‘trained’ reader. In fact many of those advocating

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100 I am using the term ‘Scripture’ to refer to the Bible, see Chapter One note 34; however it is very true to say that there is a breadth of understanding concerning the Bible within the Methodist Church (cf. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-a-lamp-to-my-feet-1998.pdf)

101 Note that the terms ‘ordinary’ and ‘trained’ readers are not my own, but are technical terms to denote people who have been academically trained in contrast to ‘everyday’ readers (if I can put it this way); other terms have been used e.g. ‘critical’ and ‘intuitive’ readers (Kahl 2007: 148).
the CBS methodological approach were seemingly arguing for some kind of process involving a partnership.

While (in some quarters at least), it is considered that there was an interpretative crisis in hermeneutics and the demise of the theory of objectivity was and is a very real phenomenon; this is not to be seen as some mere accident along the way. Indeed, Walter Wink has proactively critiqued objectivity as a principle, it is a concept that should be challenged and confronted as a result of ideological concerns (Wink 1973: 7). However, the demise of objectivity has not led to some kind of nihilism, to a sense of 'anything goes' (West 1995:45). West identifies Wink's reservations about historical-critical methods:

First, he argues that they do not complete the whole hermeneutical process, they somehow fall short; second, he argues that while the questions posed by the historical-critical method are admittedly necessary, they are not always the questions which best allow the text to "speak" to people today" (West 1995: 61, emphases mine).\(^{102}\)

In a similar way Schüssler Fiorenza argues:

Understanding the 'first' or historical meaning of the biblical text as a deposit of the definite meaning of the author, historical biblical interpretation runs the risk of 'shutting up' the 'meaning' of the text in the past and turning it into an artefact of antiquity that is accessible only to the expert of biblical history or philology (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009: 17)

I could not agree more! For the concerns of this thesis, the academic process should not be seen as an end in itself but I would argue as a first order step,

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\(^{102}\) I strongly agree: the phrase "they somehow fall short" seems so apt to my context; ultimately I argue that historical critical readings feed off and are informed by a context such as the one I am researching, when that process is perceived as part of the process of reading for contemporary concerns; similarly local contextual concerns can be informed by the issues confronting an ancient context (as far as that may be discerned).
or a later exercise within the process that can contribute to further meaning and understanding.

I am emphasising then, that the historical critical methodology (and indeed literary theories), are not an end in themselves, the work is not complete when they have been utilised as exegetical tools, particularly in church communities; they somehow fall short in allowing the text to ‘speak’ today. The reading community and its concerns become a lever to break these established exegetical procedures (Lategan 1984: 6; West 1995: 62). However, these exegetical procedures are not redundant; they are to be seen simply as incomplete and inadequate in and of themselves (West 1995: 221).

Two dangers can be avoided as and when the readings of ‘trained’ and ‘ordinary’ readers are working in genuine partnership. First, we avoid the minimisation and rationalisation of the contributions and experience of ordinary people, and by becoming aware of our privileged and powerful position, we see ordinary/intuitive readers as equal partners within the interpretive process.103 Secondly, and conversely, we evade the danger of accepting uncritically any position, thereby idolising and romanticising any and all positions (cf. West 1995: 223).

It is only when both trained and ordinary readers are active "subjects" in the reading process that we really perceive a process of "reading with". For the contextual Bible study process to truly be a "reading with" both trained and ordinary readers must be active participants who are aware of who they are. However, because trained readers are active subjects we need

103 The term intuitive reader is used by Kahl (Kahl 2007: 147 ff.).

I am stating that there is a partnership to be enhanced between ‘intuitive’ and ‘trained’ readers on these terms. Perhaps the last ‘word’ in this section should go to Riches when he writes:

The excitement of CBS lies in its ability to unlock ‘ordinary’ readers’ abilities and skills and to draw out their insights into the text. Through conversation arising from the text, people can share their understanding and explore the way the text helps them make sense of their lives (Riches 2010:151).

**A rationale for the use of CBS**

I hope that I have already communicated my enthusiasm for the concept of a partnership between ‘trained’ and ‘ordinary’ readers. As I continued the journey into my research I strongly hoped that the partnership had the potential for unlocking the Biblical text as a narrative for the contemporary context of which I am a part. Within my work I saw the CBS process and the broadly termed ‘historical-critical’ process working together in collaboration to unlock two conceptual themes in Hauerwas and a Pauline text, while undertaking this research under the overarching concern of a narrative methodology.

A narrative methodology explicates and expands upon vision; therefore the narrative of cruciformity and the cruciform life has nothing to develop without a vision of the self-sacrificing love of the cross. I see the narrative unfolding and recounting vision in rather more tangible terms. Paul seeks to explicate his vision of the cross as held within his own story and the
story he hopes to encourage as embodied by the people of the Church at Corinth.

The narrative would remain simply as a good story without the embodiment of that story by a people. This is where the idea of an embodied narrative finds meaning. I argue that a call to a Christocentric ethic is an integral part of the central meaning of the epistle of 1 Corinthians; it was offered by Paul as a story for the Church at Corinth, *furthermore* it is a story that could be offered to a contemporary expression of church; a story for the people I know and work among in North Devon/Cornwall.

As I approached the task of engaging with local groups using the CBS methodology, attempting also to introduce (subsequently) the insights of historical-critical exegesis, certain questions came to the fore: Would the themes of vision, narrative embodied (or not) within a discrete, specific and particular community in antiquity mesh with the experience of some 'ordinary' and 'clergy' ¹⁰⁴ readers in my context of ministry? Do the story and the vision held within 1 Corinthians have little relevancy, being a story from ancient times? Would the story jar and aggravate the ordinary readers, and if so does it exacerbate feelings of distance between Paul’s time and context that will enable growth or the opposite? CBS sometimes unsettles cosy domestications of the text and new interpretations might challenge anew. However, would the CBS methodology be complemented and supplemented through a partnership in the terms I am espousing?

As I set out on my research journey I was convinced that without the point of view of the readers in my own context of ministry, an exploration

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¹⁰⁴ And thereby 'trained' readers.
of 1 Corinthians would remain as a history lesson, potentially as an arid, theoretical exercise; in other words I hoped to hear the voice of a localised and contemporary contextual voice to cash out the story of Jesus in this epistle as a contemporary story for the Church; in fact I had a growing understanding that we needed that local contextual voice. However, equally I believed that we could not afford the luxury of merely allowing the text to say anything we wanted it to say.

The process of CBS teased out and tested these things, testing both an exegetical reading of 1 Corinthians and Hauerwas’ rather idealistic and aspirational ecclesiological view. Ultimately CBS enabled an understanding of both a Pauline text and the ethics of Hauerwas and it brought critique to bear on both Paul and Hauerwas’ view of the Church; however, conversely an engagement with the text (and Hauerwas’ two themes) critiqued a contemporary expression of the church under the concept of a narrative methodology.

As will become clear in the analyses presented in subsequent chapters, Hauerwas, along with national and local vision statements within the Methodist Church (given to the study groups), and the narrative potential emanating from them, were far too prescriptive and generalised in their view of the ecclesiological community. The CBS methodology threw critical light on these things. The CBS methodology enforced and developed some of the criticisms noted of Hauerwas and opened up the Pauline text under contemporary ecclesiological concerns.

My thesis tested these things out in terms of some ‘readings’ with people who hold 1 Corinthians to be scripture and my own encompassing of
the ecclesiological ethics of Hauerwas as a backdrop for those readings. The question that underpinned my activities and critical reflections was “Do Hauerwas’ ecclesiology and ethics have any correspondence with Church as we know it in North Devon/Cornwall? How can we proceed through a reading that is authentic and avoids the pitfalls of both ‘ordinary/intuitive’ and ‘trained’ readings” (cf. Kahl 2007: 153-54)?

Finally, I now set out how I went about setting up and engaging with the CBS groups. What were my concerns, how did I hope to explore the themes as identified above?

Setting up the Contextual Bible Study Groups

I worked with two groups, a group of ordinary readers and a group of trained readers in the form of Methodist Ministers. I engaged two passages of scripture and related them to the two themes I am proposing. I involved the groups by engaging them in a two stage process.

My first meeting with each group followed the Contextual Bible Study process as outlined by Riches (Riches 2010: location 982) and Lawrence (2009: location 520). In the second meeting I offered my own exegesis of the texts, informed by historical critical scholarship and then asked the groups for further insights and application for our context in North Devon/Cornwall. The outcomes of each group at stage one and two of the process is recorded in each chapter that follows, dealing in turn with vision 105

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105 I see these ‘trained’ readers as also being contextual readers as they are my colleagues in Bude and Holsworthy Circuit, i.e. they were reading in the context where I tested out CBS/exegetical readings, the ethics and ecclesiology of Hauerwas.
and narrative. In my concluding chapter I make suggestions as to how the process might be developed further.

I was all too aware that my role and position within the context as a Superintendent Minister may well have affected the responses offered by the participants. It seemed to me that there were two pitfalls to try to guard against.

The first thing I was aware of was the power dynamics involved within the relationship. A Superintendent Minister has a considerable amount of influence within the Methodist Church. However, the participants were chosen carefully in two ways in order to address this concern: firstly, they were people whom I knew, people I had journeyed with prior to the exercise in order for me to be confident that there was a sufficient level of trust and openness within the group (in fact in many ways I had done similar exercises with them informally in the past). Of course it could be argued that this would introduce a further dynamic: the possibility of participants colluding with any perceived bias within my research as a result of the friendship and colleagueship, therefore my second reason for being selective with the particular participants was the knowledge that the members of the groups would speak their mind! While being aware of the fact that the dynamics of any particular group will influence the conversations, dialogue and interaction within the group, I was confident of a degree of objectivity and independence within the responses being made. It was my belief that people would offer disinterested responses that might confront my initial thoughts and ideas.

The second danger was that the participants might view my research and scholarship as some kind of perceived definitive answer to the
issues we engaged. For this reason, I took great care in presenting my exegesis and research. I sought to detach myself and my conclusions from the material offered in its primary form and to offer the research in a nuanced and diverse way concerning the different concepts and ideas we were exploring, noting, for example, that particular scholars might have different opinions on particular verses and that Hauerwas has come under certain criticisms, etc. Nonetheless, despite these attempts to offset these potential pitfalls, I must acknowledge that personal dynamics and established patterns of relationship will likely have influenced the shape of the discussions to some extent. This cannot entirely be avoided, but I sought to minimise their impact on the group discussions.

**Vision: reading 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25.**

I have designated this particular text in exploring this particular theme as I had an initial sense that it encapsulates Paul’s vision as he presented it to the Corinthian Church. This preliminary intuition was examined further as I worked with the CBS methodology and through my exegesis.

I began each evening meeting by reminding the group of two documents/vision statements that have been a feature of the Methodist Church and more particularly of their ‘local’ Methodism. The first document is the Methodist General Secretary’s report to conference of 2011 – ‘A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission’\(^\text{106}\); I provided the participants with this document before the first meeting and asked them to read the document. This document has a particular ‘vision’ as a focus – a vision for the

contemporary and future Methodist Church. The second document was a ‘vision’ statement written by one of my colleagues and offered to a circuit meeting three years ago (see appendices). Similarly, I asked participants to read the statement before the meeting.

In proceeding this way I offered two documents that reflect a ‘theme’ which is current and was of interest to the participants, affecting the shape of their church in years to come and two documents that might be deemed to have the potential to be ‘contextual’, as they concern the contemporary and localised interests of the Methodist Church within broader national strategic goals and suggestions.\footnote{107 I use the concept of potentiality for two reasons: first it will be noted that participants were critical at some points of both documents and secondly as a corollary of this might not have engaged the ‘vision statements’ as fully as they might have.}
On the evening itself

After a time of introductions and preliminaries, refreshments, and an opening act of worship, I began by asking the group to read the first text (1 Corinthians 1: 18-25) twice; first reading as individuals and then by asking members of the group to share the passage out loud.

I then proceeded to the questions, based upon similar questions in Lawrence (2009), Riches (2010) and West (2007). These questions were designed to ‘slow down’ and facilitate a ‘close reading’ (Riches 2010: 62-63), I therefore asked the participants:

- What are the notable words, phrases, ideas that you see in the passage?
- What jumps out for you from the passage?

In terms of the theme, I asked the following:

- I asked you to look at two documents concerned with a vision for the Methodist Church, which reflect both national and local concerns; do you see any sense of vision in this passage as Paul writes to a church in Corinth?
- What would you put at the centre of your vision:
  - As an individual?
  - As a church community locally and then nationally?
- How and what does Paul’s text offer you in the sense of vision?

Finally in terms of ‘praxis’ and ‘context’ I asked the following:

- Do you see anything in the text that might speak to us within our particular place of North Devon/Cornwall?
As I approached the fieldwork I perceived myself to be a ‘participant-observer’ (Lawrence 2009: 35), concerned with ‘hearing’ the voices of both my clergy and lay colleagues, but also being quite aware and familiar of the context where we ‘live and move and have our being’. Barbour suggests that ethnography is “the active and frequently protracted engagement of the researcher in the setting under study” (Barbour 2008: 92; cf. Harding 2013: 15); I have continually engaged with the setting I studied over some ten years of ministry. I used the CBS methodology in collecting the data; I engaged in what might be described as a focus group. I perceive my work broadly to be qualitative research, incorporating the CBS methodology as outlined above incorporating ethnography (Lawrence 2009: location 672, 920 and 2596).

**Narrative: reading 1 Cor. 10:1–11:1**

At this point a short word of explanation on why I have chosen this particular passage is important. Narrative theology and the hermeneutical methodology are concerned with the practice of stories. Within this section of 1 Corinthians Paul draws upon a story, the story of Israel. I argue that he then turns the story around and begins to reflect upon the story of the Church at Corinth, before finally utilising the narrative of his own life as an ‘example’ (11:1; cf. 9.1-23). Within all of this it is my conviction that Paul uses a narrative methodology.\(^{108}\) He utilises stories to challenge the story implicit within the community at Corinth. I shall of course explicate this further below.

\(^{108}\) Clearly not in the terms that it has been stated in modern theology and philosophy, but all the same I think a narrative hermeneutic is there.
As we came to the evening on narrative/story I started the evening by offering one of our hymns as a reflection/short act of worship:

*Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear;*
*Things I would ask him to tell me if he were here;*
*Scenes by the wayside, Tales of the sea,*
*Stories of Jesus, Tell them to me (Parker: 1885).*

This is a very popular hymn in North Devon/Cornwall and opens up the theme of story. I then moved into an ice-breaker opening out thoughts about what stories are important to them as a group with questions such as:

- What are some of your favourite stories, both as individuals but also as a Church community?
- Is there a story that your family have passed on and why might it be important?

In a similar fashion to the previous reading, I invited the participants to read the text (1 Cor. 10:1–11:1) and then asked:

- What are the notable words, phrases, ideas that you see in the passage?
- What jumps out for you from the passage?

To bring out the theme, I posed the following questions:

- Paul tells a story for the members of the Corinthian Church to ‘hear’ that story. What do you think that story might have meant for them?
- Is it a story that might speak to us?
- Think about the stories of our ancestors, how did/do they shape our sense of identity?
- What are the key stories that shape our identity in this place?
- Are the stories we tell in any way like the one Paul retells?
The CBS groups were purposeful, having designed the questions to explore the themes as raised by Hauerwas and the passages in 1 Corinthians. However, I came to those CBS groups open to the views that might be articulated; the whole point being to test out the ecclesiology of Hauerwas and the implicit ecclesiology of Paul; an ecclesiology held in two Pauline passages concerning a particular vision, a narrative and a call to be a particular community. Would these things mesh with and create a situation of understanding for our local context?

The CBS methodology worked alongside a reflection on the work of Hauerwas, and an exegetical engagement with the texts chosen was an interesting and fruitful exercise. The engagement suggested a complementary way of reading the texts and Hauerwas’ concepts.

In my initial engagement with the groups I utilised the CBS groups as an alternative hermeneutical approach in contrast to the historical-critical model as identified above, only then did I test out the exegesis with the groups. Once again I reinforce the view that ultimately I argue that the partnership between CBS and historical critical exegesis was a fruitful one. The CBS methodology complemented the more traditional hermeneutical process; the exegetical offering ‘filled out’ the earlier, perhaps clichéd answers of the CBS groups.

**Conclusion**

The main thrust of this chapter has been to set out the CBS methodology as an alternative to more traditional scholarship, outlining how I used my proposed methodological approach and hinting at some possible
outcomes. CBS offers a method for enabling local readers to respond to a biblical text in light of their own individual and community contexts, a deliberate contrast to a more traditional model in which historical-critical exegesis (mediated by a ‘professional’ interpreter) establishes what the text means. In selecting themes and passages, I focused attention on 1 Corinthians, neglected thus far in narrative analysis of Paul, and on two Hauerwasian themes: vision and narrative. As I have indicated, in an experimental attempt to explore how far historical-critical exegesis might enrich – rather than compete with – the CBS approach, I followed each CBS group with a subsequent meeting, in which I presented further exegesis of the texts and then invited participants to develop their own reactions to it. The results of these meetings and explorations of the two texts from 1 Corinthians are set out in the following two chapters. Toward the end of each of these chapters I shall move towards some initial analysis to be finalised in a concluding chapter looking at and considering the thesis and its findings as a whole.
Chapter Four
Vision

In Chapter 3 of this thesis I noted three things that are pertinent to my project (and indeed to this chapter). First, I stated that I have been broadly committed to the use of the tools of scholarship (subsumed under the general understanding of historical critical methods), and for a full understanding of a Biblical text; I then went on to note a growing appreciation of reader-orientated hermeneutics; finally I suggested the possibility of a fruitful and complementary relationship between the two methodologies.

While I would want to contest any sense of hegemony or privileging of the exegetical (historical-critical/literary methodology), in keeping with the concerns of my thesis I argue that it assists and accompanies reader response approaches in serving and empowering a contemporary ecclesiological narrative understanding of a text.

I have argued above that Hauerwas does not focus on exegesis in order to develop a Christocentric paradigm for Christian discipleship, but rather focuses his thought on ‘the’ church. Furthermore, I have critiqued his all too general and vague notion of ‘the’ church. In this and the next chapter I bring these two concerns together. I focus in on a very particular expression of ‘the’ church within North West Devon and Cornish Methodism and also offer some exegetical input in order to show how a dialogue between historical-critical and the CBS methodologies might proceed in practice.

In the next two chapters I work to the following pattern: first, I report the observations of the focus/CBS groups following initial meetings with both groups. At this point I offered no exegesis to the groups and their responses are an initial reaction to the text and the questions I used for promoting some
level of feedback on the theme as outlined above. At this point the groups were simply engaging with the text and the themes offered. Secondly, I share my own exegesis as a reflection on the theme as suggested by Hauerwas’ themes, themes that I perceived in the text and through observations on the passages from 1 Corinthians (in this chapter on vision, using 1 Cor. 1.18-25, and in the following chapter on narrative, using 1 Cor. 10: 1–11:1). Thirdly, I report on further conversations with each group after I had offered them a summary of the historical-critical exegesis, thereby testing and developing my thesis of a fruitful dialogue between ‘ordinary’ and ‘trained’ readers for the development of a narratively shaped discipleship.

As I considered Paul’s ‘vision’ (and indeed story), I have purposively structured the chapter(s) to ‘hear’ Hauerwas and some contemporary readers before then going on to proceed with the exegesis to note whether or not this enabled richer contemporary understanding. This achieves two objectives, first it privileges the present-day ecclesiological voice (by referencing the theology of Hauerwas and a particular ecclesiological context) and secondly it avoids the scenario of ‘reading into’ those findings anything from a previously constructed exegesis. This does not infer that the exegetical work is superior and must be augmented to the previous work but rather it should be seen as complimenting the CBS methodology.

The contemporary contextual voice is required to explicate a narrative understanding in the way that I am suggesting (for contemporary ecclesiological concerns); however, when it came to expressing some central concepts within their deliberations and thinking, both the work of Hauerwas and the CBS groups revealed an impression of a need for further reflection
and engagement with those concepts and a more sharply defined explication of the themes in terms of their application. I argue that a historical-critical exegetical exercise enabled a further discourse. However I will conclude that further work and dialogue would be a key objective for future work, a dialogue that would involve both the CBS methodology and the fruits of exegesis.

**My Initial Contact With the CBS Groups**

In this short section I wish to proceed in three ways. First of all to give the briefest of introductions to the context; at this point I will summarise the demographic of the two groups. Secondly, I will present what I hoped to achieve within the CBS groups. Thirdly, I will report the outcome of the CBS groups exploring the theme of vision and the selected passage before I offered my exegesis.\(^{109}\) Instead of reporting the lay group and the clergy group separately, I will summarise the findings of both groups collectively before and after my offered exegesis, in order to avoid needless repetition. However, I will highlight any major differences between the reactions of the two groups.

Bude and Holsworthy Methodist Circuit is part of the Plymouth and Exeter District of the Methodist Church; a merger in 2011 of the former Bude and Holsworthy Circuits.\(^{110}\) The Circuit is very rural; its two main centres are the market town of Holsworthy and the seaside town of Bude. It has 21

\(^{109}\) I am fully aware that in the process of transcription, there is a danger that certain things can be lost (cf. Lawrence 2009: location 2601).

\(^{110}\) A circuit is made up of a number of chapels over a particular geographical area. A circuit has Circuit Staff who can be either ordained or lay people. It has a Circuit Leadership Team comprising of Circuit Stewards, a treasurer and all the Circuit staff. It has a Circuit Meeting to think through missional policy and strategy, governance issues and the management of a Circuit in terms of resources and finance. I am the Superintendent Minister of Bude and Holsworthy Circuit, meaning that I have an oversight role over the life of the circuit (along with others); this means that I am familiar with the context of the Circuit as a whole.
chapels over a wide geographical area. We currently have 3 full time Presbyters (ministers), one half time presbyter, and two administrators.\textsuperscript{111}

Since our merger in 2011, the circuit has lost some sense of momentum.\textsuperscript{112}

To think about vision in fact is very timely as we constantly seek a way forward for the life of the new circuit.

The two groups might be described as containing some of the ‘stakeholders’ within the circuit;\textsuperscript{113} the people I worked with had an interest in the concept of a particular vision for the church.\textsuperscript{114} The first group comprised the circuit staff: four full time presbyters, a recently retired supernumery minister, and a part time minister.

The full time presbyters consisted of a Deputy Superintendent ministering in the Cornish seaside town of Bude; he has a very different theology to my own, leaning toward a liberal persuasion; a presbyter working at the Northern end of the circuit with leanings toward a sacramental emphasis in ministry; a comparatively new member of the staff team who leans even further than myself toward an evangelical persuasion and a presbyter who had a particular role in enabling mission, who had a broad theology. The part time presbyter has had an emphasis on rural ministry for the whole of his time as a minister and might best be described as ‘middle of the road’ theologically and the recently retired minister had worked in a team.

\textsuperscript{111} We also have two supernumery (retired) ministers only one of whom is active now.
\textsuperscript{112} Prior to our merger my experience was of Holsworthy Circuit and there seemed a greater focus and purpose. My perception is that we had some greater sense of direction, than we do at present. I think my colleague and former Co-Superintendent might well say this of Bude Circuit. An enormous amount of energy has been taken bringing about the merger and then working out some sense of direction within it; time will show whether the relatively new circuit can develop a new sense of direction — perhaps direction can be stated as a new sense of vision!
\textsuperscript{113} I acknowledge that in circuit terms the people I worked with were just a small representative number and that there are many more ‘stakeholders’.
\textsuperscript{114} Although I did not want to pre-empt the question.
ministry at Bude, again she might be described as being broadly evangelical. There was therefore a range of theological perspectives, and some mix of gender, though all but one of the group was male.

The second group comprised some people best described as representing ‘the person in the pew’ – ordinary Methodist members who are openly interested in the future of the Methodist Church in the area, paradoxically the second group also contained a current senior circuit steward, an ex-circuit steward, two ex-circuit treasurers, a Methodist Local Preacher, a Circuit administrator, a mission enabler and two youth workers; however, it also contained three people holding no office whatsoever.

This group consisted of people of mixed gender, five men and six women and of mixed age, ranging from early forties to late seventies; however, in hindsight and if repeating the exercise again I would have engaged some much younger adults in their twenties and thirties, in order to gain the point of view of a different and nuanced demographic.

The senior circuit steward had been in office for seven years and the ex-circuit steward had only very recently retired from office, as had the two circuit treasurers similarly serving for seven years prior to their retirement. Circuit stewards and treasurers have a responsibility for appointing ministerial staff (along with others); they also offer leadership and vision within the life of the Circuit and enable management and governance to take place (along with the Circuit Staff). The two youth workers lead a large youth group within the circuit known as Rock Solid and have their finger on the pulse in relation to the concerns of our young people. The administrator has responsibility for

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115 These people, therefore, are effectively lay leaders within the local churches.
assisting the Circuit presbyters in the effective running of the circuit. The three people without office were people that have been Methodist members for many years; there were also two people who had been Methodists for only a short time. Finally, the Local Preacher is a lay preacher within the life of the Methodist Church in North Devon and Cornwall, she is being trained in Biblical exegesis, theology and worship preparation and regularly interprets the Bible for a range of different congregations from small country chapels to the large congregation at Bude, she has been a Local Preacher for five years and has also regularly led Bible studies within small group work.

What was the intention for the creation of the groups? I attempt to answer this question at this point. Louise Lawrence writes:

The equation between place and narrative, memory and story can be forged in Contextual Bible Study that works in groups within local contexts and prioritizes community consciousness responses to biblical texts (Lawrence 2009: location 417).

Both CBS groups were drawn from the locality in question and so this exercise concerned itself with a particular place and context; perhaps more importantly (and in answering one of the critiques of Hauerwas), it was about exploring a specific and localised expression of ‘the’ church.\(^{116}\) However I was also attempting to facilitate an exchange with the chosen material. In exploring the ‘themes’ I hoped that the two groups, a clergy group and a laity group would engage with the texts on their own terms and I sought to explore how the groups might inhabit the texts chosen for local concerns (Lawrence 2009: location 2620). I wanted to make some comparative observations of how the theme of vision might be contrasted in Hauerwas, the

\(^{116}\) This is consistent with the stated strategy of the CBS methodology, reading the Biblical text for local concerns and specific contextual ideas. It also coheres with a Democratic reading process (See Schüssler Fiorenza 2009 below).
data from the CBS groups and an exegetical exploration of the Pauline text – all with the aim of working towards a constructive and contemporary narrative reading.

I hoped to ‘hear’ fresh voices as we approached the text. I was eager to explore the prospect of the discourse hinted at above, and trusted that the dialogue would be open and as impartial as possible. I was hoping that the CBS sessions might be a place where there would be an uncluttered and uninhibited exchange of views on the ‘Hauerwasian’ themes and the biblical passage.
The first set of gatherings – before the exegesis

As we gathered in each of the groups I gave a little background information to my research and then we proceeded as outlined above (see Chapter 3). I then recorded the responses as accurately as possible. As I now share those responses, I will concern myself with those points of interest as relating to my research.

*Question one* was designed to build a picture of the idea of vision more generally. The question framed was, “What does vision mean to you?” The question was purposive, endeavouring to bring out the broadest set of possible replies. It was also posed as an introduction to the theme and as a 'warm-up' to the rest of the research using previously distributed documents, the report of the General Secretary of the Methodist Church to its 2011 conference and a local vision statement written by one of my colleagues.117

A major theme that sprung from this question was the sense of wanting to perceive something for the future, some sense of direction and a course of action. One member suggested “some sort of focus – so we don’t lose our way…an unimpeded focus – without obstacles” and yet another member, “to have an idea of where we are going”.

One Clergy member challenged these early, expected and perhaps clichéd answers:

I find it hard to know what the future ought to be – sometimes people’s vision is very specific, that doesn’t work for me; ‘they’ see a goal, sometimes ‘I’ don’t see the goal… It’s as a wood with a lot of dense trees in it (emphases mine).

117 See appendices.
Other participants saw vision as:

Seeing your way forward – a goal for the future; a sense of looking forward, not backward.

A goal that is given – and therefore a guide for the future, the light has been put on and a framework is offered for a plan for the future.

A mission statement – that can be individual, or can be for a group, therefore a focus for mission.

Vision is something that can draw your attention. The end product – the builder has plans, i.e. a vision of what it will look like. Responding and listening to God!

A vision is something that brings detail out of the shade.

Another member began to state that he would not be sure if he had arrived at the vision – suggesting that for him, vision might not be so obviously perceived. In keeping with this sense of uncertainty of vision, another member questioned:

Did Jesus have a vision? Or was there a sense of working through it all a bit at a time – perhaps there was a gear change either when he was going towards Jerusalem or in the garden of Gethsemane.

For the clergy group in particular the notion of insight was preferable; insight was broader, more helpful. Perhaps Jesus might have had some sense of intuition in his ministry and within his vocation; however, more specific than intuition one member asked whether vision can include dreams.

One participant member noted that, “sometimes with vision you need clarification”, and that “vision needs a termination point to see it through”. Therefore seeking something more concrete, more tangible it was

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118 This was again a member from the Clergy group. It was telling that the clergy group were far more analytical and perhaps even critical of simplistic points of view.
suggested that we need to turn to Habakkuk 2:2 for inspiration – “Write the vision; make it plain!” (NRSV).

Some members of the groups saw this particular question as particularly relating to God and the Bible and one stated “Vision is about personal inspiration from God; a biblical sense of vision”. He noted that in the 20th century vision often is about seeing and then asked, “Why then have we automatically gone to biblical vision”?  

*Question two* asked, “What are the notable words, phrases, ideas that you see in the passage?” This question was designed to try and bring out anything that struck the group from the text. Comments included:

The Cross is stupid; to us it is the power of God. Therefore, the good news is nonsense.

This could be perceived with a sense of critique:

What are you saying – *are you right in the head*, some people who think religious ideas are mentally ill... if Paul had a word processor, he may well have gone back and changed some of his words... If it is viewed as foolishness, it might just be foolishness (emphasis mine).  

One member tipped back into verse 17, and made the point that Paul was setting up the argument and then noted that while “Paul is saying he is not going to use a clever argument... *he does* and tries to persuade – his own use of rhetoric!” Another member asked, “What does the Jew want?” and then he commented “he's demanding signs” and commented “they knew what they were looking for”.

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119 At this point we did not explicate further what ‘Biblical vision’ is in contrast to any other kind of vision.

120 What struck me forcefully is the sense that once we had brought exegesis to the text, the clergy group moved quickly to the place to a new perception of Paul’s theology and rhetoric, his carefully worded and created words; see further below.
The participants of the laity group were particularly struck by how different translations and paraphrases used brought out differently nuanced meaning.\(^{121}\) Some verses they particularly homed in on were:

So what about these wise men, these scholars, these brilliant debaters of this world’s great affairs? God has made them all look foolish and shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense (Taylor 1971: 20).

While Jews clamour for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified…. Human wisdom is so tiny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can’t begin to compete with God’s ‘weakness’ (Peterson 2003: 22 - 25).\(^{122}\)

To the question, “What jumps out for you from the passage?” clergy members responded, “It is a bit of a fixed argument; in fact Paul is not producing an argument” and while “it is wise, it is hidden wisdom! Paul may be on thin ice.” However, they began to perceive Paul’s arguments in more positive terms:

Paul is turning some stuff on its head – rather like the Sermon on the Mount... We are given hope – because of the simplicity of it all – there may be the debates and arguments... But all we need to know is Christ crucified…Therein is a complete message; you don’t have to add anything to it...In the noise of the different voices saying how we need to be church... We actually need to get back to Jesus, what were his command and his commission?

Again I reiterate that this sense of understanding developed considerably once we had engaged the exegesis (see note 142).

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\(^{121}\) I encouraged participants to read from their own versions of the Bible; it was interesting that these nuances did not particularly come out in the clergy group.

\(^{122}\) What struck me forcibly is how many times paraphrases of the text brought a new and nuanced sense of meaning.
One member picked up on the questioning from verse 20 “Where is…” and noted that Paul was saying “the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom.” A phrase was repeated, “Human wisdom is so tiny”, and in fact it is God’s point of view, through the Holy Spirit that is all important. He noted that the teaching of Jesus (and by extension of Paul) is ‘uncommon’ sense! In developing this viewpoint one member again quoted directly from the Living Bible:

For God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find God through human brilliance, and then he stepped in and saved all those who believed his message, which the world calls foolish and silly (Taylor 1971: verse 21)

Question 4 asked, “Do you see any sense of vision in this passage as Paul writes to a church in Corinth?” There were once again some quite probing and analytical comments: 123 “Paul is trying to remove an obstacle. His vision is to set up his own agenda”. Another participant suggested “I don’t think I see any vision, if I wanted to talk about the gospel I wouldn’t want to use an argument” and remarkably (from a member of the clergy group), “If anyone came and said I’m right and you’re wrong, Paul would ‘stick two fingers up’ and walk away!” 124

Without any prompting on my part, 125 there were a few answers that tied to my exegesis of the passage.

Paul comes back and sees that they are confused so he has to recap… He’s recapping so he can represent new thought, he’s presenting the vision, i.e. looking back, in order to look forward...

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123 Particularly from the clergy group.
124 This response seemed to me to be saying that Paul was a bit of an egotist and that it was his way or no way! Could it be that Paul was wrong, but that he would never admit this in a million years? This coheres with the implicit overconfidence in Hauerwas. He can sometimes appear as if his particular theology and opinion is the only ‘right’ one (see above). Hauerwas does have strong views and opinions. However, this may be unjust, perhaps he is simply self-confident in his theological positions; perhaps the same was true of Paul.
125 At this point in the interaction, with the exception of points of clarification I remained silent and simply recorded what the groups were saying.
He is clearing stuff away to get back to basics i.e., the original gospel he’d proclaimed to them...This was a re-cap of where the Corinthians as a church had come from, i.e. what they had heard – they would have heard of Christ's saving power.  

An inspirational comment came when one member said:

It’s a bit like cutting something out from a template, if you constantly copy from the copy eventually you will go wrong – you might need to come back to the original template...In the original context, the original template was ‘Christ crucified’.

One final comment (particularly in light of the comment above about rhetoric) raised the question of Paul’s agenda. Someone asked, “Was Paul trying to stamp on Apollos?”

Participants tended to wander from the text; however, when we came back to the text and I asked whether they saw any sense of vision there, or anything from the text that might speak to our particular place, the groups still tended to speak in the abstract (i.e. not really focusing on the text itself). However, there were a couple of notable comments:

It does very much – we are surrounded by lives that need the vision presenting to them.

The passage was seen as offering this sense of vision; it was argued that it is central to what we do and say: “It is knocking down the intelligent and scholars and returning to the central truth of Jesus” (emphasis mine).

Paul is saying that it doesn’t matter what else we see as long as we come back to a vision centred on Christ, all other things are distractions etc...vision is essentially Christ centred. Wisdom and foolishness were being juxtaposed to a Christ centred vision... Paul was speaking about the fact that the cross brings to nothing the cleverness of the clever (emphases mine).

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126 I was amazed by how quickly the groups could come to nuanced and perhaps almost contradictory views.
127 In my view this is exactly what is happening in 1 Corinthians.
128 The comment came from the same member that had raised the idea of Paul using rhetoric.
The point was made about the passage’s “simplicity of belief”. The vision is actually a call “back to basics”. Under this concept both groups then began to make some application: “Twenty one chapels had in fact missed the point; we are all there to worship a single God revealed to us in Christ.” Interestingly (and in comparison to the comments made by one member of the clergy group) one member of the laity group noted the unifying power of the vision:

In terms of vision, Christ crucified gives to us a corporate vision, Christ crucified gives unity, one direction, we can go off in different directions unless we hold to one pillar – Christ crucified (emphases mine).

Christ was thought to be God’s ultimate wisdom all wrapped up in one and therefore the passage was about the devaluing of egos. People look for different ways to discover salvation, yet the diamond at the centre was seen to be Christ. So we are called to look at God’s ultimate wisdom in Christ – the good news for all people.

**Question 5** attempted to further bring both a contemporary and personal slant on the concept of vision. “What would you put at the centre of your vision; as an individual, as a church community locally and then nationally?” Individually responses included:

As an individual Christ’s two Commandments, to love God with all my being and to love my neighbour as myself.

What struck me from this comment is that these things might be gleaned from the paradigm of the story of Jesus and not merely from one of his commands in the Gospels and that this might be a concern that Paul seeks to communicate to the Church at Corinth.
My personal vision is that things should be the very best they can be for God – if you’re not doing it well then you shouldn’t be doing it...God is saying I want a personal relationship with you – every individual relates to God as an individual...’Thy will be done’ – being open to God’s purposes.

Another member said that he had rarely come across a group of Christians that have the same vision, noting that “my personal vision might not be the vision of others at all”. Therefore, thinking corporately and considering the question “Can there be any ‘connexional vision’?” one particular member was both clear and also critical on this point:

We delude ourselves if we think that the General Secretary’s report offers a corporate vision. The national church vision could lose contact with everything and everyone on the ground – how does it work or how can it work in Bude and Holsworthy, we are only interested in the local context. We are told by The General Secretary what the national vision is, however nothing that the national church has said inspires, nothing motivates, there is nothing coherent and consistent – we have to stop pretending we are the Anglican Church.

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129 This came from a member of the clergy group and probably reflects the fact that we have seen so many suggestions and articulations of vision within our circuit.

130 Connexionalism is a Methodist term; the best way to define the term simplistically is “we are all in this together”. To think of a connexional church is to think of connectedness, developing a sense of belonging and shared strategy. This can be expressed in Circuit, District, National and Global terms. Therefore, despite comments made in the group, I do believe that the Methodist ‘Connexion’ through its various levels of governance and oversight does essentially try to be effective in terms of consultation and conferring and maintaining connectedness.

131 I have already referred to the General Secretary’s report it was offered to the participants to read prior to the CBS groups, this was the report of the General Secretary, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins to the 2012 Methodist Conference. I decided to use the report to feed into a discussion on vision as it was far-reaching, wide ranging and some might consider ‘visionary’. It suggests a radically new way forward for the Methodist Church. It is included in the appendices. I started my research while this report was fairly current. Since then other reports and ecclesiological trajectories have followed. At the time of writing I have just returned from the Superintendent’s Conference and we engaged Bishop Robert Schnase’s ‘Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations’ as part of the material; My perception is that this has now become something of a current Connexional narrative (see Schnase 2007).

132 To be fair to ‘The General Secretary’ in presenting the report at The Methodist Conference he made it very clear that the report was not his alone, but was in fact a work of collaboration and dialogue and of taking ‘soundings’ throughout Methodism in the UK, of holding a mirror back to the Methodist people: “I use this report to ‘mirror back’ some of the themes which we are rehearsing and reflecting upon together throughout the Connexion” (Atkins et al 2011: 25, emphasis mine); I am convinced that the report is excellent and if taken seriously, gives the Methodist Church a creative vision for the future.
I found this so revealing – it was in essence picking up the critique I have noted concerning Hauerwas. There can be no single vision for ‘the’ church in some generalised, unfocused way; I will come back to this point later on; however, a Christocentric vision might enable and facilitate an application of some core principles gleaned from a broad vision statement.

Another member replied, “Margaret Thatcher said, ‘there is no such thing as society’, well there is no such thing as church”. Similarly, we can say “this is my vision for the church, within a particular church, and if you don’t like it you’re in the wrong church.”

One member asked the pointed question, “Vision is only meaningful when people run with it, did the Corinthians run with it?” Another member pointed out that if the builder skips on the materials then the whole thing is flawed. The materials might be the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ and therefore, heaven would be the blueprint of the vision!

The vision offered by the Connexion is great instruction for people within the church but it is too broad. Sometimes the Christian message has been diluted – we forget the message of the cross. …Locally we need re-invigoration, a lot of our churches are tired, many of our people have spent a lifetime listening to a story… they have slowed down and even at times stopped… it’s like reading a recipe book, but not buying the food and cooking. We are in new territory, trying to reach new people. Sometimes it feels like the National Church’s vision is too soft, too woolly… my vision is for the Church to have a vision… Church leaders are not really reflecting the vision…We are expecting a challenge (emphases mine).”

Question 6 asked, “How and what does Paul’s text offer you in the sense of vision?” Again, this question was designed as an attempt to tease out whether the Pauline text has anything to say to us today and what that

133 Although not fully articulated at all, I believe that this comment came from a frustration that in Methodism people do not always ‘run’ with the vision (see below). This ‘hunch’ comes from knowing this particular person well and knowing that he does feel this frustration.
might be. This time the answers were quite affirmative, and certainly seemed to suggest that the text had relevance, what is more the answers were somewhat in keeping but were drawn out further through my historical-critical exegesis.

We have been saved by the power of God in Christ, fundamentally we preach Christ crucified and there is no difference in our message, in our fundamental truth; how it differs is how we preach Christ.

The underlying narrative is of cost; Paul is dragging people back to basics – we need to drag people to basics!

One member noted that the familiarity of the text means that the text ceases to be surprising, our job is to remind people of the cost of discipleship, and our discipleship needs to be cross-shaped.

Finally, another member asked as a church what are we in competition with? “What is the equivalent to the 'Jews demand signs!' and 'Greeks demand wisdom for us'?” He then went on to answer his own question by stating: “we are in competition with people like Brian Cox and Richard Dawkins”.

Individually members had a vision that spoke to them. One member shared his enthusiasm for the concept that broken lives can be restored through the cross of Jesus; the same member told of his own thrill at singing the ‘old-fashioned chorus’,134 “I get so excited Lord, every time I realise I’m forgiven”, it was for him a personal statement of his own vision of Christ and his work. In turn, realising that broken lives can be restored means

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134 Participant’s words.
that we are called to show love to broken people and that there is always the possibility of a fresh start. There is the possibility of reconciliation with God.\textsuperscript{135}

One member spoke about a trip he had made recently to Kenya and the strength of faith there; indeed while he spoke about the sense of vision within both laity and clergy, he also spoke about the stronger leadership, with greater vision, and suggested that this text offers something for ‘our’ (United Kingdom) leaders to engage with.\textsuperscript{136} In our context we see so much that distracts – the priority is ‘the building’. Twenty one chapels are liabilities not assets and then that all becomes a local vision and not a circuit vision. We need to set some priorities and some vision. Quoting from the passage, “‘We preach Christ crucified’ the group member said that when this is preached “we will see an effective witness”.

The final question asked, “Do you see anything in the text that might speak to us within our particular place of North Devon/Cornwall?” The answers were wide ranging.

In a concentration on buildings and in keeping the infrastructure the circuit had in fact lost sight of what was really important, asking the question how ‘Christ-Crucified’ might impact on our daily discipleship, what would this motif, this vision mean? One participant felt that it was about bringing our ‘first-fruits’ to God not our left overs; again the idea of Christ-crucified surfaced again; this imagery and vision was the ‘litmus test’ of our walk with God. While we are not crucified ourselves, it offers for us a picture, a paradigm. One member asked:

\textsuperscript{135} I repeat that at this point I said very little; however, I was tempted to ask how the cross impacts on broken lives.
\textsuperscript{136} He meant amongst the Clergy.
If I am truly informed by the cross can I be comfortable in my comfortable house when there is a poor starving child on the street?¹³⁷

I found that both groups moved toward a Christocentric and a cruciform vision although this was much more pronounced from the beginning in the laity group. The clergy group began by being pretty negative in terms of the ability to articulate a specific vision for our circuit, and yet began to articulate the importance of Christ-centred discipleship for informing a vision. What did it all mean and how do we unpack the Christocentric vision?

I now make an initial and preliminary analysis of the initial CBS groups’ reflections, particularly in terms of the theme of vision.

There were some points of correspondence between the two groups. Both groups saw vision in terms of direction and as a sense of motivation. I sensed that this was about looking toward the future and beginning to develop a sense of where individuals and the church might journey. However, it was marked that the clergy group were much more ready to critique any sense of a specific corporate vision and that, “there might be as many different visions as there are members in the church”. Similarly I noted above that both groups contained ‘stakeholders’; however my own experience of the circuit leads me to the view that these stakeholders might have very differing views than many other members within the circuit.

Challenging ‘a’ single shared sense of vision relates to a central critique of the work of Hauerwas. As I have noted he generalises and oversimplifies ‘the’ church. He speaks as though there is one expression of

¹³⁷ This was part of a wider discussion on how fortunate we are (as we engaged in discussion, we sat eating mince pies, and one member remembered a Christmas advertising campaign for the Salvation Army and of the portrayal of people being in abject need – this was a challenge to us).
'the' church and 'a' generalised ecclesial vision; the clergy group wanted to challenge a generalised specific vision. There can be no single vision for the church, or for the circuit in which we work, certainly not in terms of specific direction. However (and perhaps paradoxically), eventually both groups came around to and saw some sense of shared vision under a Christocentric perspective and particularly the clergy group really pushed this idea. One single thing that we might ‘gather around’ would be the idea of sacrifice and cost implicit within the story of Jesus.

The clergy group (possibly because of their experience) could not or would not articulate a corporate vision when that was seen in terms of a specific and concrete direction of travel for our circuit, but were ready to embrace a Christocentric perspective as getting back to basics and ‘the original template’. The laity group picked up the idea of a Christocentric vision as a unifying concept from the start.

Why were the clergy group seemingly all too ready to reject vision, when that vision meant specific, measurable and quantifiable courses of action, while the laity group seemed to openly accept a corporate vision, albeit in terms of a Christocentric orientation?

Part of the Methodist DNA is the idea of connexionalism (see above); this could be seen as shared thinking and development of shared vision; I suspect it is rather more important to Methodist Ministers and Circuit Leadership Teams than to most Methodist members. Paradoxically a failure to implement and encourage it breeds frustration, dissatisfaction and scepticism in the way I am highlighting within the clergy group. I think that an experience of trying to develop some sense of direction for the circuit and being frustrated
and thwarted within that task has left an uncertainty about whether it can be achieved. However, the basic Christocentric vision (of self-giving love) was still seen to be so vitally important; surely this was something that we might see as a goal for discipleship and by extension for our corporate walk as Christians.\textsuperscript{138}

Our clergy are in some measure tasked with trying to build a shared vision across the circuit,\textsuperscript{139} trying to get twenty one chapels (or at least their representatives) to think as a shared entity in terms of future direction. Scepticism concerning the vision comes because, through experience, they can perceive the reality of the critique levelled at Hauerwas; that there can be no single vision, (particularly) if that is seen as specific directions of travel, because there are twenty one chapels all with their own views of where we should be going.\textsuperscript{140}

For the lay people (with some exceptions) there is not the same sense of felt urgency to encourage specific vision across a circuit and so they thought more openly (rather than in specifics). A Christocentric vision can be seen as something shared and owned together.\textsuperscript{141} I am suggesting that through the CBS process the laity group were thinking through a particular way of articulating vision; seen in terms of a basic disposition, and a basic orientation rather than in specifics and measurable data.

\textsuperscript{138} I began to wonder whether in fact this sense of shared vision – i.e. a Christocentric Vision (whatever that means?) – might be something that a linked group of churches might gather around.

\textsuperscript{139} Methodist Ministers are stationed to a circuit and not to individual chapels. They may have responsibility for a section i.e. a group of chapels, but their ministry is a circuit one.

\textsuperscript{140} Again I reiterate that this is true as it relates to different specific and measurable entities. An example might be what levels of staff the Circuit might keep, how many places of worship we need etc.

\textsuperscript{141} It was interesting that some of the laity group have some sense of circuit responsibility – e.g. circuit stewards, but still thought in these more general terms etc.
Thinking about ‘particular materials’ and ‘a blueprint’ were again suggestive to me of there being a paradigm, or models and contours to intuitively follow. I was, in fact, inspired by the constant reference back to Christ and an innate sense of articulating material that I perceive within the chosen passage. However, I am also aware that perhaps the idea needs to be fleshed out further, both in Hauerwas’ theology and in specific Christian contexts (including our own). There is always a need to explicate further the Christocentric vision so that we do not fall into the trap of jargon and cliché.

As a Methodist minister, I have agreement with the basic sentiments that were being voiced, however, I found myself crying out inside “but what does it actually mean?” I was therefore also delighted to hear further comments, such as: “We have to translate Christ crucified… What does it really mean for us to preach this way?”

On reflection perhaps I was seeking too much. Conceivably there are no complete and finished answers. Perhaps ‘cruciformity’ and Christocentric orientation and what it may mean comes about over a period of time and is indeed about a constant reflection on its implications. It would be interesting to note how the concept would be completed by accompanying action habituating this particular people and allowing them to live into this story or vision.

I once again pondered upon the critique of Albrecht concerning Hauerwas (see Chapter Two above) and of his ecclesiology being a particular

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142 This intuitive sense of explicating the passage became clearer and developed following the exegesis.
143 I sensed that in this initial meeting with both groups, given more time and possibly drawing upon exegesis, they might have engaged a fuller exploration of what this vision of Christocentric discipleship meant.
144 Certainly this would feed into Hauerwas’ idea of training in discipleship (see above).
expression of Christianity, an expression which is privileged, white, male, middle class, etc. I also noted the different contextual and cultural expression of Christianity expressed by one member in reference to Kenya. However, perhaps Albrecht (and other Christian theologians), Christians from Kenya and indeed other culturally different expressions of Christianity might hold to the paradigm of Christ as a particular orientation. Contextual and cultural expressions of Christianity and the vision they promote will vary and clearly would be open to interpretation, however, it is my hunch that Christ-shaped vision could be a category which most Christians would be prepared to gather around in dialogue, while requiring constant discourse about how this is interpreted.

It was telling to me that the participant mentioning Kenya seemed to be suggesting that this cultural expression could be lifted from Kenya and simply applied to the UK. I think that the concept of Christocentric discipleship might, but its interpretation would differ tremendously.

There will of course be different ways of interpreting the world and indeed for Christianity of interpreting Christ and his meaning for today, and perhaps this coheres with CBS thinking. There can be no simplistic articulation of vision and this is why the concept of vision needs further work in a particular context. Both the laity group and the clergy group thought in

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145 Researching this goes beyond the scope of this thesis, I am merely suggesting an idea and a possible particular theological journey.

146 This suggests to me an interesting exercise, how would the articulation and expression of a Christocentric vision actually differ in different contexts. I am mindful of sitting within the Methodist Conference over a number of years and hearing many points of view, but of having the intuition that the majority of the good folk of Methodism would seek a Christ led and formed discipleship. I am reminded of one of the hymns in one of our hymn books ‘Come, all who look to Christ today’ it has the following words within it: “Bring your traditions’ richest store, your hymns and rites and cherished creeds; explore our visions, pray for more, since God delights to meet fresh needs” (Jones 1983).
terms of Christ-likeness and of Christ crucified being constitutive of vision, (rather than in specifics and more concrete expressions of vision); I want to suggest that this is a starting point for dialogue and discussion.

The task of developing a vision contextually (and particularly around Christ) is an on-going and perhaps a difficult one. There are no easy ways to develop the vision. Indeed the groups noted the need of a task in interpreting and translating 'Christ crucified'. I believe this would be an on-going undertaking both for the church and then for a task of dialogue with the wider world. I noted above that Hauerwas is accused of being a sectarian (Chapter 2, page 74). Hauerwas has constantly maintained that an undertaking of dialogue with the wider world needs to be about witness and within this task Hauerwas and Willimon have said that “The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross” (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989: 47). They explicate this further:

The church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Only on the basis of his story, which reveals to us who we are and what has happened in the world is true community possible (p. 77).

In some measure Hauerwas opens up this Christocentric vision (e.g. pp. 47, 63, 71, 74), however, I still think that there is a further work of reflection upon texts and an exegesis to be utilised to fill out his work.

Both groups used building imagery to develop a sense of the importance of vision, building according to some clear plans and building with good (and thereby not faulty) materials. Building materials and plans will differ according to which building is being created. However what was thought-provoking is that in both groups a view was articulated that the gauge, the ‘litmus test’, seemed to be how faithfully we had been shaped by a
Christocentric view. Even the negative critique about the lack of any shared vision (when that meant specific quantifiable courses of action) in the clergy group was resolved in a measure by a return to Christocentric view and our faithful articulation of the cross.

The clergy group were much more critical (in the best sense of the word) to interrogate Paul’s text; asking questions of it, probing it, even challenging it. For example, one member of this group noted that while Paul seems to play down and denigrate this world’s wisdom, in fact he begins to use rhetoric to make his argument. The laity group tended to accept the text at face value. Perhaps this difference reflects the clergy’s “professional” scholarly training in biblical studies. Our clergy are trained to think critically and the lay people in our context tend to take things at face value (the context is predominately a quite conservative circuit); this does not in any way suggest naivety or inexperience on the part of the lay group; rather that they bring a different nuance to the text. The more I thought about this, the more it became clear to me that this was an acceptance of the text as a resource for suggesting to them a theological category and concept and perhaps not a document for them to critique. This might be an assessment of academic criticism; it could simply be about disparaging the text or more positively put, about the creation and the serving of understanding. Certainly, I have been made aware of a hunger to ‘understand’ the Bible within this context, and using the tools of scholarship.  

We have facilitated a group within a local pub with the expressed purpose of exploring the Bible using materials produced through an organisation known as CBSi (Community Bible Study International), this group does in fact draw on what might be seen as broadly historical critical methods but also reader response methodology.
Similarly, as noted above, the clergy group were much more ready to challenge the ‘General Secretary’s Report’ than the laity group. Interestingly the one person ready to challenge the local ‘Vision Statement’ (see appendices) was the author of the statement. The laity group seemed pleased that in both the report and the vision statement there was some sense of challenge and vision (although just one member of this group wondered whether both statements were too broad). A very Hauerwasian comment from one member was that his vision for the church was for the church to have a vision. However, I do not think he meant a very specific and yet broadly applied vision, rather I think he simply wanted the church to have some sense of direction; again, this could still be expressed as Christocentric discipleship.148

As I engaged the groups in an initial meeting, I was aware that both groups’ responses needed some sense of development and further reflection. The reader must not infer from this statement that I see any of the comments made as being simplistic or inadequate; this would be to negate things I hinted at in the CBS chapter. Rather I merely see them as needing further explication, as hints towards a further reflection and praxis. This of course might well be fulfilled through an on-going CBS engagement. For example we might well have posed the question, “How do we translate Christ Crucified for our context?” and explored that through further CBS groups, possibly drawing on different texts. However, this exploration was supported in some measure through a historical-critical exegesis of the texts.

148 In fact that particular participant would be very happy with this as a goal, as a vision, albeit perhaps interpreted for this particular context.
Once again this must not be interpreted as an inference that the CBS methodology was somehow lacking; rather, I see it as being enhanced through a partnership within a particular shared hermeneutical methodology, CBS complementing a more traditional approach and vice versa. In fact, in my limited experience the CBS groups most definitely added a great deal to the interpretative process. I will argue this further below and in the concluding chapter.

I noted above (Chapter 2), that Hauerwas is liable to the charge that his theology can be vacuous, specifically in terms of biblical engagement and exegesis. Hays makes the charge that Hauerwas rarely engages in exegesis to develop “theological insights through careful analysis” (Hays 1997a: 259). While Hauerwas speaks of Christ as being a resource for vision (see above) I believe he never fully explicates how that might be embraced, in contrast to some of the narrative explorations of Paul as illustrated in Chapter One above and within the literature review.

Throughout the last two chapters I have hinted at the idea that an exegetical approach might come alongside and partner the CBS methodology. While I believe the historical critical paradigm should not be privileged (as noted above in Chapter 3) and it is one methodology among others, I do believe it has a place and a part to play. In order to explore what this part might be, and how it might function within our local context, I subsequently presented my own exegesis of the passage in question (in summary). I offered my exegesis as hand-outs in the form of notes, rather than a full text. I have not included them in the appendix as they really were a summary of the material presented in this thesis (below and in the following
chapter). I also shared something of the theology of Hauerwas in an informal way and this was offered aurally. During the exercise I also offered certain insights and clarifications aurally. In essence my input was a mixture of material offered as summary documents and a dialogical conversation. For example, “Hays suggests this… what do you think?”. Within each step of the process I took care to offer divergent and nuanced views both on the Biblical text and an engagement of Hauerwas’ theology. I now turn to this exegesis.

**Vision in 1 Corinthians**

I now wish to look at the concept of vision in 1 Corinthians concentrating my research on a particular passage. Before I do this I ask the question, where did Paul receive his Christocentric vision? This is an important question as it frames his on-going reflection concerning Christ. In order to explore this question I will look very briefly at the Acts’ accounts of Paul’s conversion and his reference to a particular vision and revelation in 2 Cor. 12. This exploration is suggestive of development of vision in Paul.

By the time of his writing of 1 Corinthians, I argue that Paul is reflecting on a particular Christocentric perspective and this has come from his own experience. In his conversion there is much about perceiving, and receiving a vision of the significance of Christ; in his reflections on vision and revelation in 2 Cor. 12 there is material fruitful for further reflection.149

Seyoon Kim argues that the Christophany “affected Paul to the innermost part of his life, creating the conviction in the seat of his

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149 There are a number of references that may be technical constructions referring to the Christophany (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8; Gal. 1:12, 16), but I am not totally convinced by Newman’s fuller list (Newman 1992: 184).
understanding, thought, feeling and will that what appeared to him was Christ, revealed by God in glory” (Kim 1982: 7). Similarly, Newman writes, “the Damascus Christophany is the interpretative ‘origin’ of Paul’s δόξα-Christology” (Newman 1992: 164). While I accept that Paul’s initial theological reflection may well have come from a vision of the exalted Christ on the Damascus road, I believe that this theology developed over a period of time and in relation to specific contexts, one of which was the Corinthian context. Not only was Paul apprehended by a vision of the ‘glorious’ Christ, he also came to reflect on the other part, we might say the flip side of the story – the crucifixion.150

The noun ὅραμα – ‘vision’ (cf. Matt. 17:9; Acts 7:31; 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9-10; 18:9) – is not to be found in Paul. However that we doesn’t mean we cannot find any sense of vision in his writings, and it does not mean that the concept has no bearing upon his theology. The term can be defined as something which one sees with the eyes, the act by which the recipient is granted a vision; the state of being in which the person

150 Newman notes that in relation to the Christophany “the general tendency in scholarship has been to downplay its importance for understanding Paul” (p. 164). This may be because it is thought that Paul spoke of his conversion very little (p. 165); however, “Paul refers to the Christophany many more times than is assumed” (p. 165; cf. pp. 165 ff. for the examples and Newman’s critique of the scholarly scepticism; also cf. p.179 ff. for an evaluation of Kim’s work). Newman refers to the narrative underpinning of Paul’s theology thereby (p. 185). This can be seen in relation to four narrative thought worlds; “(i) beneath Paul’s letters lies a ‘story,’ a ‘narrative substructure’ and “it is this ‘story’ which Paul applies to specific and highly contingent situations... (ii) Paul told and re-told his own life ‘story’ for apologetic and/or ethical reasons...”(iii) The letters themselves evince an on-going narrative of conflict and reconciliation, misunderstanding and instruction, rebellion and correction; and finally, (iv) “the narrative which Paul preached and applied can only be understood against the narrative horizon generated by the Jewish Scriptures. Paul’s story is part of a larger story” (p.185). While I am in broad agreement with Newman, I also believe that the story of Jesus and particularly the crucifixion is also an important story, it is clear to me that the cross is an important motif in Paul and I argue points to an implicit narrative.
receives a vision (Bauer 2000:5355, Bible Works Version). I think there are hints of Paul receiving this kind of vision within the New Testament.¹⁵¹

**Paul’s Conversion**

A reflection on Paul’s conversion is fruitful for teasing out a particular understanding of vision. Ananias received the commission to go to Paul in a vision (Acts 9:10) and receives the news that in turn Paul had received his own vision and that Ananias would come to him and pray with him (Acts 9:12). Johnson has noted that Luke has specifically introduced the plot device of vision within his narrative:

> Luke has the daunting effort of putting in narrative terms what is essentially an internal transformation… the (by definition incommunicable) personal experience of the risen Lord (Johnson 1992: 167, cf. p. 164)

Johnson suggests that Luke “employs models and symbols available to him in the tradition” (p 167); one of which is vision. Johnson argues that this vision is reminiscent of an Old Testament theophany (pp. 167, 168). The idea of a theophany is important. According to Acts, in his experience on the Damascus road God was being revealed to Paul in a new way and this experience was Christocentric.

Another of the accounts of Paul’s conversion in the book of Acts, has a different word connoting vision “οὐκ ἐγενόμην ἄπειθής τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ” (Acts 26:19 cf. Luke 1:22; 24:23). ὀπτασία can be defined as an event that leaves a strong impression upon the mind, and is something

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¹⁵¹ I am all too aware that the vision or theophany that Paul received was markedly different from Murdoch’s and therefore Hauerwas’ moral vision. However, I am convinced that much of Paul’s ethical concerns emanate from his reflection upon Christ and the Christocentric vision which informs an ethical point of view. In some measure Hauerwas in a similar way claims this conceptuality for his theology. His theological scheme is just too weak exegetically.
transcendent (Bauer 2000: 5349);\textsuperscript{152} it could be described as a Christophany (Balz and Schneider 1990: 3755, Bible Works Edition). Earlier in the conversion account of Acts 22 Paul describes his commission in terms of ‘seeing’ the Righteous One (14) and of being appointed to declare what he had seen and heard. The word ‘to see’ can be “interpreted in the light of the prophetic and apocalyptic texts of the OT and Judaism” (Balz and Schneider 1990: 3762/4; cf. Bauer 2000: 5358/B).

Richard Pervo notes the work of István Czachesz in terms of commission narratives:

In his study of the forms of commission stories, István Czachesz finds that Acts 26 “stands very close to the philosophical examples.” A common feature of these stories is a narrative in which “the hearer is commissioned directly by the sender without any reference to an institutional framework, owes loyalty only to the sender, and acts much on his own (Pervo 2009: 627, citing Czachesz 2002:83).

Czachesz argues that “many ancient philosophers, ranging from Pythagoras to Epicurus claimed divine revelation as the source of their systems” (Pervo, 83, citing Czachesz p.83. emphasis mine). Their thinking proceeds from a sense of vision and revelation. Luke portrays Paul as receiving a divine revelation, a vision from God and this becomes integral to his commission and in turn to a particular theological journey. To return to Acts 9, Paul’s perception of the risen Lord is not expressly stated in the conversion account, but is confirmed in Ananias’ words of verse 17 “Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθείς σοι” (Bruce 1988: 183).

\textsuperscript{152} This has a link with the note of transcendence in Murdoch and Hauerwas’ appropriation of her thought.
Referring to Acts, is of course, to refer to secondary sources, yet this sense of perception, of seeing, seems to be confirmed by Paul (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:12, 16). Longenecker writes:

The verb used in 1 Corinthians is ὁράω, ‘see,’ rather than ἀποκαλύπτω, ‘reveal’… ὁράω suggests an external vision whereas ἀποκαλύπτω has been taken to signify an internal experience… however, to quote H.D. Betz: ‘we should not suppose that Paul feels he contradicts himself in Gal 1:16 and 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8. Apparently for him the two forms of visions (external and internal) are not as distinct as they may be for some commentators’ (Longenecker 1990: 31).

The reference in Galatians (Gal. 1:16) is particularly interesting: is the dative ἐν ἐμοί to be translated ‘to’ or ‘in’? BDAG defines the word ἐν as “the marker denoting the object to which something happens or in which something shows itself” (Bauer 2000: 2581, 8). Is Paul the ‘human object’ the revelation is revealed to or the ‘human instrument’ of the revelation? Both possibilities speak of vision, either a vision revealed to Paul or a vision revealed in him (ἀποκαλύψαι). The ambiguity is irrelevant for my purposes; within his ministry the original revelation was now being revealed within his life and ministry and I believe had drawn from his vision of Christ.153

If we had but the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles I perhaps would not be able to make a case, or at the very least the case would be extremely weak. However, the fact that Paul writes himself of receiving the Gospel οὐδὲ… παρὰ ἀνθρώπου but δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησού Χριστοῦ (Gal. 1:12) and that God was ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί (Gal 1:16) seems to imply a divine knowledge revealed to him in Christ and now being revealed

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153 This will be important later when I explore the embodied story of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10.
in him, a vision, or at the very least a revelation; and at the risk of repetition, a Christocentric revelation.

The impression thus far is of a vision of glory; however, what about the cross? Paul clearly knows about the crucifixion of Jesus (see below) and following his conversion he reflected upon that event. Certainly the cross (1 Cor. 1:17-18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12, 14; Eph. 2:16; Phil. 2:8; 3:18; Col. 1:20; 2:14) and the motif of crucifixion (Rom. 6:6; 1 Cor. 1:13, 23; 2:2, 8; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 2:20; 3:1; 5:24; 6:14) become central in his writings and a key source of reflection; an orientation for his own life and the life of the churches for which he writes. I will argue that the cross then becomes a central part of the vision he is communicating to the Corinthians.

**The revelation in 2 Corinthians 12**

Now to the passage in 2 Corinthians 12 (albeit briefly), and turning specifically to Paul’s words in verse 1, “ἐλεύσομαι δὲ εἰς ὀπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου”. Here Paul highlights ὀπτασία and ἀποκάλυψις. Crucial to my reflection is what he means by the two terms in this context and what they might mean for Paul’s understanding of vision.

Harris suggests that the principal focus of the passage is revelation (Harris 2004: 231). The passage somehow concerns itself with a revealing of the majesty of God; perhaps even more pointedly of Jesus. Both nouns are qualified by the genitive κυρίου, therefore we can think Christologically, as Paul uses the title to refer to Jesus extensively (Dunn 1998: 244 ff.). This speaks volumes of a revealing by Christ of the things Paul is to do, be and declare, particularly if the passage is autobiographical (Martin 1986: 390).
Is the genitive in verse 1 subjective or objective (Harris 2004: 832)?

“Did these ‘visions’ and ‘revelations’ emanate ‘from the Lord’ or were they ‘of the Lord’ or both” (Barnett 1997: 558). Most scholars see the genitive as subjective (Barnett 1997: 558; Martin 1986: 397; Thrall 2000: 774). Martin writes, “more than likely Paul is speaking of visions and revelations given by the Lord” (p.397, emphasis mine). It doesn’t matter too much, “the author of the visions could also be the object of them”, and the construct may be purposively ambiguous (Dunn 1975: 414, note 88).

If the passage is to be seen as autobiographical, what is Paul stating about his experience? The key to the meaning of the passage is to be found in the climax. Martin writes, “divine power in human weakness will be claimed as the ‘sole basis of the apostolic experience’” (Martin 1986: 397). The visionary experience is perceived as “a revelation with a ‘word-of-God’ character” (p. 398).

It seems to me that in this experience God spoke powerfully to Paul in Christ and that revelation is received in weakness and vulnerability. Clearly there are connections with the first letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24; 2:3, 5; 15:5):

Paul freely acknowledges his limitations and weaknesses…he knows that in his apostleship participation in the life of the heavenly Man at present also involves bearing his cross (Lincoln 1979: 210, emphasis mine).

Weakness, powerlessness and limitation all become themes within Paul’s experience; in turn pointing to and hinting towards a cruciform orientation, an orientation that he seems to want to communicate to the Corinthian Church particularly in 1 Corinthians. Thrall writes:
With hesitation, and speaking objectively as though of some other person, he recounts his rapture to the third heaven. But he goes on to speak of his ‘thorn in the flesh’ explaining the purpose of this affliction and his own realisation through a divine revelation, that such conditions of weakness were the necessary context for the manifestation of the power of Christ (Thrall 2000: 772, emphasis mine).

Thrall makes the link between glory and weakness seamlessly; she notes that the manifestation of the power of Christ is revealed against the backdrop of weakness. This will become important as we consider the Corinthian context, a place of hubris and pride; against this I argue that Paul offers a vision of the crucified Christ as a controlling motif for the Corinthians and it is this idea underpinning Paul’s writing.

In this brief look at some carefully selected New Testament material it seems we might point to the concept of glory – noted in the revelations to Paul and yet also the concept of weakness and suffering. These may well be connected in some measure, first Jesus is revealed to Paul in glory – within the Christophany and then Paul reflects on the cross. Similarly, Gorman comprehends a connection between the revealed glory of Christ and the crucifixion:

Paul implicitly connects the revelation that sent him to Jerusalem (Galatians 2: 2) with his gospel of the once crucified but now living Jesus (Galatians 2:15-21), and he explicitly connects the famous ascent into heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-10) with his general experience of Christ’s power (“resurrection”) in the midst of weakness (“crucifixion”) (Gorman 2001: 24).

Both concepts (glory and crucifixion) are important to Paul, but it is the concept of Jesus crucified that Paul will push in 1 Corinthians, particularly
in the earlier chapters. I believe it was the glory of Christ that apprehended Paul and the cross of Christ that he has to consider carefully in retrospect.\textsuperscript{154}

**Visual Imagery for a particular way of being.**

Within the Pauline corpus there is use of particular visual imagery, material and symbols his hearers/readers would be able to grasp, concepts they would understand and process cognitively; perhaps more importantly for my purposes, symbols that would encourage a particular way of being and understanding. Paul (and the Pauline tradition) uses imagery connected with the stadia and athletics "ὁτι οὐκ εἰς κενὸν ἔδραμον" (Phil. 2:16), "Ἐπεστρέψετε καλῶς" (Gal. 5:7; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24, 26, 2 Tim. 4:8); imagery connected with agriculture, "ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλώς ἔπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ Θεὸς ἀνέβαν" (1 Cor. 3:6); imagery connected with construction, "Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσαν μοι ὑσ σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, ἀλλὸς δὲ ἔποικοδομεί" (1 Cor. 3:10).

I argue that Paul has a particular vision of being in 1 Corinthians taking its cue from the cross. A concrete and discreet image, an image captured in a moment of time, yet developed further into broader conceptual framework. A particular cognitive orientation not based merely on a single transitory image but rather on a story, the story of a crucified messiah, the single image of the cross becoming a cipher, of a much wider story.

In Galatians 3:1 Paul writes "Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος". The verb προεγράφη can mean to set forth for public notice,

\textsuperscript{154} Perhaps we cannot stress too strongly that for Paul, a Jew, the cross would have been a scandal (1 Cor. 1:23).
to placard and to portray (Bauer 2000#6176). Part of this compound verb ἔγραφη, can mean to draw, to paint and to inscribe (Bauer 2000#1687). I think it is possible to interpret this phrase as follows: ‘Jesus Christ pictured – placarded – portrayed as crucified’.

Paul was developing the wider motif as a controlling paradigm for the Galatians (cf. Hays 2002: 23 - 24, 27, 168, and 206), a fuller story; the picture of the cross serves as a picture of a wider story of sacrificial living. Paul is doing something similar writing for the Corinthian Church; placarding Jesus as crucified for the Corinthians also (Barrett 1968: 51).

How does Paul handle the theme and image of the cross and for what ethical and theological purposes? More pointedly, how is Paul handling the paradigm of a crucified saviour as a theme that has the potential to form the orientation of the Corinthians?

**Exegesis: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25**

I suggest that in these eight verses Paul is offering a governing pattern for the Corinthian Church which in turn can be considered as his ‘vision’ of the Gospel. I will go on to argue that this can then be further explicated as the plea Paul makes to the Corinthians, as being the normative story for the community to which he writes to be explicated further in Chapter 10-11:1. I now work through a verse by verse exegesis to explicate a broad picture and elucidate the vision that Paul offers to the Corinthians.

**Verse 18** has a clear connection and a relationship with verse 17. The conjunction γὰρ indicates that Paul is carrying over arguments from verse 17: a sign that “a longer discussion begins” and that “the gospel proclaimed from verse 17 is taken up and continued” (Schrage 1991: 170; Conzelmann

If Paul is presenting the Gospel in further and extended terms, why didn’t he use the phrase ‘Gospel of the Cross’ or ‘The Gospel’? He takes the calculated risk of using ‘Word of the Cross’, utilising the word ‘λόγος’, a word loaded with hidden implications within this particular context (Barrett 1968: 52). The Corinthian community was rather taken with logos, the ‘word’ of wisdom and a worldly view of wisdom at that! He does this “to draw the Corinthians’ logos into the service of his theology of the cross…” and “to effect the transformation of the Corinthians’ own use of the term” (Brown 1995: 26). Paul is purposively setting his message in semantic contrast to the σοφία λόγου (Thiselton 2000: 154; cf. 1 Cor. 1:19-20, 22, 24, 30; 2:6-7; 12:8).

Within Israel’s tradition the ‘Word’ was effective in bringing about God’s new plan for the future (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 43:19; Isa. 65:17-25; Ezek. 37:4; cf. Brown 1995: 78). A new ‘Word’ is offered to the Corinthians. This new ‘Word’, in contrast to the σοφία λόγου was an attempt to bring about a new and dynamic reorientation within the community.

When Paul writes of the power of God revealed in the word of the cross, the powerful Word of Yahweh known to the prophets and the visionaries is not far from view (Brown 1995: 78-79, emphases mine).

I noted a particular ‘revelation’ in 2 Corinthians 12 above and that the concept might be considered to be interchangeable with vision. Paul not only has these things in view, he is stating something quite blatantly and deliberately. Paul is offering to the Corinthian Church a new way of being in
the world; the possibility of ‘new creation’ created and formed around the
cognitive re-orientation of cruciformity.

Margaret Mitchell argues that Paul compacts a whole narrative into
“the very phrase τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, [verse 17] which serves as a ‘super
abbreviation’ of the whole, functioning as a title which both characterises its
full contents and interprets its meaning for the hearer” (Mitchell 1994: 64), if
Mitchell is correct, then it could be argued that this ‘Word of the Cross’ is an
abbreviation for Paul’s vision, a vision generated and engendered by the story
of ‘Christ and Him Crucified’ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1; 6:14).

Pickett further sets out Paul’s hermeneutical intention:

He infers a vision of the world from the symbolic structure of the
gospel ... Paul’s rhetorical strategy is to bring the attitudes and
conduct of his readers into conformity with the patterns and acting
he derives from his gospel (Pickett 1997: 28 - 29, emphases mine).

Pickett ties vision to an understanding of the world held by the
Corinthians and the conflicting understanding of Paul. Paul’s theological
programme embodied within an epistle is an attempt to get the Church he had
founded at Corinth to embody the values of the vision he was proposing. First,
however, he has to enable the Corinthians to ‘see’ his vision for themselves.

Paul’s vision and that of the Corinthians were on a collision course.
Paul’s rhetoric seeks to offer a new source of perception. At stake the
prevailing conceptuality, for Paul this involved nothing less than the ‘theology
of the cross’ (Conzelmann 1975: 40). Perception κατὰ πνεῦμα was to be
arrived at in relation to reflection κατὰ σταύρον (Martyn 1967: 262).

Thiselton argues that τοῦ σταυροῦ, is an objective genitive, “the
phrase serves, in effect, as Paul’s definition of the Gospel” (Thiselton 2000:
154). If the phrase is a definition of the Gospel then clearly Paul’s message
(and indeed, I would argue vision), is of the revelation of a crucified saviour. This then, is where I want to develop Kim and Newman’s argument. I do believe that Jesus was revealed to Paul as the Christ on the Damascus road, but then Paul, as a Jew would reflect long and hard on the σκάνδαλον of the cross. What could it mean, how was that also a revelation of Christ?

At first glance verse 18 seems a nicely balanced sentence: what amounts to a contrast between τοῖς ἄπολλυμένοις and τοῖς δὲ σῳζομένοις with a parallelism between the participles (Collins 1999: 102) and perhaps an apocalyptic division of people (Brown 1995: 34) thereby creating a contrast between these two groups. However, and markedly, the parallelism is not perfect and the chiasm breaks down; instead of the expected ‘to those who are being saved it is the wisdom of God’ what in fact is offered by Paul, and in the place of wisdom, is δύναμις θεοῦ. The contrast made clearer and stronger by the inclusion of the first person plural ἡμῖν (Collins 1999: 102; Schrage 1991: 173).

In Galatians and Romans Paul creates a contrast between an attempt at nomistic salvation and the salvation of the cross: here Paul proposes a different antithesis. Paul contrasts wisdom with his λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ (Schrage 1991: 170); in Galatians and Romans a contrast between the works of the law and the Gospel, here a contrast between wisdom and the word of the cross, a bold step in this Graeco-Roman context, where wisdom and folly would have been much more likely contrasts.

The wisdom of the world is subjected to the critique of the cross in both an epistemic sense (the cross defines in what reality consists) and in a salvific sense (the cross defines the pathway to life and well-being). We use the word ‘define’ because these realities count as realities on the basis of a definitive divine verdict expressed
through the cross in advance of the last judgement (Thiselton 2000: 158).

The participles are present tense, thereby Paul is offering hope that people will be transformed and be established on the right side of the equation and within this present time, the new orientation is for now. Paul’s optimistic expectation is that the Corinthian community might be shaped and formed by a different narrative, by an innovative and ground-breaking vision of the world. Perhaps there is another more subtle reason why Paul used present participles:

Salvation is not yet gained in its totality, in so far as the world of the resurrection, also called the ‘future’ age, has not appeared. Whilst waiting for it the elect are on their way to the kingdom of God (Héring 1962: 8)

Many at Corinth seemed to have wanted to take a spiritual short cut (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8), perhaps wishing to avoid the embodiment of Paul’s Gospel within themselves and as personified for them in Paul and the other apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9 ff.). Paul challenges this, the crucifixion (and the resurrection) indicate the ‘turning of the ages’, Paul presents his gospel in and under an eschatological framework (Ridderbos 1977: 39). Those who still belong to the present age “are in a process of ‘perishing’ with it” (Fee 1987: 69). A decision is to be made (Schrage 1991: 172), a decision to be informed by a new vision. He is searching the Corinthians’ stance, questioning their response to the world (Horsley 1998: 45; Witherington 1995: 108), hoping that they will come to a new cognition.

Finally, within this verse, Paul speaks of the power of God. On the face of it sheer folly; a disturbing equation: the folly of the cross is the power of God. However, “whoever believes that their calling is otherwise constructed
has rested faith in the wisdom of human beings and not in the power of God (2:5)" (Brown 1995: 30; cf. 1:24-25).

Schrage makes the point that the power of the cross is present, when people listen and believe: "Die Heilwirkung des Kreuzes hängt demgemäß vom Hören und Glauben dieses Wortes ab" – “the healing effect of the cross thus depends on listening and believing on this word” (Schrage 1991: 171; cf. Thiselton 2000: 147).

Collins believes 2 Corinthians 13:4 offers a virtual commentary on the power of God in the cross (Collins 1999: 102). There Paul notes that Jesus was ἐσταυρώθη ἐξ ἀσθενείας (aorist passive), but that ζῇ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ (present active); Paul then goes on to note the paradox of his/the other apostles’ weakness and yet notes that their life is σὺν αὐτῷ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ. Life according to God’s purposes comes about through the power of God, not in and through the power or ability of people. The power of God is cruciform in shape.

In verse 19 Paul offers a scriptural precedent for this new vision offered in the cross. He cites the verse from the LXX (Isa. 29:14), yet with one change, an important change. For κρύψω he uses ἀθετήσω. Paul makes the point that σύνεσιν (intelligence), is declared invalid, nullified and ignored (Bauer 2000#161). In his modification, Paul is intensifying the effect of his scriptural precedent.

The passage in Isaiah concerns itself with outlining the “false self-exulting perceptions of Israel” (Brown 1995: 81, cf. Isa. 29:16); Therefore:

The prophet’s word like Paul’s word of the cross is two-edged. It destroys the allusions of self-determination by declaring human wisdom and understanding to be blindness and incomprehension
but also declares the will of Yahweh to open eyes and unstop ears (Brown 1995: 82).

Similarly, Thiselton argues that in drawing upon the passage in Isaiah Paul is moving in two ways. First, toward an interrogation of the ‘learned or politically dominant class’ and secondly that:

In the wisdom of his own purposes God chose to reverse what was perceived as wise in an event which appeared to consist in weakness and failure, but would lead in the longer term to new beginnings and to a chastened, transformed, people (Thiselton 2000: 161, emphasis mine).

Paul changes the verb to reflect that in Christ God is doing a brand new thing, a new thing that redefines all human understanding (Collins 1999: 103). The redefinition is about a rejection of worldly values (a point picked up in the next verse). Paul is countering the wisdom of this world with the foolishness of the gospel (Horsley 1998: 43), and in so doing making the point that God is rejecting that wisdom. This is clarified in a connection with the previous verse by his use of the verb ἀπόλλυμι.

Pointedly, the thing that God will particularly annihilate, according to Isaiah, is sophia, ‘the wisdom of the wise’—precisely the thing that the Corinthians now prize (Hays 1997b: 28-29).

We understand the full force of what Paul is saying as we note the original context of his ‘proof text’. The passage in its original context is all about judgement on those political and religious leaders trusting in their own strategy, rather than listening to God's word delivered through the prophet who intended trust and faith (p. 29). A very similar situation could be inferred from the Corinthian context: they were now trusting in their own particular strategies of salvation. However, human understanding is being rocked to the core in the eschatological event of the cross (Schrage 1991: 174).
Time and again in the analysis of just these few verses commentators have used concepts of perception, epistemology, vision, and revelation. As we have seen, Brown speaks of something being revealed and also of blindness and incomprehension; Pickett speaks specifically of vision, which is an ‘understanding’ of the world and ‘patterns’ of the Gospel; Martyn notes that knowing according to the flesh contrasts with knowing according to the Spirit and Thiselton speaks of perception.

Paul felt it necessary to deconstruct the Corinthians’ current vision and orientation. In verse 20 Paul interrogates the Corinthian context, a context of hubris and pride (Thiselton 2000: 156 ff.). The interrogation is absolute; God has made foolish the things of this world, Paul uses the aorist ἐμώπανεν, in contrast to the future verbs of the previous verse (Schrage 1991: 175).

Paul asks “where are the wise, the scribe and debater of this age?” There were ‘wise’ people in Corinth, probably debaters and scribes also. Schrage’s pithy and succinct statement summarises the issue: “they are all incompetent” (p. 175); however, incompetent and in relation to what? Incompetent in relation to a new frame of reference embodied in the new vision Paul is proposing. The old ways of knowing simply will no longer do, the old ways of ‘seeing’ are inadequate. Paul will restate this argument further in verse 22, where he writes unsympathetically of the false search of Jews and Greeks (Collins 1999: 104).

Each of the three interrogative questions in verse 20, is qualified by the subjective genitive τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (Collins 1999: 104); an inference that there must be a different age. Paul shares the apocalyptic expectation of
his time and context (ibid, cf. 1 Cor. 3:18; 7:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4). It is
within this worldview that God has made the wisdom of this world foolish and
ineffectual (cf. 3: 19 ff.).

The aorist tense of the verb puts God’s making this age’s wisdom
foolish in a specific time frame. The time when God made foolish
this age’s wisdom was the time of the crucifixion (Collins 1999:
104).

The cross is foolishness to the perishing (v. 18), but by means of it
God himself has rendered as foolish the world's wisdom; by means of the
cross Paul is turning the tables on such wisdom altogether, so that it has been
made into its very opposite – foolishness (Fee 1987: 72).

Paul illustrates the reversal, in two ways, in the call of the
Corinthians (1:26-31) and in his own proclamation (2: 1-5; cf. Collins
1999:104). The cross itself is God’s saving event, meaning that all human
standards of evaluation are overturned (Hays 1997b: 30).

Verse 21 is both negative and positive: in its wisdom, the world did not
know God; however, in the proclamation of the cross God has saved those
who believe. The verb ‘to save’ is the aorist infinitive; the participle is present,
interpreted ‘those believing’. This suggests that the saving event was the one
off event of the cross but that the means by which people avail themselves of
this salvation is through an on-going sense of belief in the work of the cross

Schrage puts it negatively “the world has missed the opportunity to
become aware of the wisdom of God, because they served their own wisdom
and their own standards and categories” (Schrage 1991: 180). God’s action
(οὐχί εμώρανεν ὁ θεὸς), in verse 20 is now more fully explained, “It is a
reaction to the attitude of the world” (Conzelmann 1975: 45).
God’s wisdom *might* have entailed some sense of natural theology (cf. Barrett 1968: 54; Brown 1995: 85; Conzelmann 1975: 45)? However, I am drawn to Barrett’s translation for a different view “For since, by God’s wise plan, *the world exercising its own wisdom, did not know God*’ (Barrett 1968: 53, emphasis mine). The world did not discern God and His way, therefore a new epistemology, a new perception needs to be grasped. “There is no manifestation of God that man’s essentially self-regarding wisdom does not twist until it has made God in its own image” (Barrett 1968: 54; cf. Fee 1987: 73).

The perception gained on the basis of God’s wisdom in the cross, on the face of it seems to be foolish but in fact is wisdom and power (1:24, 30; 2:6, 7). Paul is making the contrast between the wisdom of this world and the antithetical wisdom of God (Thiselton 2000: 169; cf. Fee 1987: 73).

Care needs to be taken in reading the second part of verse 21; proclamation is only the mode by which the divine decree is proclaimed. The kerygma refers not to the act of preaching *itself* but to the *content* of that proclamation (Fee 1987: 73; Schrage 1991; Thiselton 2000: 167), and verse 23 makes abundantly clear that the content of that preaching was ‘χριστόν ἐσταυρωμένον’.

What was to be the response to this proclamation? Paul makes it clear that the correct response is to believe. BDAG defines the word πίστις as “to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence” (Bauer 2000: #5939, 2). To entrust themselves to the crucified Messiah would mean *a change of perception, a different orientation on the part of the community*. Paul was
challenging the Corinthians to entrust themselves to this message of cruciformity and to go on trusting at that.

Paul begins verse 22 with the subordinating conjunction, ἐπειδῆ, perhaps to note a sharper restatement of the thought of verse 21. Despite the completed action of God (making foolish and saving, verses 20 and 21 - both verbs are in the aorist), people still continue to seek something other than God’s chosen mode of salvation (Collins 1999: 105; Fee 1987: 74; Thiselton 2000: 170).

Paul seems to have been able to work miracles (2 Cor. 12:12, by implication; cf. 1 Cor. 13:2); speak in tongues (1 Cor. 13:1; 14:6, 18); and is capable of both imparting wisdom and utilising rhetoric (1 Cor. 2:6). However, he writes in 1 Corinthians 2:4 “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” and he notes that his vocation was “to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:17).

Hays states the expectation rife in Corinth and God’s paradoxical gift in Christ:

The Messiah should be a man of power… a wise teacher of philosophical truths. But no! God has blown away all apparently reasonable criteria: the Christ is a crucified criminal… a stumbling block to Jews and craziness to Greeks, but for those who are part of God’s elect people – made up now of Jews and Greeks together, those who are ‘the called ones’ (1:24; cf. 1:2, 9) at Corinth and elsewhere – this mind-warping paradox is God’s power and God’s wisdom (Hays 1997b: 31)

Verse 23 begins with what might be considered to be confessional, the first person plural noting the standpoint of faith, and indeed a change of subject. Paul makes a contrast between Jews and Greeks and his own (and presumably the other apostles’ activity) ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν
ἐσταυρωμένον (Collins 1999: 107). Α σκάνδαλον instead of a σημείον; μωρία contrasted with σοφία. The verse looks back to verse 21, the cross holding within itself offence and foolishness to those who cannot see (Conzelmann 1975: 47; cf. Rom 9:23; 11: 1 - 10).

How could the brutal, shameful execution of a Jewish teacher be anything but an offence? How could this message be any other than folly (Collins 1999: 107; Hays 1997a: 31; Thiselton 2000: 170)? Perhaps it was precisely the depth of the scandal and folly within the message that caused the Corinthians to seek wisdom elsewhere, (Fee 1987: 76) and perhaps this is why Paul needs to revisit his proclamation.

For Paul ‘Christ Crucified’ was the sole content of the kerygma and thus the exclusive basis for salvation (Schrage 1991: 184). How could this be? It is precisely the fact that Paul’s Gospel does have a message of triumph which suggests that it holds good news:

Paul’s gospel declares that the crucifixion of Jesus has triumphed over those powers. Rather than proving the sovereignty of the Roman political order, it shatters the world’s system of authority. Rather than confirming what the wisest heads already know, it shatters the world’s system of knowledge (Hays 1997a: 31).

Paul uses the present tense of the verb when he speaks of the act of proclamation (κηρύσσωμεν) and the perfect for the content of that proclamation (χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον); “we proclaim, (or go on proclaiming) Christ ‘having been’ crucified”. In verse 24 he sets out the result of the act of proclamation and brings it right into the present, “to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (NRSV). Within this calling, (an outworking of the proclamation with the lives of those having faith) the relevance of Christ was to be discovered.
Paul has already spoken of ‘call’ a couple of other times in the letter. He is called to be an apostle (1:1); the Corinthians are called to be holy (1:2). Now Paul creates an association between call, the one engaging with the call and the new perception of Christ. To those fulfilling the call (thereby engaging with the call) Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. In this context of the seeking after wisdom, where people sought power, Christ is articulated as those very things. Paradoxically, to follow the call means a new sense of vision, and the calling potentially unlocks *a new epistemology and a new way of perceiving things* – I might be bold to say, *a new vision*.

Barrett puts this succinctly:

> If there are any who reach a different appraisal of the cross, they are not the exceptionally religious or the exceptionally learned, but those whom God has called (cf. Barrett 1968: 55, emphasis mine; cf. Conzelmann 1975: 48).

Here is Paul’s masterpiece, he is saying that the very things that the Corinthian community were seeking after could only be discovered ‘ἐν χριστῷ’ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30). Barrett’s ‘different appraisal’ of the cross pointing once again to a re-orientation around the cruciform way of life Paul was advocating. The cross of Christ becomes the modus operandi which communicates the power and the wisdom of God. It does not depend on human effort but rather on God’s reorientation of love in sacrifice:

> God defined himself as love on the cross of Jesus. If the cross, as the world’s turning point, is the foundation and measure of metaphorical language about God, then such language itself has the function of bringing about a turning around, or a change of direction (Jüngel 1983: 220).

Paul is reinforcing his point time and again that a new epistemology, a new vision is necessary.
In the last verse of my chosen passage, verse 25, Paul brings to a conclusion the force of his argument (Fee 1987: 77; Thiselton 2000: 172). Thiselton makes the point that the definite article, with the neuter single of the adjective μωρός, strictly means ‘the foolish thing’ (173). Tertullian writes: “what is that ‘foolishness of God which is wiser than men,’ but the cross and death of Christ? (Roberts et al. 1885: 440, Bible Works Version, emphasis mine) and Weiss interprets the neuter adjective as a reference to “the single act of God… namely the death of Christ on the cross, which is held by men to be a sign of foolishness and weakness” (Weiss 1977: 34, cited in Thiselton 2000:173).

The reader would expect Paul to write of God’s power and wisdom as a follow up to the last verse, but rather he speaks of God’s foolishness and weakness (Collins 1999: 108). Herein is a theological axiom, expressed well by both Fee and Hays:

In the cross God ‘outsmarted’ his human creatures and thereby nullified their wisdom. In the same cross God also ‘overpowered’ his enemies, with lavish grace and forgiveness, and thereby divested them of their strength…. Thus played out before human eyes is the scandalous and contradictory wisdom of God (Fee 1987: 77)

The cross is the key to understanding reality in God’s new eschatological age. Consequently, to enter the symbolic world of the gospel is to undergo a conversion of the imagination, to see all values transformed by the foolish and weak death of Jesus on the cross (Hays 1997: 31, emphasis mine)
A Summary of Paul’s Epistemological Challenge

I now wish to summarise this short analysis of the vision that Paul was advocating at Corinth. I believe that Paul had himself experienced a massive epistemological change and challenge, now he desires the Corinthians to rediscover for themselves the vision that he had originally presented to them. Paul was trying to re-communicate the formula, ‘the power of God’; a formula having as its subject ‘the word of the cross’ (Penna 1996: 169). However, this was problematical because of the Corinthian context: “Over against the Corinthian preoccupation with an exalted spiritual gnōsis, Paul demonstrates another way of knowing that takes its bearing from the cross of Christ” (Brown 1995: 23).

The Corinthians had not fully grasped the vision; therefore Paul must reattempt a transformation of cognition (cf. Brown 1995: 26; cf. Newman 1992: 239); the community had in some way transgressed the vision that Paul had offered to them (Pickett 1997: 29).

The new identity that Paul was espousing had to be assimilated in a context that had already been shaped by other factors, Paul’s aim was to attempt to draw up a cognition for the Corinthians that would impact upon ethical behaviour; this ethical behaviour was to be shaped according to the word of the cross (Pickett 1997: 33-34, emphasis mine).

This ‘word of the cross’ was likened to the ancient word offered to Israel, breaking in, and challenging recourse to this world’s wisdom.

Those who are being saved are those for whom this word of the cross becomes the power of God and are those who are called by God have responded to that call. The power of the cross is activated when and only when people have this re-orientation within their epistemology. This re-
orientation was necessary as the wisdom of this world was antithetical to the wisdom of God revealed in the power of the cross (Newman 1992: 239).

Paul had captured within ‘his mind’s eye’ a particular vision of discipleship and a particular orientation and way of being; this had been inspired and stimulated by the story of a crucified messiah and of perfect love in weakness.

It was my conviction that Paul’s vision would have some relevance to the Circuit of which I am a part and I wanted to see how far the kind of information presented above might stimulate and enrich the engagement of members of the study groups. I offered this in the form of a shortened form of my exegesis to the CBS groups. I now report their engagement with that exegesis. On this occasion I did not ask any specific questions other than the general question of what resonance and significance the text had with our own context.

The Groups Following The Exegesis

After I had offered my historical critical exegesis, the groups began to open up the text in terms of its applicability to our context; it seemed clear to me that the exegetical exercise facilitated the process. I suggested in my exegesis that Paul was offering a governing pattern for the Corinthian Church, in similar manner participants saw the relevance of this passage (and its underlying story) for contemporary and the particular circumstances of our circuit. It seemed to me that my exegesis and the interaction of the groups with the text were drawing out three things within Paul’s letter to Corinth, and that these three things had applicability to our context. The three concepts were a new orientation, an epistemic challenge and a call to sacrificial living. I
wish to explore these things under these three sub-headings as I describe the further engagement with my groups.

**A New Orientation**

I noted that the community at Corinth were rather taken with ‘wisdom’ (1 Cor. 1: 19 – 24; 2:1, 4, 5; 3:19) and I noted the contrast Paul had brought out in Galatians and 1 Corinthians (see above). In Galatians Paul had made a distinction between an attempt at nomistic salvation and salvation in Christ; in 1 Corinthians the distinction was between ‘wisdom’ and the word of the cross. Contrasts and comparisons between what members called ‘The Gospel’ and the context as we currently know it became a strong theme as we shared together.

A major theme that jumped out through discussion was the notion of the need for a new pattern of being Church within the Circuit; I define this theme under the model and paradigm of a new orientation in contrast with previously held direction of being. Clearly I am placing a category on the discussion held within the groups, however, it did seem to me that the participants were arguing for a change of direction that involved some new sense of vision, a vision shaped by a particular understanding of who and what we should be as contemporary Methodists; a vision shaped in an interaction with the text and formed in part through a historical-critical exegetical approach, while at the same time drawing on the principles of CBS. Under this sub heading I highlight just two existing ‘narrative’ paradigms endemic to the context as I considered the notion of being shaped by a particular story.\(^{155}\)

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\(^{155}\) I suspect these things might also be true throughout the connexion.
One participant noted that we are being defined by business principles and strategy, what he termed worldly wisdom. In both groups, members noted that ‘the’ Church “has tried to build on sociological and business principles for Church growth” and what’s more, both groups could see this in our own church context. According to the analysis of each group we have at times slipped into ‘methods of church growth’ rather than living sacrificially and following the pattern and the paradigm of Jesus:

The wisdom of ‘man’ is our usual default position in the Western church and even though it has only resulted in decline we still hold onto it, while in other parts of the world where this wisdom is not available there is growth. We need to ‘preach Christ crucified’; we are offering God’s truth; God’s solution to the world’s problem.

One member brought some critical analysis to ‘The General Secretary’s Report’: it was lacking in a call to discipleship based upon a particular key part of our Christian identity, a relationship with Christ; it was top heavy in terms of connexional strategy and its business-like approach; and lacking in a deep spirituality based upon a story of Christ.\(^{156}\) The General Secretary’s Report suggests that:

A feature of poorer evangelism is always to suppose that we are recruiting for the Church rather than inviting a person to experience God’s supreme love which shapes, reshapes and fills their life, and so transforms the world for good (Atkins et al 2011:45).

… And the report goes on:

Evangelism is… transformative, containing within it all the passion of piety and social justice inextricably connected together. It relates directly to the invitation to live out whole-life, life-long and world-transforming discipleship (p. 45).

\(^{156}\) Although the participant did not develop this point I think he was pointing toward a spirituality based on a Christ-like and Christ informed identity.
Participants noted that the report does not point specifically towards a Christocentric modelling of this discipleship and that this was a shame.\(^{157}\)

Time and again participants saw the application of this passage as a call to return to basics, a call I had identified as a return to the original vision and message that Paul had presented to the Corinthians, namely the story of a saviour who had sacrificed himself for others, contrasted with the wisdom endemic in Corinth and the seemingly self-serving attitudes of many within that community.

The wisdom that the Corinthians seemingly craved was likened to the ‘wisdom’ that we have constantly applied as we have sought new strategy and yet another fresh approach.\(^{158}\) These comparisons came out more sharply as we studied the passage carefully and under an ever closer reading. These insights only really came out within our second ‘reading’ and following some exegetical input. Not only were we able to contrast worldly ‘wisdom’ and new orientation in Christ, but the groups – and I mean both groups – also contrasted much of the traditions held within the Circuit, Chapels and

\(^{157}\) I have heard the General Secretary, Martyn Atkins, speak on many occasions, I am fairly certain that a paradigm based upon a Christocentric identity might not ever be too far from his mind; this would also be true of many within the contemporary Methodist Church. I think that it is a shame that there was no Biblical section within the 2011 report drawing out the implications of following Christ, i.e. sacrificial living etc. Much of the report calls upon the Methodist people to make some sacrifice, i.e. in terms of letting go of such things as buildings and some of our inherited tradition; a Biblically based model might have helped what is at its heart a Biblically shaped denomination ‘grasp the nettle’. So for example in his little book *Discipleship and the People Called Methodists* Atkins writes, “Jesus is the beginning and the end; the Way, the Truth and the Life; the model and example; the inspiration and means… discipleship of Jesus Christ shapes the whole of life” (Atkins 2010: 55). I would want to ‘cash out’ what this means in practice – to utilise the story of Jesus and his sacrifice to draw out what that might mean as a story for the Church.

\(^{158}\) I need to say very clearly that I have argued passionately for new strategic thinking within our context, however the further I have proceeded within my research, the more and more I have become convinced of the need to apply a scriptural based narrative paradigm to our church life and within that strategic thinking. We should be being shaped by the story of Christ; this in turn will shape our thinking along the lines of sacrificial giving and discipleship.
individuals with a similar call to Christ-centred discipleship. One group member remarked:

We can be so busy dealing with tradition, what our present context dictates rather than looking at the story of Christ, what he says and doing that!

Another participant commented:

We are so busy looking for the `pearl of great price' that we miss the diamond that is caked in mud,\textsuperscript{159} and easily overlooked. It is easy to miss the simple message; and the message of the cross is simple.\textsuperscript{160}

Many people were born into life at the Chapel and consequently had inherited values and an inherited sense of power. Members of the two groups felt that on occasions church members could manipulate and deploy that power in ways that were not in keeping with a Christ-centred calling. For example we were reminded of one particular chapel that has a very traditional way of being Church and that nothing changes and nothing happens without the approval of one or two members. Ironically this is perceived within those members as being ‘faithful to the Gospel' while holding and preserving a status quo:

Many Chapels are in the stranglehold of a couple of people who hold the church back and won’t let any change happen. We can get too busy dealing with tradition, rather than looking at the Bible and what the story of Christ says to us and following that way.

The fact was that members of the groups perceived the need for something that was radical and pioneering. I had noted in the passage the strong sense of apocalyptic (pp. 141 and 146); participants really seemed to

\textsuperscript{159} I loved this phrase and felt it had deep resonances with what Paul was saying (1:21, 23, 27, 28, and 30).

\textsuperscript{160} The member outlined the ‘pearl of great price’ as being our buildings and infrastructure and the story of the cross of Christ as a letting go and making sacrifice.
pick up on the ‘ground-breaking’ nature of our calling in Christ – following Christ and the sacrificial living he offers would indeed mean seeing something new and exploring innovative new expressions of church within the life of the circuit. The following two subheadings extend the implications of the first heading a little more.

An Epistemic Challenge

As we drew out the fact that the community in Corinth seemingly was looking for something different to that which Paul was offering them in Christ, one member commented on the fact that the Jews didn’t believe that Jesus was the messiah, as they were seeking for some kind of ‘kingly’ figure. While we noted that Corinth was probably a predominantly gentile audience; a participant said it made little difference; similarly, seemingly the Gentiles at Corinth were seeking something other than what Paul had offered to them. Members moved from these ideas to the notion that people in North Devon/Cornish Methodism are still ‘steeped’ in their own traditions and are wanting to hold to something other than what is offered to them in Christ – are they willing to ‘see’ another way, a way that incorporates a different vision?

One example that the laity group homed in as an example of what it might mean to see things differently concerned the releasing of some of our young people in ministry. Looking at the Circuit Plan it was noted that many of our older local preachers would have started preaching as teenagers and their
very early twenties;” \(^{161}\) “Why then do we not allow the same ‘youth’ today to lead our churches?”

Group members went on to speak warmly of how many of our young people are really living their faith, *unconstrained* by tradition and ‘worldly wisdom’. We identified a number of young people who were living within a model of Christ, a model that was really shaping their being in the way they lived their life, which meant caring for each other and being willing to take up ways that meant they were living as out of a Christ-focused discipleship paradigm. \(^{162}\)

Within the implicit narrative Paul was assuming God was turning some values upside down (1:20, 25, 26-28); members of the group wondered therefore about the empowering of our young people; on the face of it they might seem too young, too inexperienced but in fact many of them were living an authentic Christian experience, an experience that was in many

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\(^{161}\) A circuit plan is produced quarterly and is a plan of all the preaching dates and the preachers who are to take services on particular Sundays – this includes our lay preachers. The plan also includes other pieces of information, such as which hymn books chapels have and also includes the dates when local preachers became accredited; members worked back from these dates to work out when they had become local preachers.

\(^{162}\) So for example during my time within the Circuit I am mindful of young people from our circuit being involved with a number of initiatives such as taking aid to Romania, serving among the poor in India, working in orphanages in South Africa, becoming Street Pastors, raising funds for many good causes including Tear Fund and the persecuted Church; our young people have also been involved with local projects – things they have initiated, such as ‘friendship teas’ when they have befriended and provided a tea for a number of people experiencing loneliness, working at improving their community through initiatives such as Hope (see [http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/32586/HOPE.aspx](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/32586/HOPE.aspx)) . Some of our young people have attended Fresh Leadership Training which has enabled them within their own Christian discipleship ([http://www.sharejesusinternational.com/project/fresh/](http://www.sharejesusinternational.com/project/fresh/)). The reader may perceive that I am very proud of a number of our young people and really perceive their commitment to a vision shaped by the paradigm of Christ and what he means for them. Of course young people who would not consider themselves Christians are involved with similar things; however, the important point to note is that our young people feel called to these things *through and by* their commitment to their vision of Christ and that this means something in their daily life, whereas some people within the life and work of the Circuit seemingly are not shaped by this paradigm, but by tradition etc. I hope in writing these things I am not generalising too much. Clearly there are some of our older members who are equally living from and through their own vision of Christ centred sacrifice.
ways more authentic to the vision of the Methodist Church in its earlier days than many members of the Circuit. One young person was named explicitly: “X’s group is walking with young people and empowering them.”

A very sharp question was posed: “What about those who have no tradition?” and in this, the person was again referring to our young people. It was as though they were able to live more authentically to the Gospel because they did not have any baggage such as the infrastructure that we are all wrestling with.

As I reflected upon the matters above it seemed to me that what the participants were really arguing for was an epistemic challenge, highlighted by the exegesis. Once again, I note that of course participants did not put it this way; however perhaps future work would have drawn this dimension out further (see conclusion). Paul was using language that posed a challenge to the epistemology, and the inherited vision held at Corinth. Time and again participants used language that was all about challenging the current context and in terms which inferred a need for a new epistemology.

Much of what we see at the moment is directly opposed to the message of the cross.\textsuperscript{163}

Many are saying ‘it is my experience that counts’ – the text confronts this kind of thinking!

Sometimes our ‘wisdom’ prevents us from seeing the message that is before our eyes.

It is not an intuitive thing, we needed to study the passage carefully … because we have studied the passage it has opened up the idea that some things need to be confronted – that is the wisdom of this age (emphases mine).

\textsuperscript{163} This participant meant in terms of what we see in the circuit.
Finally I wish to think in terms of sacrifice. One member made the following observations:

If the cross was our starting point everything else would fall into position… some of our infrastructure has to go in order to clear a path for a different agenda, to get to the heart of the matter.

For the participants this would mean sacrifice in terms of the concept of people giving up certain things, letting go of inherited tradition and many things that are indeed precious and valuable to them. As we continued to consider the dimension of striving for power, human eloquence and wisdom, participants began to perceive clear connections to our own context. As noted above nothing happens or changes without the ‘permission’ of certain members who hold a sense of controlling power – members saw this as being directly opposed to the message of the cross.

One member felt strongly that a close reading of the passage and clear exegesis had brought out this dimension quite clearly. Paul was presenting a vision of one who had made sacrifice – how many of the members within the circuit would be willing to do much the same. Just as the Corinthians seemingly wanted to return to all that they knew held within the wisdom of this world so another member suggested another contemporary application:

Are we prepared to throw aside the wisdom of this world, place ourselves and our church/circuit at the feet of Jesus, and say: here we are Lord, please use us in accordance with your will? I am afraid that there are all too many people in this circuit that will not move forward without some sort of certainty.

Picking up on Hauerwas’ concept of a need for on-going training in discipleship one of the clergy group suggested:
Paul's use of the present continuous tense suggests that there is an on-going process and we need to discover where in this process our churches are, including the position of the individuals within our churches.

This idea was drawn out particularly through the careful reading of the text enhanced by historical critical exegesis. Similarly another participant suggested that just like Paul:

We are calling congregations and individuals within those congregations to give certain things up, to make sacrifice, to surrender certain things.

One member particularly pointed to verse 19 and saw in this verse the point Paul was making; he was talking about massive change. The participant particularly drew upon the fact that Paul had changed his LXX source text (see above). I wrote above: “Paul makes the point that σύνεσιν (intelligence), is declared invalid, nullified and ignored”; the participant went on:

It is all about setting some things aside and unless you get that you don’t get the strength of Paul’s message. Our raison d’être is about me, my way of doing things, this passage speaks of God pouring into our life the cross. A power manipulation is directly opposed to the message of the cross.

During these times of sharing I was very conscious of the fact that exegesis had developed truth as the participants saw it but that further work was necessary; I will return to this point in my overall conclusion.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have set out a summary report of how the two groups initially reacted to the theme of vision, via their engagement with 1 Cor. 1.18-25 using the CBS method. I have then set out my exegesis of the passage, informed by
the established resources of (historical-critical) biblical scholarship, a summary of which I presented to the groups. Based on my own, admittedly subjective, assessment of the groups’ subsequent engagement with the text, but also on comments made by group members, I conclude that the historical-critical exegesis added a positive dimension to the process. Rather than ‘reader-focused’ methods and historical exegesis being oppositional alternatives, or historical exegesis turning people away from contemporary application and creative contextualisation, it seemed that the opposite occurred: the historical exegesis helped to enrich and expand the groups’ engagement with the text. In a similar way I now turn to my chapter of narrative, working through a similar process and procedure and once again I will suggest that we discover a sense of positive connection between readers’ contextual reactions and historical exegesis.
Chapter Five

Narrative

As I turn to the concept of narrative or story, I explore 1 Cor. 10:1-11:1. The reader will see from the exegesis offered below that I argue the chapter contains three stories:\textsuperscript{164} the story of the ancient Israelites applied by Paul for paraenetic purposes; a ‘live’ story from the context in ancient Corinth, a story which Paul seeks to influence and shape; and hints of Paul’s own story based upon a Christocentric paradigm.

As I pondered and reflected upon my context of ministry and my engagement with the groups it seemed once again that there was a sense that these three stories, a past, back story, a live current story, and a story that might be influenced and shaped through an engagement with a scriptural narrative were relevant and applicable.

I follow a similar shape and structure as in the last chapter: first I report the observations of the focus/CBS groups following the initial meetings.\textsuperscript{165} Next, I present my own exegesis as a reflection on the theme of narrative within the chapter. Thirdly, I report on further conversations with each group after I had offered them the exegesis. How would this text shape and mould Christian discipleship around the pattern identified in chapter 1 and in engagement with Hauerwas’ themes?

My Initial Contact With the CBS Groups

\textsuperscript{164} I am including 11:1 as part of the chapter; the chapter break in most translations breaks the flow of Paul’s argument.

\textsuperscript{165} Once again I will summarise the meetings, drawing out differences between the clergy and laity groups as and when that is applicable.
Once again, I asked questions to enable the focus groups with the concept of story. To the question *what is your favourite story*: One member said “E Nesbit's Five Children and It” – going on to say that Nesbit had a lovely way of telling the story and commenting on things. He said that as a child he had looked at the story in minute detail. Another member said that he preferred the medium of film to see and hear a story and then went on to tell us that his favourite film is the ‘Love Actually’ – he likes it because it weaves together half a dozen different and separate stories and that all of the characters were seeking and searching for true love.  

Another member said that she always felt inspired by the biographies of people like Gladys Alywood and ‘God’s Smuggler’ – Brother Andrew; yet another member countered this by saying they had been influenced by ordinary people who were not household names.

To the question *what are the phrases/ideas that you see in the passage?* The following responses were made:

Eat and drink but do not cause anyone to stumble

…and then the related question:

Do our actions cause others to struggle?

Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

There is always a way out of temptation and idolatry.

Refocus on Jesus and emulate him.

If you start asking questions and you don't get the answer you wanted you might get into a pickle.

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166 An interesting exegetical exercise might be to explore the different stories in Corinth and/or the different stories within an ecclesial context, space precludes this in this present thesis – at least in any depth; I have touched upon this idea, but a fruitful exercise might be to develop this further.
Once again the clergy group were much more critical and analytical of the passage:

It is typical Paul trying to put across an idea in a hard-nosed way but then worrying about how people would read what he’s saying – he doesn't want them to eat meat offered to idols but then thinks again and then seemed more worried about the people who might be watching – it looks like you’re compromising your faith Paul! 167

In his effort to be all things to all people it gets him into scrapes – he says something but then seems to contradict it – eat anything – but then be careful! The Christian faith can be just like this you can end up in a position other than what you started with!

In answer to what jumped out for you from this passage? One member inferred that Paul may have started out with a flat message (participant’s terminology) but this message was then shaped by the contours of others’ experience! In other words in engaging the Corinthian context Paul was encountering a challenge to his thinking. 168 Indeed one member jumped from this to saying that while Paul was writing and presenting a homogenised picture, we preach to a pastoral context and that is always a balancing act between teaching and its outworking in pastoral practice. 169

Another member offered a very interesting insight:

It's a bit like Goldilocks and the three Bears – the bed was not too lumpy; Paul is trying to bring them back to a place of what

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167 Once again and specifically to this clergy group historical-critical exegesis offered a different point of view; Paul was offering a very carefully constructed argument.
168 Historical-critical exegesis shows this indeed is true, Paul was facing a challenge to his teaching; however, he engages that challenge with rhetorical force. Once again, perhaps this only comes out in any focused way under and through a process of historical-critical exegesis.
169 While I didn’t say it on the evening I couldn’t disagree more, Paul was himself preaching and teaching into a pastoral context and is sensitive to the issues that the Corinthians were facing.
is just and right, to get them to see that their bed *is* too lumpy. He is instructing them on what to do and what not to do. 170

Looking at verse 23, one member suggested that Paul was saying that God is protecting you from falling into a place where you can't get back – you could fall further into temptation and end up going down a slippery slope!

Someone was particularly drawn to verse six in ‘The Message’ “We must not turn our religion into a circus as they did.” 172

Perhaps God was saying look at your forefathers they were guided, God provided food and spiritual sustenance but they *and we* go off on a tangent (emphasis mine). 173

A number of participants saw the passage in terms of a general pointing to idolatry in our day and age:

Paul is writing to the Corinthians because there were a lot of issues, sin and immorality at that time – it is similar for us today, there are lots of idolatrous issues we face.

Am I going to get sucked in to a place where I don’t want to go – for example through the internet, some of the patterns of society?

They had been led out of Egypt and then dissatisfaction had set in – it is the same for us today, we have everything but then dissatisfaction creeps in.

In answer to the question *Paul tells a story for the members of the Corinthian church to ‘hear’; what you think that story might have meant to them?* One member asked:

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170 A member of the laity group – interesting that he drew out a story’s meaning, by the use of another story.
171 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. (NRSV).
172 This resonated with the member, they went on to say: “it is so easy to turn God’s work here (North Devon/Cornwall) into a circus!”
173 At this point the group member was offering some undeveloped application to our context.
Is Paul wrestling with his back story – he had believed all these things for so long he was now wrestling with it all… rather like somebody buying a pint of milk on Sunday – and someone else can’t reconcile that action – you then struggle!

Furthermore: What about the tension between being pastoral and upholding orthodoxy – either way someone will be hurt by the back story.

The issues were very different – but the concept was and is very useful.\(^{174}\)

To the question *is it a story that might speak to us today*, one member said “I don’t nail the colours of my faith to another person’s story” (emphasis mine).\(^{175}\) In contrast someone else said: “absolutely! It is relevant, it is a story of living in law or grace”, however “the purpose of the story is for someone to reinterpret it; there is no point unless I make it my own, or a story for others” (emphasis mine). At this point I was struck by the idea that good exegesis might serve this end; however negatively put another member ‘quoted’ Nietzsche "there are no facts only interpretations!" (I wasn’t sure whether this was an accurate quote). Another group member said affirmatively “yes, because do you know what! We study God’s word and then we fall! … and *we are aware of our heritage*” (original emphasis).\(^{176}\)

One member asked the question why Paul would draw on a Jewish story and then answered his own question by saying “to draw them into the story”; he then went on to say Jesus draws us into the story because he wants the best for us.

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\(^{174}\) Perhaps another underdeveloped contemporary application.

\(^{175}\) An interesting comment for a Christian and indeed for a Methodist to make; surely as Methodists we are shaped by the scriptural story and perhaps the story of our Wesleyan tradition. I am assuming that this member meant the story as offered by Paul; interestingly this was a member of the clergy group.

\(^{176}\) I make the assumption that he meant in a similar way to the Corinthians being aware of their ‘fathers’.
A participant read to us from ‘The Message’:

“Looking at it one way, you could say, ‘Anything goes’. Because of God’s immense generosity and grace, we don’t have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster”;

Picking up on this someone else went on to say “the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should also be to help others live well.”

He then went on to ask: “Where is our own self-discipline, what are our motives?”

On the subject of grumbling within the passage both groups concluded that we shouldn’t grumble against our leaders – but we do, i.e. we don’t own the story (I took this to mean the connexional story – the Methodist narrative at this time in our ecclesial history).

A member of the clergy group shared with us how the message of Mary Poppins suddenly dawned on him – a truth by analogy; he developed the point, “being in a wilderness – we reinterpret this today as we are always in the wilderness – yes we hear this truth by analogy”. Another member of the same group spoke about the distinctive emphasis of ‘Methodists’ lifting words off a page and allowing them to speak.

I then posed the question: Think about the stories of our ancestors, how did/do they shape our sense of identity?

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177 Again, I resisted the temptation in this initial meeting, but I wanted to cry out “what would it mean for us to live well?” If I were teaching a group, rather than facilitating a group I would want to make some application on Christocentric lines – I am ever more convinced that this was how Paul was working.

178 I would question whether this is a ‘Methodist’ phenomenon.
One member noted that he was more influenced by his Christian background rather than his socio-economic background; *the* Christian story had become important for him.\(^{179}\) This was developed further:

Our primitive Methodist forebears had an adherence to a scriptural standard – a moral life, but we are guided and directed by what? These days there seems to be a freedom to be who you are but within a bubble of faith.

People don’t like people doing things different in their culture – their culture gives them cohesion – some things are perceived as negative … for example Tesco – there is a cultural prejudice to anything new. There is a story of being gripped by fear.

Within the clergy group a very sharp and incisive point was raised, there might be a sense in which we as ministers have a very different story to the indigenous folk.\(^{180}\) Our professional story as ministers swamps out the simple story of faith… we are then seen as outsiders – so it is hard to convince a Cornishman or a Devonian – are there parallels with Paul?

It almost seems like an immovable barrier – I have been able to make progress in other places – should we continue to bang our heads against a brick wall if we can’t change it!

Members spoke of how their ‘forefather’s’ faith had indeed shaped them:

I remember when Gran was coming, but paradoxically dreaded Gran coming – you couldn’t read the paper, watch TV … She could have put me off for life but in fact was an inspiration! One of my Grandmas was a Christian but the other wasn’t, however she still had a massive influence upon my Christian life – giving me determination and courage!

\(^{179}\) I question the concept ‘the’ Christian story – see above. Indeed, in keeping with this critique one member said “my faith is not wishy-washy but it is broad”.

\(^{180}\) A very interesting point is that two of the laity group were ‘outsiders’ and in some ways their thoughts and observations were slightly different from the other members of the group.
The laity group did note a reluctance to change within our context; there is a very distinct narrative:

Are we holding back the church, because of our sheltered background, is our sheltered background too much our story?

Members noted that the church is fighting for its very existence and there was a feeling that we need to get to the core instead of living with the tradition, he then wondered if this is even flying in the face of Paul! Another member challenged this and asked “were the Corinthians stuck in a particular tradition and culture that Paul was challenging!”

We can only do it in this way and in this format – we have a fossilised chapel culture!

I then asked the groups: What are the key stories that shape our identity in this place? In continuity with the previous question members of the clergy group carried on raising the idea of some sense of disconnect between us as ministers and the people in our congregations:

We are confronted with something we can’t change – there has to be some kind of progress somewhere! But then John the Baptist didn’t achieve anything!

What is the role of a Methodist minister – to minister to the flock – But surely that suggests that we need to gain some trust!

The members have no idea what is needed – what the vision is, paradoxically it will not work unless it is owned or articulated by the people – we need to challenge the idea that going with the flow, maintaining the status quo works.

Remarkably, members of the laity group recognised the need for change and that in fact the key story shaping the place was quite the opposite:

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181 Paul was indeed confronting tradition and the ‘institution’ at Corinth. His ‘core’ was Christ and Him Crucified – which as I have argued above was a radical apocalyptic message (see Chapter Four).
We have an inability to change, the fixed pews becoming a metaphor for where we are, this means declining numbers and that we become insular.

Conversely there was some ‘good news’ – people were coming to faith, there was some reinvention, necessity becoming the mother of re-invention, with fresh expressions of Church and new ways of being church.¹⁸²

In my initial contact with both groups I was struck by how very much the theme of story was a strong one. There are competing stories – the stories of tradition and innovation; the stories of them and us; the stories of status quo and change; the stories of contentment and preservation and that of challenge. As I proceeded with the historical critical exegesis I developed an understanding that some of these things dovetailed with Paul’s teaching and theology.

The exegesis

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 Paul addresses further a question that the Corinthians had ‘posed’ in their letter to him; the question being whether it was acceptable to eat food offered to idols. In essence he carries forward a discussion that had begun in 1 Cor. 8:1.¹⁸³ The Corinthian ‘strong’ are seeking support for their enlightened understanding that an idol was meaningless and

¹⁸² I was struck by the glimmers of hope and positivity in the laity group, in contrast to the pessimism and negativity within the clergy group.

¹⁸³ I am not convinced of the ‘partition theory’ i.e. that these chapters comprise different letters redacted together (Thiselton 2000: 717 - 18; cf. Yeo 1995: 81 ff.). Willis writes “there is a unity of argument and structure in 1 Corinthians 8–10 which shows that this portion of the letter has a thoughtful organisation and development. This unity can be seen also in the cohesion of the theological themes which Paul employs”(Willis 1985: 275), I concur; Paul develops a sense of theological cohesion through the addressing of the question of meat sacrificed to idols by telling stories, his own story, the story of ancient Israel and the story implicit within the Corinthian context. Fee suggests that conjunction γάρ in 10:1 creates close ties with the exhortation/warning at the end of 1 Corinthians 9 (Fee 1987: 443).
because of that ‘knowledge’ they seek to be set free from petty rules (Hays 1997: 159). This could be articulated as an argument from the Corinthian community seeking to maintain their status quo, to preserve those things they were comfortable in. Paul’s argument in essence is a challenge for them to think of a different story; in principle this is one of the arguments of Hauerwas (Hauerwas 1981a: 92, 150; 1983: 87; 1985: 63 ff.; 1988: 12).

How will Paul address this question and what approach will he take? The answer is to be found in his use of an ancient narrative in midrashic form to explicate truth for the Corinthians (Schrage 1995: 382) and then to an exploration of the Corinthian story, before turning to his own story. He therefore utilises this ancient story, before engaging some ‘live’ stories within the Corinthian context (10:16 ff.) and the implicit story of his own ministry (10:33 – 11:1; cf. Ch. 9). I now consider each of these three stories in turn.

**A Story from Ancient Israel**

Collins notes Paul’s hermeneutical strategy:

> The summary rehearsal of the Exodus events with which Paul begins his exposition (vv. 1 – 5) sets the stage for what proved to be an *actualising interpretation of the biblical narrative*… Paul’s scripturally-based exposition begins with a narrative of events (vv. 1 - 5) on which Paul reflects and from which he adduces pertinent paraenesis (10: 6 - 13). Therefore he draws a strong inference from the Midrash he has developed. ‘Wherefore, my beloved,’ he says, ‘flee from idolatry’ (10:14) (Collins 1999: 365, emphasis mine; cf. Conzelmann 1975: 165; Robertson 1973: 67-68).  

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184 Paul teases out the Corinthian story – a story contained within the argument for their ‘rights’; he challenges this by the use of a Christocentric story that he had embodied.

185 I am convinced that he does something similar by the use of his own story, built implicitly on the story of Christ. Garland does not agree with the notion that Paul uses an *existing* Midrash. (Garland 2013: location 10414; cf. Fitzmyer 2008:379).
Paul depicts Israel during the Exodus in a way that emphasises parallels with the context and situation of the Corinthians, “Paul applies the exodus story to the state of affairs in Corinth as a further, vivid word of illustrative warning” (Soards 1999: 199). I shall note below that there are points of convergence and contact between the Exodus and the embodied Corinthian stories.

As I have already noted (chapter one), characters in a story have a part to play within the drama of that story, the characters within a story can be distinguished as heroic or tragic, examples to be imitated or avoided (Soards 1999: 199). Paul uses the word τύπος in 10:6 and 11, and within these verses this forms an inclusio (Collins 1999: 365). According to Soards this points to one of the key functions of the narrative that Paul employs; indeed not as ‘type’ implying a kind of fatalism that the Corinthians had to fall into the same errors but rather as exemplary warning (Soards 1999:199).

If the story Paul utilises seems a digression, it is because Paul takes a detour into Biblical exposition, for the purposes of paraenesis (Willis 1985: 162), and through this exposition Paul makes his point: “Paul's use of the Exodus account bears similarity to rabbinic haggadah (the story) and halakah (the behavioural imperative)” (Collins 1999: 364). Paul is telling a story to affect behaviour (in much the same way I noted in Chapter 1).

The initial argument proceeds in two ways: first Paul sets forth the Israelites as exhibit ‘A’ in verses 1-5, as those who had failed to take the prize and then in verses 6–13 applies the story directly to the Corinthians (Fee 1987: 443); the hubristic Corinthians are in much the same situation (Collins 1999: 367).
Despite the fact that this community is predominantly Gentile (see 1 Cor. 12:2), the story held within the Hebrew Bible becomes a mirror to their story; they are engrafted into the covenantal people of God (Fee 1987: 444; Hays 1997: 160) and as such hear the story of their forefathers. Paul wants to be sure that they do not miss the significance of the ancient story of Israel for their own lives (Fee 1987: 443).

There are a number of points of correspondence tied to the story from the Hebrew Bible and the implicit narrative held within the Corinthian community in the first 13 verses of chapter 10. Paul draws upon the redemptive experience of Israel to make connections with the Corinthian context (Collins 1999: 365; Soards 1999: 200). The ‘Fathers’ experienced divine provisions, the presence of Christ (10:4), a prefiguration of baptism (10:2) and the ‘Lord’s Supper’ (10: 3-4); however they failed to enter the promised land because of their idolatry (Garland 2013: location 10368).

Perhaps the Corinthians felt that their baptism, participation in the Eucharist and ‘preeminent knowledge’ (8:2) gave them security and an elevated position (Morris 1985: 138). However the privileges which Israel enjoyed did not guarantee subsequent blessing (Blomberg 1994: 191) and this story is used as a warning.

Here is something of the nature of the Corinthians’ misguided beliefs about the Lord’s Supper and baptism. Most likely, the ‘strong’ Christians among them maintain that participation in these rituals guaranteed them immunity from spiritual danger so that they could freely partake in idol feasts. Quite the opposite, Paul declares, by his elaborate Old Testament analogies: participation in spectacular spiritual experiences does not relieve the people of God from ethical responsibility (Blomberg 1994: 199; cf. Oepke 1985: entry 123, Bible Works Edition).\(^{186}\)

\(^{186}\) In contrast Garland writes, “It reads too much into the text to suppose that the Corinthians thought that Christian rites gave them immunity from punishment or license to tempt God” (Garland 2013: 10536, emphasis mine); however he does concede that “Paul must alert them
The generosity of God’s grace is such that all of ancient Israel participated in the blessings of God. The word πάντες is repeated five times in four verses (1-4). However: “Paul does not seek a point-for-point correspondence – he is satisfied with the exemplary character of the history of Israel” (Conzelmann 1975: 166).

The point being made is simple. The Exodus was understood by Paul as an act of redemption and so it is no stretch for him to associate it with the symbols of Christian redemption (Garland 2013: location 10456; cf. Grosheide 1954: 220). The Corinthians are in danger of brazenly disobeying God’s commands and moving into idolatry (Garland 2013: location 10497).

Paul’s reshaping of the story prepares the way for how he will utilise that story (cf. Soards 1999: 201).

In verse 3, the food provided by God is in stark contrast with the food that the Corinthians crave (Collins 1999: 369). After divine deliverance came divine sustenance. The adjective πνευματικόν does not mean that Paul doubts the reality of the manna but rather that it has divine origin and is provided by God (Godet and Cusin 1890: 54; Ps. 78:24 NRSV).

(“I do not want you to be ignorant”) to those dangers by boldly drawing the parallels between the wilderness generation and themselves and by casting a glaring spotlight on their wretched fate” (ibid.). See also Willis, where he notes that Paul’s concern is not sacramentalism, but rather idolatry (Willis 1985: 141). Whether or not the Corinthians relied upon a hyper-sacramentalism is a moot point; however, through the process of mirror reading we can be pretty sure that they were over confident in some way.

187 Fee suggests an analogy with the Lord’s supper (Fee 1987: 446); the main point Paul makes is that God had fed the Old Testament people of God both physically and spiritually, now he feeds the people of Corinth spiritually, the Old Testament people of God turned away from that blessing, now the people of God in Corinth do much the same.

188 Bruce suggests a connection at this point with verses 10:16b and 17, “we may be sure that he would have agreed that it pointed to Christ as the bread of life” (Bruce 1971: 91).
Paul identifies the rock in verse 4 with Christ; the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy identifies the rock with God (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; cf. 2 Sam. 22:2);\(^\text{189}\) Paul reads these texts with Christological lenses (Hays 1997: 161). The complexities of the precise meaning of ‘the rock was Christ’ should not distract from the main point Paul is making: Israel and the Corinthians were and are receiving blessing from God, for the Corinthians this was explicitly ἐν χριστῷ.\(^\text{190}\) Paul concerns himself with interpreting the wilderness tradition as an example to the Corinthian Church: “Paul's addition to the wilderness traditions is the idea that such gifts actually came from Christ, since he was present and helping God's people back then” (Witherington 1995: Location 5270, Kindle Version).

The role of wisdom in guiding, protecting and leading Israel through the wilderness is attested within the traditions Paul would have known:

A holy people and blameless race wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors. She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord, and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs. She gave to holy people the reward of their labours; she guided them along a marvellous way, and became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters (Wisdom 10:15-17, NRSV)

When they were thirsty, they called upon you, and water was given them out of flinty rock, and from hard stone a remedy for their thirst. (Wisdom 11:4)

Also to be found in a near contemporary of Paul:

\(^{189}\) “Underlying the statement in 1 Cor. 10:4 is the OT miracle of water gushing out of the rock (Ex. 17; Num. 20). This is given typical significance in rabbinic exposition. The legend arises of a fountain that is with the people in the desert. Paul gives this a messianic turn (cf. Jn. 7:37-38). Christ is a spiritual reality, not an actual rock, but the same Christ acts in history in both the old covenant and the new to sustain his people. The "following" denotes his faithfulness both past and present” (Cullman 1985: #623, Bible Works Version)

For the abrupt (flinty) rock is the wisdom of God… of it he gives drink to the souls that love God; and they, when they have drunk, are also filled with the most universal manna (Philo, *Legum Allegoriarum* 2:86).

Dunn notes the connection: “Paul was attributing to Christ the role previously attributed to divine Wisdom” (Dunn 1998: 270; cf. 1 Cor. 1:30) and Godet notes that the message that Paul is beginning to convey is plain:

The practical consequence is obvious at a glance: Christ lived in the midst of the ancient people, and the people perished! How can you think yourselves, you Christians, secure from the same lot (Godet and Cusin 1890: 58 - 59).

As I now turn to verses 5-11, I note that Paul pushes home the point. He continues the story of Israel as an example to the Corinthian Church and once again I note that Paul engages the Old Testament narrative (Fee 1987: 450).

Verse 5 is a hinge point in the argument of these first 12 verses, it is transitional. What Paul has said in a positive way he will now put negatively (Ruef 1977: 92). The conjunction ἀλλά indicates that what now happens runs counter to what one might expect after such divine blessing; in the following verses Paul flags up why disaster struck and pointedly makes connections with the Corinthian context.

BDAG defines the verb εὐδοκέω in verse 5: “to consider something as good and therefore worthy of choice” (Bauer 2000: 3214 Bible Works Version; cf. 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 1:15; Col. 1:19). In this situation, God’s displeasure results in “the forfeiture of election” (Willis 1985: 143); the following verses unpack why.

As noted above Israel’s story is a τύπος (verse 6), a prefiguration, model or impression (cf. Balz and Schneider1990#5331, Bible Works
Version). The Corinthians ought to take note and hear this story, the purpose: “so that we might not desire evil as they did” (verse 5).

Blomberg notes that the four privileges granted to ‘all’ in verses 1-5, which should have resulted in continued blessing are failed by four tests in verses 7-10. The self-sufficient stance of Israel (and correspondingly the Corinthian community), find expression in (1) Idolatry; (2) immorality; (3) putting the Lord to the test; (4) grumbling or complaint (Blomberg 1994: 191). I shall now consider each of these failings in turn.

Israel was idolatrous (verse 7). Paul cites Exodus 32: 6 (cf. Ex. 32: 1 – 6); the fact that he closes this particular pericope with the words “flee from the worship of idols” (14) suggests that this is his primary concern and therefore a live issue in Corinth. Thiselton notes that this would involve three things within Israel’s narrative: letting their hair down, idolatrous dancing before the golden calf and sexual licence; a marked contrast to the discipline and self-restraint that Paul calls for (Thiselton 2000: 734; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24 - 27). Paul is consciously drawing inferences from this paradigm:

The slap-in-the-face audacity of the people’s idolatry is underscored by Paul’s device of reading the eating and drinking as a reminiscence of the earlier narrative of God’s gracious provision... Paul’s quotation from Exodus, by coaxing the reader to remember the golden calf story, links the present Corinthian dilemma (whether to eat meat offered to idols) to the larger and older story of Israel in the wilderness (Hays 1989: 92; cf. Morris 1985: 140; Ruef 1971: 92).

Israel was immoral (verse 8). Perhaps Paul takes the edge off the warning by using the first person plural and thereby including himself within it; however, this second exhortation “is also aimed directly at the Corinthians’ misdoings” (Hays 1997:164; cf. Soards 1999: 203). Paul probably has in mind Numbers 25: 1-9 (cf. Wisdom 14:12; Rev. 2:14) probably conflating this
passage with Exodus 32 in making his point (Garland 2013: location 10724). Grosheide notes: “The main thing is that Paul describes a case of sin and consequent punishment which is applicable to the Corinthians” (Grosheide 1954: 224); and Bruce writes: “the relevance of this episode to the Corinthian situation called for no emphasising” (Bruce 1971: 92).

Israel put the ‘Christ’ to the test (verse 9). The present subjunctive, ἐκπειράζωμεν with the negative might suggest an on-going, continued, and present situation (Thiselton 2000: 740). As noted above the Corinthians somehow seemed to think that they were immune from spiritual danger (Witherington 1995: location 5249), Paul is trying to dissuade them from this point of view (ibid.). The Corinthians were indeed putting Christ to the test by their attendance at the temple sacrifices (Barrett 1968: 225; Fee 1987: 456; Fitzmyer 2008: 387; Hays 1997: 164; Ruef 1971: 93).

Israel grumbled and complained (verse 10). The verb γογγύζω can be defined as conferring together secretly and discontentedly complaining (Thayer 1889#1163, Bible Works Version).

As Moses protested the peoples’ idolatry, so Paul has protested the Corinthians’ participation in sacrificial meals. As the people of Israel grumbled against the leader appointed by God, so also Paul insinuates that the Corinthians are no less guilty of rebelliously grumbling against him and refusing to listen to his counsel (Garland 2013: 10752; cf. Godet and Cusin 1890: 64; Grosheide 1954: 225).

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191 Garland explores the reason for the discrepancy in Paul’s accounting of the numbers involved to that in the text and concludes “A more promising alternative suggests that Paul deliberately mixed Num. 25: 9 with Exod. 32: 28, which records that three thousand died at the hands of the Levites who administered harsh punishment on the stubborn idolaters (Koet 1996). Exodus 32 forms a prominent backdrop for Paul’s warnings against idolatry, and he has just quoted Exod. 32: 6 in 1 Cor. 10: 7” (ibid.).

192 There is a variant reading at this point in the text, the earliest MSS attest χριστόν a number of MSS have κύριον which reflects the LXX’s θεόν of Numbers 21: 5 and 6. Thiselton notes that most writers argue for Christ (Thiselton 2000: 740).
Paul’s teaching in these four verses has been all about utilising the story of Israel πρὸς νουθεσίαν ἡμῶν (verse 11; cf. 4:14).

A new age has arrived and has begun (verse 11; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17) (Fitzmyer 2008: 388). However, it has begun ‘in Christ’ and not through their own self-sufficiency or strength. Thiselton notes that this verse addresses two sets of people in Corinth “the not yet dimension addresses a Corinthian theology of presumption, especially on the part of the strong” and “the now dimension addresses a Corinthian theology of doubt and anxiety especially on the part of the weak for whom the socio-economic realities of dependency on the powerful seem not to have changed very much” (Thiselton 2000: 745, emphases mine). The importance of the story is pushed home:

To both Paul explains that they are incorporated within a cosmic story of grace to Israel and to the church in which God decisively redeems his people but also requires that they journey as pilgrims through but not of the world (Thiselton 2000: 745).

Paul writes in 1 Cor. 2:6 “among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish”.193 At the end of the ages, a new wisdom arrives, wisdom to be found in Christ and through the instruction of scripture.

The eschatological identification of those for whose sake the Scriptures were written suggests that in Paul's vision the Scriptures themselves [and thus the scriptural story] have eschatological significance (Collins 1999: 373).

If the wilderness generation met such a horrifying end by spurning a concealed Christ who nurtured them throughout their journey, how much more the Corinthians will be condemned if they spurn the revealed Christ (Garland 2013: location 10774)

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193 Perhaps there is a touch of irony here.
Paul clinches this particular argument in verse 12; those ‘in the know’ need to watch out lest they cause others to fall, but also in case they themselves fall (cf. 1 Cor.8:7ff.). There can be no doubt about it that this was indeed aimed at a sense of ‘cocksureness’ (Conzelmann 1975: 168). The verb (ἐστάναι) is in the infinitive and suggests those who think they stand fast now; it can be compared to 8:2: εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι – “if anyone thinks he knows something”, where the verb ἐγνωκέναι carries with it a sense of complete and perfect knowledge.

That presumed “knowledge” has led them to risk idolatrous associations and to think nothing of it…He is not addressing the question of the security of the believer but calling attention to the pitfall of being careless because of overconfidence (Garland 2013: location 10799)

The Corinthians are to look out, Ὥστε indicating an exhortation to watchfulness based upon the story he has just told them. There were many at Corinth who claimed to stand and determined their ethics from that assumption. Within this story Paul is exhorting them and yet at the same time offering hope (verse 13).

The phrase θεός πιστὸς appears in the LXX at Deut. 7:9 and 32:4 arising in the context of the covenant, therefore:

Christian believers can never claim that they could not help themselves in the face of pressure to abandon covenant faithfulness, for God will ensure, as part of his own covenant faithfulness, that he will not simply leave them to face impossible odds. His grace provides ever new opportunities for human faithfulness (Thiselton 2000: 748-49).  

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194 Fee argues that verse 13 is often cited apart from its present context (Fee 1987: 460). Garland writes, “Because 10: 13 does not seem to connect logically with what precedes, Godet (1887: 68) labels it “undoubtedly one of the most difficult of the whole Epistle.” It could have been omitted, and the imperative to flee idolatry in 10: 14 would have seemed a fitting conclusion to 10: 1-12 (Fee 1987: 460). The question that must be addressed is how 10: 13 fits the thrust of Paul’s argument. What is the testing that Paul has in view? The best option will make sense of it in the context of the warning examples he has just enumerated and the exhortation to flee idolatry that immediately follows (Garland 2013: location 10826). He goes on to suggest that this might invite hostility and “Withdrawning from all idolatrous functions
However, this is not to be manipulated by human presumption (p.749.).

Ultimately Paul comes to the conclusion φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας. The conjunction indicates an inference (Balz and Schneider 1990:3755, Bible Works; cf. 1 Cor 8:13; 14:13); he “gives the directive that all of chs. 8-10 has been arguing for” (Witherington 1995: location 5316); the present tense suggesting that this should be a continuing state of affairs (Grosheide 1954: 229); Paul will now go on to unpack what this means in context.

The Story Within The Corinthian Community.

I now wish to turn to the implicit story within the Corinthian community – a narrative of everyday living in a context where the possibility of eating food offered to idols and being involved in ‘fellowship with demons’ was a very real possibility (1 Cor. 10: 20 ff.) and where an invitation to a meal where the serving of ‘idol-food’ was also a likelihood. Paul works through some complex arguments to offer counsel to the Corinthians.

Paul appeals to the Corinthians as ‘sensible people’ (v. 15) as he poses his argument; herein is perhaps a touch of irony (cf. 4:10) (Barrett 1971: 231; Thiselton 2000: 755; Witherington 1995: location 5316). However, surely sensible people will not fail to see Paul’s point of view. They should judge Paul’s words and indeed see the sense of what Paul will say.

would scuttle any ambitions for social advancement, impair patron/client relations, fuel ostracism, and damage economic partnerships” (ibid. 10840; cf. Cheung 1999: 38).

195 Fitzmyer proposes that Paul is not using sarcasm but rather “flattering them into recognising the correctness of his counsel” (Fitzmyer 2008: 389; cf. Fee 1987:464) and Garland suggests, “It is unlikely that Paul resorts to irony, as that would risk alienating his audience at this crucial stage in the argument. It would be particularly jarring just after addressing them as “my beloved” (1 Cor. 10: 14)” (Garland 2013: location 11033); however, I
A number of commentators note that Paul is not at this point giving teaching on the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper; he is rather looking beyond the sacrament as an illustration of a particular principle (Fee 1987: 465; Garland 2013: location 11046; Grosheide 1954: 230; Hays 1997: 167).

Paul appeals to the Lord’s Supper to make the point that sacrificial meals to idols are “similar, but opposite realities” (Smit 1997: 51) and to admonish them to avoid any conscious contact with idolatrous rites no matter how meaningless or benign such might seem (Garland 2013: location 11046).

Paul’s teaching draws attention to three things (Garland 2013: location 11060 ff.). First of all, that participation in the Lord’s Supper creates ‘fellowship’ with Christ. Fellowship is an important word in verses 16-20; the word and its cognates are mentioned four times – κοινωνία twice in verse 16, κοινωνός in verses 18 and 20. Paul is noting a relationship formed, creating a commonality.

κοινωνός is derived from the root κοιν -, ‘common’ and means accordingly ‘one who has something in common with someone else...When two or more persons have the same thing in common (we shall use the words person and thing for the sake of convenience and brevity) some kind and degree of relationship is necessarily established between them (Campbell 1932: 353).

Therefore in asking the rhetorical question in verse 16, which assumes an answer in the affirmative, he notes that participation creates solidarity with Christ.

Secondly, Paul implies that participation ‘in Christ’ generates κοινωνία – participation and fellowship with one’s fellow Christians.

Witherington draws out this dimension:

The term koinōnia has as its fundamental meaning to have or to share in common in something with someone. The question then do not concur, Paul is using a biting sense of irony in this context where ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ were elevated (Barrett 1971: 231; Hays 1997: 166; Witherington 1995: location 5317).
becomes whether this term is referring to a sharing between God and the worshipper, among worshippers, or perhaps both. I would suggest that some of both is entailed. Barrett's translation 'common participation' is a good one (Witherington 1995: location 5327, emphasis mine)

I will not labour this point as I return to this dimension below.

Thirdly, the emphasis in verse on to the blood of Christ generates the idea of covenant (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25; Gen. 15: 9-18; Exod. 24: 3-8; Zech. 9: 11; Heb. 9: 18).

What is decisive about the sacrifice of Jesus is that it created a new covenant between God and man… this messianic community, established in and on Jesus death, is both exemplified by and embodied in its memorial meal (Willis 1985: 218)

Again, this is a point I will return to.

The fellowship meal was indeed the way that they united to Christ and to each other; all who partook in the one bread were participating together in Christ (verse 17; cf. Barrett 1971: 234; Fitzmyer 2008: 391). However, the divisions in the community (cf. 1: 10-12), were in contrast to Paul’s aspirational and theological goal for the Church.

Paul continues to build his case in verse 18. Israel according to the flesh was bound together in their common worship of Yahweh (Fee 1987: 471). Paul is offering three examples of ‘participation’: participation in

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196 Or at least they should have been! Robinson declares “one could say without exaggeration that the concept of the body forms the keystone of Paul’s theology… it is into His body the Church that we are incorporated; it is by His body in the Eucharist that this community is sustained” (Robinson 1952: 9).

197 See Thiselton’s comments on ‘split reference’ and ‘double meaning’ (Thiselton 2000: 769); picking up on this concept from Ricoeur he applies this to the work of Marshall (cf. Marshall 1980: 121). Thiselton writes “Marshall perceives the link between this verse and commitment to corporate responsibility for brothers and sisters ‘for whom Christ died’ (8:11)” (Thiselton 2001:769 and citing Marshall 1980:121). Marshall goes on to say that they “must express that unity in love and consideration for others” (ibid).

198 Other commenters have noted the negative implications of this verse – in other words Paul is tipping back to his previous argument in the earlier part of the chapter, so Garland writes, “The phrase κατὰ σάρκα refers, in this context, to the flesh caught in the power of sin, which leads to rebellion against God… This interpretation makes better sense of what follows in 10: 19-22, with its emphasis on idolatry and provoking the Lord to jealousy. The quotations from
Christ, in ancient Israel and in fellowship at the idol sacrifice. His argument "depends on establishing parallelism between these three meals in verses 16-21 – Christian – Jewish – and pagan" (Hays 1997: 168).

Bruce comments:

Sensible men would have protested 'you have already agreed with us that "an idol has no real existence" and that "there is no God but one". How can we be partakers of a nonentity?' 'I know', Paul replies 'I am not saying the food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything...what I do mean is this… what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons' (Bruce 1971: 95-96).

Paul probably draws upon Deuteronomy again in verse 20 (Deut. 32:17). He shifts tense to the present θυόυσιν. He also begins with the strong adversative ἀλλ' . Paul clearly does not think of eating 'idol meat' as wrong in itself (Bruce 1971:96); in essence the conjunction signals “I do not contend that idols exist, but I do contend etc…” (Grosheide 1954: 235). However, scholarly debates about what Paul did or did not believe about demons are to miss the point; ultimately the

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Deut. 32: 17 in 1 Cor. 10: 20 and Deut. 32: 21 in 1 Cor. 10: 22 apply to sinful Israel (Garland 2013: location 11088; cf. Collins 1999: 377; Thiselton 2000:771; Fitzmyer 2008: 392).

197 On the face of it the question might be asked does Paul turn away from his teaching in 1 Corinthians 8. Here he had seemingly agreed with the Corinthians that "we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." (1Cor 8:4 NRSV). Garland writes, "Paul is conscious that his statements might seem inconsistent with what he wrote in 8: 4, that 'an idol has no real existence,' and he is careful to avoid stumbling into some form of henotheism, a belief in one God without denying the existence of other gods. He does not concede the existence of idols but does want to introduce a new wrinkle to the problem that they have failed to see—the complication of having fellowship with demons (Garland 2013: location 11117). Soards notes that "this section is challenging to translators and interpreters because Paul writes in a vigorous style that takes abrupt rhetorical turns that can be and often lost in the reading of the text… he anticipates the objections of those who would differ with him, stating these objections in a diatribe-like fashion as an imaginary opponent might raise the objections. In turn, Paul formulates responses to his partner in debate and explains why his own understanding in the instructions are preferable. Ultimately one sees the heart of Paul's concern— the Corinthian Christians relations with God, with one another, and with those outside the church— that has guided all that Paul was written since he took up this general matter in chapter 8" (Soards 1999: 214).
Corinthians must choose where their allegiance lies (Fitzmyer 2008: 394; Hays 1997: 170).

Paul is juxtaposing two levels of concern, two loyalties, and two powers. One power is the power of God manifested in a clear and ultimate form in Jesus Christ and the other is labeled Demons. Paul states plainly that the Corinthian Christians are to be concerned with and involved with only God. There is no room for other affiliations, and the Corinthians are to avoid all possible compromises of their relationship to God (Soards 1999: 210).

Οὐ δύνασθε in verse 20 implies a logical, empirical and institutional negative inference. Drinking the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons are logically excluded from each other; empirically something will be destroyed if ‘you’ try; institutionally Christians cannot and still be called Christian (Thiselton 2000: 776; Godet and Cusin 1890:90). Paul is posing the radical incompatibility within the allegiance he has pictured; in very real terms Paul is painting the story of the Corinthian community (Bruce 1971: 97; Collins 1999: 381).

In essence I think that Paul is posing a contrast between various competing stories live within the Corinthian context. A pagan story wherein it was perfectly acceptable to be involved with fellowship at idol worship; a story of a community that believed it was protected in some way from judgement by its incorporation into the sacramental life of the community; a story where individuals were living as if anything goes and a story based around the self-giving displayed to them in Christ; it is to the latter story that Paul calls the Corinthians.

The idolatrous conduct on the part of the Israelites provoked God to anger; Paul’s comment in verse 22 alludes to this anger (Deut. 32: 21; Exod. 20: 4 – 5, 34:14; Psa. 78:58). Stumpff notes Paul’s pastoral motivation:
“as God seeks with holy zeal to keep his people from idolatry, so Paul
jealously watches over the church lest it fall into error" (Stumpff 1985: 284,
Bible Works Edition).

Now Paul continues his exploration of the Corinthian context and
the implicit story held within their on-going day to day lives. He effectively
asks how the Corinthians are to conduct their behaviour as it relates to the
building up of others, before going on to illustrate further from his own life and
ministry (10:23-34).

Fee proposes a chiastic structure in the following verses:

Chiastic form:

A (23-24) The criteria: the good of others
   B (25-27) Personal freedom with regard to meat
   C (28-29A) The criterion illustrated: freedom curtailed for sake of
         others
   B' (29B-30) Personal freedom defended
   A' (31-33f) The criterion generalised: that all may be saved (Fee 1987:
         478).

This is helpful and enables an interpretation of Paul's rhetorical structure. It is
now time for Paul to sum up the discussion that has been ‘on the table’ since
Chapter 8 in practical advice (Barrett 1971: 238), some loose threads must be
tied together (Fee 1987: 478).

200 Barrett entitles this section of the letter and his commentary on the following verses
201 Garland addresses the so called interpolation theories (Garland 2013: location 11196 ff.)
   and concludes “Others more reasonably attribute the apparent discrepancies to differing
   situations. One situation (1 Cor. 10: 1–22) is presumed to deal with eating sacrificial food in
   cultic context; the other (8: 1-13; 10: 23–11: 1), in a noncultic context…The imagined
   inconsistency in Paul’s response is best attributed to the complexity of the issue and his clear-
   eyed theological thinking (location 11212).
Corinthians as he had done in 6:12. He will go on to open out the principle ‘for the good of others’. Paul has two concerns in these verses: first to establish that in neutral matters one is truly free (7:19; cf. Rom. 14:5; Col 2:16); however, secondly, that, personal freedom is not the *summum bonum* or highest good of the Christian life (Fee 1987: 478); as Barth puts it: “the freedom of the Christian is the freedom to play his part in the upbuilding of the community” (Barth 1960: 305).

The concrete examples of personal freedom are sandwiched in between teaching on benefiting others (verses 23-24; 31– 1:1). One of the concrete examples is qualified by forbearance for others (28 – 29; Fee 478). I would argue that this is Paul’s primary concern. Paul concedes the truth of the Corinthian slogan (6:12; 10:23), but adds the qualifying ‘but!’ (Collins 1999: 383).

In verse 24 Paul uses a maxim that is paralleled in Romans 15:2 and Philippians 2:4; however, in these two instances the maxim is qualified by a Christocentric ethic (Rom 15:3; Phil. 2:5 ff.).

Concern for the other remains, in Bonhoeffer’s phrase, the Christomorphic pattern of the lifestyle and atoning work of ‘the Man for Others’ (cf. Matt 22: 37 – 40), and Paul will appeal to this in the last verse of this section. It is also, as he states in v. 33 and 11a, a mode of life which he himself seeks to live out (Thiselton 2000: 782)

Paul turns the argument about rights on its head, he is urging that they do not seek their own advantage but the advantage of others (Collins 1999: 386). The exhortation is drawn from the character of Christian love (13:5), modelled in the normative work of Christ (see above) and modelled in
his own life (see below) (Willis 1985: 228). I propose that these things suggest a narrative shape.

Verse 25 poses some interpretative questions (Thiselton 2000: 784). Is Paul offering permissive freedom – you need not ask questions!? Is he seeking to release ‘the weak’ from an over scrupulous conscience (Pierce 1975: 75)? Or is he placing a radical obligation on the weak to overcome their conscience (Jewett 1971: 428)? Does δια τὴν συνείδησιν refer to the conscience of the one eating the meat or that of the weak Christian brother who may be offended? Does conscience mean just that or self-awareness, a sense of consciousness (Thiselton 2000: 784)? Thiselton proposes the translation “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without asking about it to reach a judgement because of your self-awareness” (Thiselton 2000:779) and Garland suggests:

In this case, ignorance is bliss. It is not simply “What you don’t know won’t hurt you” (Jewett 1971: 428), but “Why worry needlessly about something that is clearly a matter of indifference?” In the same way that they need not worry that marriage to an unbeliever might somehow contaminate the believer (7: 13–14), they need not worry that they will be contaminated by food that may have pagan antecedents (Garland 2013: location 11377; cf. Soards 1999: 215).

At the back of Paul’s mind is the question of the other, the one for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 8:9 ff.).

Concern for the upbuilding of the church requires that he or she take into consideration the one who has provided the information (Collins 1999:388)

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202 Garland comments succinctly on Paul’s use of the Psalm in verse 26: “Paul does not complete the thought with a conclusion from the biblical citation, but it is implicit: “Nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14: 14; cf. Acts 10: 15). If it can be eaten in honour of the Lord (Rom. 14: 7), it is permitted. What Paul finds sinful is eating idol food in any setting that might give others the slightest hint that Christians sanctioned idolatry, no matter how attenuated the religious aspects attached to the meal or the place might be” (Garland 2013: location 11404).
Paul now turns to another situation that might crop up in the Greco-Roman world: the “conceivable situation in which an unbeliever invites a believer to dine”. In a similar fashion to the last exhortation Paul urges that “Christians need not, out of conscience, give their host the third degree—a highly inappropriate and unlikely event—to insure that the food is acceptable” (Garland 2013: location 11430).

Soards suggests that Paul is teaching on the applicability of the behaviour he is calling for through the posing of an imaginary situation in verses 27 and 28 (Soards 1999: 216). However, I suggest that Paul is setting up a contrast with a purpose in mind, he is limiting personal freedom and qualifying it by the rule he set up in verse 24. The word ἱερόθυτόν is found only in verse 28 in the whole of the New Testament. Even if Paul had invented the interlocutor it is unlikely he would have used the term if the person was a fellow Christian.

Both verse 25 and 27 end with the same phrase ἐσθίετε μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντες διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν:

This repetition serves to amplify through repetition (Cicero Part. Or. 15.54) that in all situations involving meat, even in one in which the meat very certainly has been offered to an idol, conscience is not involved (Watson 1989: 305).

However, Watson goes on to argue that:

The reduplication that ties the first two examples of v. 25 and v. 27 together, "eat questioning nothing because of conscience" … finds a contrast in the qualification of v. 28… The audience is led to expect another repetition of "eat questioning nothing because of conscience" and is instead confronted with the opposite: "Do not eat for the sake of… conscience" (p. 306).

203 Witherington suggests that verse 27 is “a real situation” while verse 28 is likely to be hypothetical (Witherington 1995: 5361; cf. Garland 2013: 11443).
204 Fee suggests the interlocutor is likely to have been a pagan because he uses the pagan term (Fee 1987: 483; cf. Bauer 2000: 3673, Bible Works Edition; Thayer 1889: 755, Bible Works Edition).
Again, what is involved is the welfare of ‘the other’ (Bruce 1971: 100; Soards 1999: 216; Thiselton 2000: 787). Paul now calls for the principle of verses 23 and 24 to be applied. “The whole thrust of Paul’s argument throughout is that the other person, especially the brother, shall not suffer any harm” (Grosheide 1954: 242).

After the parenthesis of verses 28 and 29a Paul now comes back to what he said about conscience in verse 27 (Fitzmyer 2008: 401), “Christian freedom must be exercised with the conscience of others in mind” (Watson 1989: 315).

Thiselton defines the meaning of verse 29 (and 30) superbly:

If it genuinely does not matter whether I eat or not, why choose the path that raises unnecessary difficulties? What is the point of freedom if I cannot choose not to cause problems? (Thiselton 2000: 790, emphasis mine).205

Verse 30 brings out the absurdity of the situation; the strong Christian’s conduct would create a contradiction between his thanksgiving and the wounding of the conscience of the weak (Godet and Cusin 1890: 99). If the Corinthians are indeed free they might as well choose to do what does the least harm (Thiselton 2000: 792). It is for this very reason that Paul can sum up in the following verse: “Εἴτε οὖν ἐσθίετε εἴτε πίνετε εἴτε τι ποιεῖτε, πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ ποιεῖτε” meaning that they will give no offence to Jews, Greeks or the Church of God (v. 32).

205 For a discussion of what might appear as an interpolation by a later writer “For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience?” see (Garland 2013: location 11512; Thiselton 2000: 788). Witherington suggests “perhaps the least objectionable view is that the rhetorical question… is again the objection of the Corinthians, as in v. 23a, and does not represent Paul’s own view” (Witherington 1995: location 5374).
The verbal adjective in verse 32 ἀπρόσκοποι can mean “not causing to fall” (Stählin 1985: section 668, Bible Works Edition). While the word is not identical to πρόσκομμα (cf. 8:9) it still denotes generally destructive qualities (Thiselton 2000:794); Paul is challenging the potential destructive behaviour of those who would argue for ‘rights’.

The imperative of verse 32 picks up the concerns of verses 23 and 24, but now stated negatively. Paul’s exhortation is supported by welfare for all people (Collins 1999: 389). His theology is driven by a social concern (ibid.). Paul is moving towards a general principle using teaching about food offered to idols as a basis for concern for others and indeed a concern based upon sacrifice (Grosheide 1954: 245).

**Paul’s Story**

I have considered the story that Paul offered to the Corinthians in the form of a story from ancient Israel, offered as an example; the implicit story of the Corinthian context, a lived story within that community; finally I turn to the implicit story of Paul which draws on and takes its cue from the story of Christ.

The goal of Paul’s ministry was the salvation of all through his message of the cross (cf. 1:18, 2:1, and 9:22). However his desire to ‘please everyone’ was not about currying favour (cf. 1 Thess. 2:4, Gal. 1:0), indeed he had argued earlier that his message was offensive (1 Cor. 10:23).

Paul’s own commentary on this text can be found in Rom. 15: 1-3, where “pleasing others” is defined as “for his/her good, to build him/her up,” which in turn appeals to the example of Christ in his suffering (Fee 1987: 490, emphasis mine).

An emphasis on everyone and everything had dominated Paul’s discussion on ‘meat offered to idols’ (the word πάς occurs twenty eight times
in its various forms; cf. Collins 1999: 390), his goal now is the ‘advantage’ of the many so that they may be saved, picking up on a theme with which he had begun this particular pericope (verses 23 and 24).

In verse 33 Paul summarises his life and work ἐν χριστῷ (cf. Rom. 15:17; 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 2:17), believing that God acted through his Christ-like selflessness to bring salvation to others (Soards 1999: 218). Similarly, in chapter 9 Paul had developed his teaching on self-denial, and within the teaching of Chapter 10 he has asked them to make sacrifice that was painful to them; now he returns to his own example (Godet and Cusin 1890: 101) and in 11:1 makes it clear that he sees his own pattern of behaviour as being that of imitating Christ. 206

Barrett makes the point that Paul was wise enough to know that his life and ministry is a lot more accessible to the Corinthians than the life of the historical Jesus (Barrett 1971: 246). BAGD suggests for μιμηταί the concept of model (Bauer 2000: 4930), but Thiselton suggests that pattern is probably a better word (Thiselton 2000:796). “The pattern is that of placing the welfare of “the other” before that of oneself, and in this sense Paul himself takes Christ as his pattern” (Thiselton 2000:796). The antidote to their behaviour which was based on wisdom and knowledge is once more Christ crucified, embodied within the apostle (Fee 1987: 490).207

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206 I am fully aware that I am building a lot on what are only two verses; however, these two verses reveal an implicit narrative embodied in the life and ministry of Paul. Just as others have argued that some of the Pauline literature suggests an implicit narrative of Christ, so I am arguing that these verses and others within the epistle suggest a Christocentric paradigm and orientation shaping Paul and his theology.

207 There could be a serious charge of paternalism at this point, Garland summarises the view of Elizabeth Castelli (Castelli 1991) "Castelli (1991: 111–15) rejects this rhetoric of imitation as a discourse of power that sets Paul up in the similar position of Christ over the community and implicitly functions to make sameness equal salvation and difference equal damnation. This jaundiced view of Paul understands him simply to be making a power play to gain control over the Corinthians without providing anything concrete for them to imitate” (Garland 2013:
Paul’s call for the Corinthians to imitate him “does not issue from some attempt to put them under his thumb. It springs instead from his conviction that the whole Christian community should reflect the love and compassion of Christ” (Garland 2013: location 11640).

For Paul, such imitation means one thing only: shaping our lives in accordance with the pattern of Jesus’ self-sacrificing love. The imitation of Christ is, therefore focused on the cross. This is precisely what the Corinthians were failing to perceive in their quest to affirm personal freedom for themselves. Paul seeks throughout this section to impress upon them that life in the church is life in fellowship with those weak ones for whom Christ died (8:11). To live in such a fellowship is to find oneself called perpetually towards Jesus’ example of costly service on behalf of others (Hays 1997: 181).

The Groups Following The Exegesis

As I shared with the group following the offering of my historical-critical exegesis, once again clear connections with the context we share and the material from 1 Corinthians 10-11:1 became apparent. As I did in the previous chapter I offer the findings under three sub headings:

A previous and inherited back story

A current and contemporary story

A new story: embodying a Christ-ian orientation.\textsuperscript{208}

In each case these stories were teased out and shaped through an engagement with the chosen passage.

\textit{A previous and inherited back story}

\textsuperscript{208} I am interpreting Christian as Christ-one, hence the spelling.
Participants recognised a ‘back’ story within our own context as we considered the story that Paul offered to the Corinthians of ‘our forefathers’. They were able to make connections in the sense that Israel had known spiritual blessings but had lost those blessings through sin. The Circuit had lost some sense of focus and was in danger of losing some spiritual blessings. One person commented:

Where have we come from, we need to keep our integrity and our faith. We miss out now because we do not have the same faith as those that went before, there are gaps in our spirituality.

One member likened it to an experience on a holiday:

The passage reminds me of when we were on holiday. We went out to see dolphins on a boat. It wasn’t bad going out; but then, in a couple of minutes the sea changed and became very rough. It caused us all to have sea sickness. The captain turned round to go back to base; he told us to concentrate on the shore line as a point of focus and that would help. It did! Have we lost our point of focus? Have we, like the Corinthians become so comfortable, so sure of ourselves that we have lost our focus? Have we forgotten where we came from?

The groups thought through what a lesson from our forefathers might look like. How might we learn from their experience? Surely there were lessons to learn!

The people in our context get comfortable in what they know, “it becomes rather like the Corinthians’ security in the sacraments and the ‘wisdom of this world’”. Paradoxically rather than being comfortable, there was a danger that members within the circuit were looking back to the glory days, a time when “our little chapel was full most weeks, and bursting at the seams at anniversaries”. The paradox was clear, members are comfortable in some ways, but look back to a ‘better time’ in other ways. Members felt that the
situation as we know it has come about because of a failure to keep some
sense of continuity with the faithfulness of the past:

I suspect that the faithful people who built the chapels had a strong
call, and as one old lady told me years ago, gave sacrificially – they
gave what they couldn’t afford, in order to progress the work of the
kingdom.

It was at this point that we began to reflect evermore about our current
context;\(^{209}\) I now, therefore move to the second sub-heading.

*A current and contemporary story*

Following on from the last quote above, one participant noted: “God
has no grandchildren, only sons and daughters” and then asked: “Are too
many of us living on the coat tails of our parents and grandparents faith?” The
question then prompted some sense of critique, if we are living off an inherited
faith there will be problems:

If we are, [living off an inherited faith] we are bound to fail. We have
to commit ourselves as deeply to the faith as our predecessors did,
and then claim the promises of God for ourselves; then we might
stand a chance of changing our churches and our circuit.

One member of the clergy group noted that in fact the analogy broke down:

The danger is that we could miss the prize by failing to apply the
new thing God is doing and letting go of the past; but then the
analogy breaks down, because in the past the Methodist prize was
good and in Corinth the past and idol worship was bad.

We went on to explore this further. Yes it was true that originally the Methodist
Church within our context was a pioneering church, a place where people
were deeply committed to spiritual values and perhaps even a Christ-centred
model of being Christian;\(^{210}\) however to be where we are now means that at

\(^{209}\) Indeed it was hard in some ways to separate out these two sub headings and their focus.
\(^{210}\) Our circuit is very close to the birth-place of the ‘Bible Christians’ “The Bible Christian
Church was a Methodist denomination founded by William O’Bryan, a Wesleyan Methodist
local preacher, on 18th October 1815 in North Cornwall, with the first society, just 22
members, meeting at Lake Farm in Shebbear, Devon”
some point people let go of these things and have turned to being church as we know it today.

We could explicate this further; just as the Corinthian community were seemingly holding on to some past way of being, that is pagan worship, an obsession with the wisdom of this world etc., so too people in our context were fixated with something that was held within their history, traditions and a wisdom that draws on the past and a particular kind of idealism. Herein was a paradox, our past had a tremendous story to tell of a pioneering and ground-breaking spirit, but we could so easily be tied to that past and make it an idol.

Similarly that was an acknowledgement that some past traditions were not helpful within our present context. An example of this kind of inherited ‘religion’ was a concern with the issue of not shopping on Sundays in order to protect ‘the Sabbath’. One member suggested “some people shop in Morrisons on Sunday at ten o’clock in order not to get copped by the evangelicals”; however, surely this was to miss the point, another member commented “Paul was drawing out, caring for and having a Christocentric concern for the ‘other’ – that is the real heart of the message”. Members then began to draw up comparisons with Paul’s teaching on fellowship and participation, how what we do now will affect others. One of the clergy group made the point “The main thing is to glorify God in everything we do and not

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Christian_Church accessed 9/2/15, (cf. Wilkinson 1983: 294 ff.). The Bible Christians are perceived to have ignited a new spiritual awakening in North Devon/Cornwall. I am convinced that while we can look at these things through rose coloured spectacles there is some perception that this movement was a richly profound spiritual awakening; the Bishop of Truro recognised that “Methodism had kept religion alive in Cornwall when the Church had almost lost the sacred flame” (Benson 1899: 430). Much of that Methodism in the South West at that time would have consisted in the Bible Christians – indeed a good number of our chapels were Bible Christian chapels.
to please ourselves!” (1 Cor. 10: 31), holding this paradigm would mean living our lives not just for God but for other people.

Just as Paul has the task of interpreting the Christ story for Corinth (1 Cor. 1: 24, 1: 30, 2:6-8), a story that would challenge their current story to the extent that they could no longer enjoy fellowship with the things of their world and with Christ (10:21), so too we are called to share a truthful story and with integrity.

One member of the clergy group asked:

Does Paul see himself as Moses leading them to the Promised Land – perhaps our role is just to keep standing by those who want to enter the Promised Land – Moses led but they died in the wilderness. Could our folk find themselves dying in the wilderness? Could our role be about standing with those who will miss it?

On the contrary members of the laity group saw the clergy having a very different task:

There is a need for personal journeys, they were led from Egypt but they had everything done for them. There was an Exodus from Egypt but then dissatisfaction set in. People have to make the journey for themselves but with leadership and challenge from our ministers.

However, one laity member asked:

Are our leaders in the circuit stating truth, challenging others? Are they swayed and go with the flow rather than standing firm. If they are to challenge others, if they are to offer leadership, what shape might that challenge and that leadership take?

Could it be that Paul was in some way attempting to lead people at Corinth to a new promised land? To answer this question I turn to my last sub-heading.

A new story offered in Christ
While it was not explicitly stated members of the two groups hinted towards and implied some sense of a new story for the contemporary ecclesial context of which we are a part. I have already noted that it is perceived that our infrastructure, perhaps exemplified in our buildings (the numbers of chapels we hold onto), becomes the problem:

Our buildings are our biggest idols – we confine God to a building – the application is: this is what I grew up with, this is my ‘idol-meat’; I grew up eating ‘idol-meat’, I grew up with this building. The whole point is that Jesus is the channel for the blessing – not the building!

We glorify our buildings, Paul speaks about glorifying God.

In a very real sense members saw this holding on to the past as somehow turning away from Christ and his purpose for us.

We cannot have a foot in both camps. Just because we are not breaking the law by our actions, it doesn’t mean that we are living in the way that Christ wants us to.

Perhaps we, like the people Paul is addressing, need to be constantly reminded that to live in God’s way means that we are following the designer’s instructions, and as we do that, we are able to live the very best life that it is possible for any human being to live.

Paul writes elsewhere that he: ‘forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead, he presses on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.’ Maybe we need to be asking the question: is that our own personal goal, and is that our Church/circuit goal?

They are examples to us that not everyone who gets out of Egypt makes it into the Promised Land. If it was easy for them to lose the power how much more necessary is it for us to regain that power if we want to maintain our Christian lives and if we want our churches to survive, thrive and grow! 211

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211 The participant identified the ‘they’ as both the Israelites and some within the community at Corinth.
While members of the group did not explicate very much further what following an alternative Christocentric story might mean, they clearly felt that there was an alternative story to both the story fixed in the past and the story we currently now know. I felt these stories could have been developed further, however I will engage that particular argument in my concluding chapter.

Conclusion

Following the same pattern as in Chapter Four, in this chapter too I have set out a summary report of how the two groups initially reacted to the theme of story, via their engagement with 1 Cor. 10–11.1 using the CBS method. I followed this, again, with my own exegesis of the passage based on the standard resources of biblical scholarship, especially commentaries. In particular, I have drawn attention to three stories implicit in this text: the story of Israel in the past, the story of the Corinthians in the present, and the story of Paul as imitator of Christ. Even more strongly than in the previous chapter, it should be clear here how the presentation of exegetical information, especially the idea of the various stories glimpsed in the text, led the groups to richer engagement with the text, and a stronger development of parallel insights into their current context and its challenges. Once again, the historical-critical exegesis added a positive dimension to the process.

Finally, I now turn to my concluding chapter in which I analyse some of the key findings and implications from my research and also identify some of the limitations of the work. Given the aims of the thesis overall, I need to ask
whether the narrative approach to Paul – and specifically the combination of Hauerwasian themes, a CBS approach, and historical exegesis – has in the end helped to enrich scriptural engagement in my own contemporary ecclesial setting.
Chapter six

Conclusion

I began my work stating that I wanted to explore whether a narrative approach
to a Pauline text would enable a reading for modern-day Christian purposes.
Stated more broadly my aim was to explore the combination of four discrete
elements within a hermeneutical interface and dialogue towards this purpose
(see introduction, Figure 1). I was concerned to explore Paul's implicit story of
Christ as a paradigm for Churches within Bude and Holsworthy Methodist
Circuit.

My approach was to suggest that the trajectory of reading Paul
through a narrative model, initiated by Richard Hays, could be ‘read
alongside’ the theology of Hauerwas, with its strong focus on narrative, and
that the reactions and engagement of groups from my contemporary
ecclesiological context could be explored using the CBS methodology,
supplementing the groups’ initial reactions with material that represented a
broad historical exegesis. At the beginning of my research I had had a ‘hunch’
that contemporary discipleship formation could be facilitated through the
partnership between ordinary (intuitive) readers and the tools of scholarship.

The narrative reading of Paul has not filtered down in any
established and thoroughgoing way for the utilisation for contemporary
Christian discipleship purposes, i.e. a reading for a particular Christian
community. I indicated that there were hints of this possibility in chapter one
(pp. 36 ff.), yet, to my knowledge this has never been overtly stated and
explored. However, it was also my conviction that it was inadequate simply to
turn to the Pauline epistles. Paul's 'voice' was to be contrasted and brought
into dialogue with other voices. There were other ‘texts’ to read, the texts of Hauerwas’ theology and of the lives of people within a ‘particular’ contemporary Christian context. I was also mindful of the fact that Paul’s voice is hard to hear in a contemporary setting and is distant in culture and time, therefore a process of careful ‘listening’ was required, utilising the tools of an engagement with the text at an intuitive and historical critical exegetical level.

My thesis was therefore a rich marriage of four elements: A perceived implicit Pauline story within the Pauline corpus – gathered through an engagement with a trajectory initiated by Hays; Paul’s proposed story – the vision of a crucified and self-sacrificing Christ, gathered through historical critical exegesis of selected passages from 1 Corinthians (not previously taken up in narrative analysis); a theological story from beyond ourselves, a vision of how people might be shaped and have they being in a wider story that goes beyond the story of their lives – gathered in an engagement with the vision and narrative constructs of Stanley Hauerwas; finally a contemporary contextual story – gathered through an engagement of the CBS methodology within my own context of ministry.

My thesis was also an exploration of a number of conceptual binary opposites, a comparison between perhaps complimentary, yet different concepts: drawing out the distinction between and yet at the same time bringing together, the contemporary and the ancient; the scholarly and the ordinary or intuitive; text and world. It was my conviction that these opposites could be gathered and structured in a creative synthesis all for the purposes of a narrative reading as stated above. Herein was the broad and large brush
stroke landscape. What would the mapping of that landscape look like in practice?

In Chapter One I set about demonstrating the legitimacy and validity of reading Paul’s letters through a narrative hermeneutic. I noted the genesis of this paradigm in the early work of Hays, I then noted that Wright (et al) took the suggestions that Hays had made and engaged the paradigm in ever more fruitful ways. Petersen suggested that the model could be used for mapping Paul in his various social relationships; Campbell, Fowl, and Gorman suggested that this hermeneutical tool might be suggestive of an ethical and spiritual engagement of Pauline texts. I also considered some of the critiques of the narrative trajectory in Pauline studies, ultimately concluding that the model was fruitful for the interpretation of Paul. Chapter one was therefore purposive within the overall shape of the thesis: an exploration of the idea that the narrative paradigm can be a first order step for further explication of the Pauline literature.

However, I came to the conclusion this hermeneutical process had not gone far enough in terms of the purposes I was suggesting: How might the revealed and unveiled story of Jesus – within the trajectory Hays had suggested – speak into the story and the narrative of the contemporary Church? This created an impetus to explore a theology, within contemporary understanding, that drew upon the story of Jesus and narrative as whole for the purposes of current ecclesiological formation.

Having worked with the writing of Hauerwas in the past I was drawn to his theology once more. I was aware that in his earlier writings he had centred his theology on the story of Jesus as a narrative paradigm for the
community known as the church and the individual Christian within it. *Chapter two* was therefore an exploration of his theology under the two concepts of vision and narrative – part of his broader theological framework. I wanted to explore how Hauerwas has suggested narrative and the related concept of vision as part of a conceptual framework for understanding Christian community.

However, Hauerwas’ definition of the story and of church was shown to be rather too broad and generalised, certainly lacking in detailed engagement with either specific biblical texts (notably, the Pauline writings) or specific ecclesial contexts. Therefore, I perceived a need to root and ground this Hauerwasian story, first through the careful and attentive uncovering of the story of Jesus in Paul and secondly the exploration of that story in a specific and discrete community of faith and with a particular group of Christians. I therefore proceeded to explore the story of Jesus in Paul and in the theology of Hauerwas, within a specific local ‘place’ (Lawrence 2009), engaged through intuitive and face value readings; furthermore I sought to discover how the story which Paul had offered to the community at Corinth, abstracted by historical critical readings might (or might not) speak into the story of our lives together within North Devonian and Cornish Methodism.

*Chapter three* was therefore an exploration of the CBS methodology and its potential to engage the second of the conceptual frameworks noted above. The CBS approach implied a way of engaging the text in local concerns and interests while at the same time taking seriously the critique of Hauerwas that his approach was too inexact and sweeping. I set out the argument of the CBS methodology: contextual and particular concerns
within ‘place’ are all important in any hermeneutical journey. The chapter also
challenged the bias towards Eurocentric and historical-critical approaches to
the text of scripture, while suggesting that historical critical exegesis might
have a part to play, thereby suggesting the possibility of a partnership
between intuitive and scholarly readers and the creation of a democratic
reading space. *Chapter three* pointed toward a framework for the research in
Chapters four and five in terms of a democratic reading space.

In *Chapter four* I considered the concept of vision. I stated in
*Chapter Two* that Hauerwas had suggested that it is a failing for the Christian
to be unsuccessful in imagination, “to abandon or forget the resources God
has given us as the means of calling us to his kingdom” (Hauerwas 1985: 59,
emphases mine; cf. p. 59 above). First of all, I used the CBS approach to
explore my groups’ initial reactions to a chosen text on vision (1 Cor 1.18-31)
and then set out the basis of the exegetical analyses that I subsequently
presented and discussed with the same groups. I considered that Paul was
reminding the Corinthian Church of the resources for Christian community
held within the Christocentric ‘vision’. I investigated what vision might mean
within a local context and by way of a reflection on Paul’s epistemic challenge
to the Corinthian Church; all of the above being negotiated through a process
of exegesis – and certainly not limiting that exegesis to historical-critical
exegesis.

A similar process was undertaken in *Chapter Five* and in relation to
narrative. Again, using the CBS approach my groups engaged with a text on
story (1 Cor 10.1–11.1), after which I presented an exegetical analysis
summarised in the chapter above. Was the alternative and thought-provoking
narrative offered to the Corinthian Church to be opened out through an interpretative engagement in a comparable course of exegesis? Paul was challenging the story of the Corinthian context by offering a Christocentric story. Was the inherited and sometimes unfavourable story within a particular context of ministry challenged by this story?

Some key themes within the group sessions and dialogue.

The initial meetings with both groups structured around the two themes of vision and narrative and focused on 1 Cor. 1.18-25 and 10.1–11.1, were fruitful and worthwhile, but led to somewhat clichéd and superficial responses and engagement with the texts (see Chapters 4-5 above). Through my exegesis and in dialogue within the groups, we subsequently drew out a number of themes together that were especially applicable to our context (see pp. 159 ff. on vision; pp. 201 ff. on narrative); I suggest that these themes would have remained dormant and unexpressed deprived of the partnership between initial readings and historical-critical exegetical input.

One of the areas that sprung out forcibly as we considered the theme of vision was the contesting of any single application of vision; this challenged Hauerwas’ rather monolithic concept of ‘the’ church. Challenging a single sense of vision, exegesis brought out a multi-focused emphasis – How might the Christocentric vision of a saviour who overturns ‘this-worldly ideas’ work in the myriad of questions and notions to be found within our particular church circuit? Christocentric vision (i.e. an orientation to a particular way of being based upon a picture of Christ), gleaned through an engagement with 1
Corinthians, might well be a concept that people within my context of ministry would be able to ‘gather around’ as a particular paradigm of being a Christian Church. Members of the group noted that “the basic Christocentric vision (of self-giving love) was still seen to be so vitally important” and this particular centre was drawn out through the exegesis, developed in ways that might ‘fit’ particular discipleship concerns which then had varied applications.

Similarly, the theme of story was engaged powerfully in our reflections on 1 Cor. 10:1–11:1, particularly after an exploration of the historical-critical exegesis. Initially participants had been drawn to a general concentration on idolatry, asking initial questions about what this might mean in contemporary living. As we concentrated further upon the text, the theme began to be developed in terms of what our story might be contrasted with, in what might be perceived as the idolatrous story we currently inhabit. Once again all of this was echoed in ways that became particular and focused to our context. Therefore, comments were made that indicated that we are in danger of losing our story just as the Israelites had lost their spiritual blessings. People in our situation are obsessed with something that was held within their history, dated tradition and a knowledge involving a particular kind of naïve romanticism; participants saw this in terms of the veneration of an archaic chapel culture.\(^\text{212}\)

To illustrate this point, the exegesis on vision drew out the possibility of perceiving the text in terms of a new orientation, an epistemic

\(^{212}\) The term ‘fossilised chapel culture’ was articulated in one of the groups, it was a term I had first heard at the Methodist Faith and Order network biannual conference, at Durham, articulated by a former Methodist Chair of District.
challenge and the concept of sacrifice; similarly the exploration of narrative uncovered the themes of a previous and inherited back story, a current and contemporary story and a new story: embodying a Christian orientation. The exegesis and the grass-roots dialogue worked fruitfully together and enabled a deeper reading of the text in developing these themes, themes I would argue were developed through a narrative approach to the text. The concept of Christocentric orientation had particular contextual application within both Corinth and North Devonian and Cornish Methodism, similarly the concept of a different story as a challenge to an existing story was a fruitful point of reflection. The fruit of exegesis (broadly stated, i.e. not just historical-critical exegesis) was to explore what these things meant in Corinth and then to ask the hermeneutical question whether this had any currency within our context.

I recorded above that I thought it was a shame that within a setting in which the Methodist Church is being offered a vision that involves sacrifice there was no biblical picture of that sacrificial orientation (pp. 161-162; cf. note 157), a picture that might be enabled and facilitated through a dialogue with a Christocentric vision held within Paul’s story of Jesus. Similar things could also be said of more local and parochial concerns in which a vision had been expressed (see appendices for the local vision statement). A biblical input, the result of the partnership between exegesis and local reading groups would have offered further reflective resources.

I suggested at the outset that orientation, and a particular way of being, would be important for my thesis (cf. note 8). Martyn Atkins offers a
calling to the people called Methodists which invites them toward this orientation within the story of Christ:

Jesus is the beginning and the end; the Way, the Truth and the Life; the model and example; the inspiration and means… discipleship of Jesus Christ shapes the whole of life (Atkins 2010: 55).

I suggested that there was a need to ‘cash out’ what this means in practice – to utilise the story of Jesus and his sacrifice to draw out what that might mean as a story for the Church. I wish to argue that the dialogue I have initiated in my own context facilitated and enabled this process, though I am well aware of the need for further on-going work.

**The limitations of this research**

I noted on page 133 that I saw the work of the two groups as “needing further explication” and merely “as hints towards a further reflection and praxis.” I then suggested that might well be fulfilled through an on-going CBS engagement in its purest terms (therefore without a strong element of historical-critical exegesis); however, it is my conviction that the partnership as explored in this thesis between CBS and historical exegesis would continue to bear fruit, but at this stage I simply do not know.

This project would need to be extended further to test out the on-going viability of the suggested hermeneutical process. To really test the thesis further, similar work would need to be engaged. I would need to repeat the process over and again; perhaps exploring further Pauline material. At its heart this thesis does propose that a narrative reading of Paul explicates and generates a story valuable and relevant for the purposes of Christian
formation. I think in terms of an exploration of 1 Corinthians there is a story useful for reflection and consideration for my context of ministry but would this be true in other contexts? Only further developed work would test this out.

Another question I have considered concerning the validity of the research I have conducted is this: Would it make a difference where in the hermeneutical circle you entered the dialogue? What if I had offered the exegesis to begin with, would there have been a change in the findings? Would an exegetical exercise offered first have endangered a local perspective; conversely, has a local perspective influenced the way I came to the texts – was I looking for patterns that the offerings of ‘place’ had suggested that would influence my historical exegetical work? While I explored the commentaries etc. with a perceived objectivity, I am mindful that objectivity is neither a possibility nor perhaps indeed even an ideal! There is inevitably an inextricable relationship between a particular context and the generation of exegesis.

**The potential for the model I am suggesting.**

I now wish to consider the potential of the model I am suggesting. Is the methodology highlighted within this thesis something that might bear fruit in further exploratory exegesis utilising the contributions of intuitive and scholarly readings of the text?

Significantly, in this regard, Horrell writes:

Christian character and virtue are developed through a process of conformity to Christ, whose paradigmatic self-giving for others is commemorated in worship and ritual, and through imitation of Paul and his co-workers in which the christomorphic pattern can also be
seen. Just as Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics is narrative dependent, and focused on the formation of the character of the church, so too is Paul's (Horrell 2005: 280)

Horrell seems to be suggesting a parallel process within the theology of Paul and Hauerwas; Lawrence also suggests a way of enabling this process within the CBS methodology:

The utility of these models [i.e., CBS] of understanding, for liberating the personal and collective stories of readers from the straitjacket of dispassionate 'modernist' modes of interpretation, surely has a part to play in rescuing biblical studies from 'the boredom of conventional and impersonal reading of the Bible, from separating a person from the scholar…' They likewise have a part to play in true discernment of the word in various contexts, a word that itself was most profoundly imaged 'in place' by 'pitching his tent among us' (John 1.14) (Lawrence 2009: location 2620).

What is so important to stress is that the stories and concepts uncovered were as a result of a dialogue between ordinary readers and trained readers, intuitive and historical-critical exegetical input. In fact, I was struck by the sense in which the exegesis often affirmed and confirmed what had been perceived contextually, while enriching the engagement with further insight and understanding. This was a confirmation and endorsement of my initial thoughts as I embarked upon the research; I hold the conviction that ordinary readers and trained exegetes can work together in a creative process and furthermore the implicit story of Christ discovered through a synthesis and engagement with the stories of an ancient and contemporary church does indeed bear fruit.

One of the main critiques of Hauerwas noted above was he argues that truth was to be discovered within the church over and against truth being perceived as revealed truth (pp. 65 and 73 ff.). I argued that Hauerwas
wanted to hold to the story of Jesus as the story for the Church but slips into the danger of making the church the place of the revelation. I critique Hauerwas for his move towards the precedence of the (universal) Christian community, however, I argue that it is in the ‘particular’ of the communities I know, that the storied is embodied. Does this risk coming back, full circle, to Hauerwas’ position? I submit that it does not.

The creative tension in the suggested dialogue is that an exegetical exploration of the scriptural story becomes something of a check against any simplistic bias to the local and the particular while giving the local and particular credence within the reflective practice; similarly, the prioritising of the scriptural story is held somewhat to account and articulated in the local and the parochial exigencies and needs to interpret the text for resident concerns. Hauerwas argues that we make sense of our Christian foundations (which includes scripture), but his communitarian hermeneutic has been found wanting. Perhaps a similar thing could be said about a CBS methodology in isolation from other resources/tools. Conversely a dry academic (or purely historical) exploration of the text is not complete in and of itself for the purposes I am advocating.

It seems to me that there is a need to discover the different stories within the interpretative process and this is why the revealing of both a local and a scriptural story has a part to play. The exploration of a particular ecclesiological context at Corinth drew out the particular application of the hermeneutic and paradigm. It may well be that different parts of the Pauline literature and diverse contemporary contexts would draw out different
paradigms but all with some reference to the central concept of a Christocentric focus, the story of Christ.

This was a partnership between me as a trained reader, other trained readers (i.e. clergy) and ordinary and intuitive (lay) readers. It is important to note that the relationship between ordinary and trained readers is a complex one: ordinary and trained readers may have different ‘functions’ within the reading process. What are the different roles that the ordinary/trained readers play (Anum 2007: 13) and what about the whole complex area of power relationships (p. 14; cf. Kahl 2007:150-51)? The dialogue itself sustained the concept of the need for translation and interpretation of the concepts, for example, “we have to translate Christ crucified… What does it really mean for us to preach this way?” (p. 118). I was very mindful of my place within this process and of my perceived ‘power’ (as a key leadership figure in the context), even when I refrained from contributing to the discussion.

Even when ‘trained’ readers have acknowledged the place of ‘ordinary’ readers they still might take a superior attitude which emanates from their knowledge. During this process I have become much more attuned to my own privileged position and more and more committed to ‘hearing’ the other’s understanding and insight.

The work of Schüssler Fiorenza helped enormously in developing a sense of perspective on these things. Taking the concept of liberation seriously, she asserts that a dialogue can serve in radically democratic terms “as energy that moves us and invigorates life” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009:}
It is ever my hope that my own ‘Biblical knowledge’ has as an agenda a liberating process for those I work alongside; it was my perception that the process I have recorded during this research moved ever closer to these things.

Similarly Christopher Rowland suggests that with the rise of more participative exegesis questions are to be asked about the role of the ‘expert’ (Rowland 2006: 23). My role was in no way to ‘correct’ the initial engagement of the groups with the text; their exploration and probing of the passages was a rich resource for grounding the text within a context, their role was key to the hermeneutical process; I felt that my role was to facilitate and nudge towards a further understanding that would open out ever richer applications of the text. Rowland points out the potentiality of this creative process:

There is every possibility that those who participate in the Bible study will have insights open to them which will be every bit as profound as anything that I can offer, and frequently more so. The primary task is to enable that to happen. I look for ways in which participants in biblical interpretation can utilise or appropriate my expertise as a professor of Holy Scripture as well as the mutual support, insight and constraints of reading together in community (Rowland 2006: 23; cf. p. 24).

Rowland describes it as a mistake to suppose that we have completed the task with historical critical exegesis (p.25) and points out that Paul placed an importance on the Spirit, which gives life contrasted with the letter which kills (p.24). This is similar to the observation made by Schüssler Fiorenza about a practice which liberates. Going on and drawing upon the work of West, Rowland redescribes the work of exegetes:

The task of biblical scholars is not to do the reading for ordinary readers, nor simply to except uncritically their readings. Rather, it is
to read the Bible, as he puts it, *with* ordinary readers (p. 24, author’s emphasis).

Again Schüssler Fiorenza argues:

*We must turn away from positivist scientistic scholarship, functionalist skills orientation, or fundamentalist anxiety; instead we must envision and claim radical democratic ethos and pedagogical space* (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009: 6)

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that this will only happen when we create a participatory democracy (pp.7ff.), which seeks not so much a perception by the facilitator of an empowerment of people but a process of learning *from* and *with* the grassroots base (p.10). In contrast I noted above that Hauerwas argues for the “slow training of our vision … as we have the story mediated to us by masters who have learned what the story says” (Hauerwas 1988: 103, emphases mine). Schüssler Fiorenza rejects this type of pedagogy:

Paradigms can also be constructed in democratic terms as promoting collaboration, interaction, and dialogue/debate… Paradigms may no longer be conceptualised in terms of competition and over-and-againstness but should be understood in terms of both difference and shared common ground (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009: 55, emphasis mine; cf. 83, 141, and 149).

I fully concur: as an exegete I was no ‘master’ but a fellow traveller on the road of discovery; many of the ‘local’ insights were profound and precious.

It may well appear that I have taken a detour from my initial research question which was *Can a narrative approach to Paul’s epistles help to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings?*’ However, it seemed to me that these hermeneutical questions were all important in answering this question. My answer, is a positive one, but one that has been
fleshed out in more detail through a dialogue between various methods. The narrative approach to Paul can be related to contemporary ecclesial settings partly through employing key concepts from Hauerwas’ narrative theology, and then through engaging local groups using the CBS method, and enriching their engagement with the text through historical-critical exegesis.

Similarly, I noted that in having a generalised picture of the church, Hauerwas is in danger of subjugating other voices. Ogletree’s point is worthy of reiteration that the focus on any particular community leaves unexpressed an “indefinite range of alternative articulations of the same story” (Ogletree 1980: 29, emphases mine). I am therefore arguing that the local and particular has a voice within the hermeneutical spiral but that the local and particular also engages a story from beyond itself. The important thing would be to set up a continued dialogue in the ways that I have argued. To go back to Schüssler Fiorenza, she argues that:

A suppression of present-day theological socioecclesial locations and religious-theological interests is due largely to the prevailing assumption that the form of exegetical commentary demands scientific objectivity and disinterestedness rather than a self-conscious reading/hearing that is engaged and perspectival (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009: 36).

I concur and I simply do not accept the perspective of Philip Davies which Schüssler Fiorenza identifies (p. 41 ff. referencing Davies 2004); according to Schüssler Fiorenza Davies “postulates two independent domains – that of academy and church – which, in his view, must not interfere with each other” (p. 41, emphasis mine). Schüssler Fiorenza goes on:

Such a dichotomy between academic and confessional biblical studies not only turns the Bible into a book of the elite, but also
reduces the logical [sic] studies to confessional studies… Such a dualistic, destruction of the disciplinary ethos aggravates, rather than alleviates the problems that biblical studies face” (p. 44).

I fully agree, and this is why I argue for a methodology that sees historical critical and contextual and local interpretations working in a creative partnership and process for the purpose of the discovery of ‘a narrative approach to Paul’s epistles helping to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings’; I fully reject the duality that Davies suggests. I passionately believe that experience is one dimension in Biblical Interpretation, but it should not be the only thing we bring; conversely I argue that academic processes require experience to root and ground it in the ways I am suggesting.

As noted above the corollary of Hauerwas’ position is that he comes to an idealised view of the church, a church that then lacks epistemic means to articulate a narrative from beyond itself. Just as Paul was reminding the communities he writes to of the wider ‘sacred’ story within which their ‘mundane’ stories were embedded (cf. Crites, in Chapter One above), much the same could be said for the people that make up the membership of the chapels I minister among; their story might be seen to be held within the sacred story.

At times different stories other than the revelatory story of ‘Scripture’ take precedence in our context (outlined above); therefore both groups identified a story that had been maintained, far removed from a different, more vigorous story. The groups noted that people within our context were in danger of creating an idealised story of their own, perhaps
drawing upon a hereditary story that is extracted from an outdated and obsolete mode of expression.

Very clearly then, the groups felt that there was a need for a challenge to the inherited back story; this was where the application of the story of Jesus came into its own; this is to stress once again that while the ‘grammar’ of the story of Jesus remains the same (see above), the application of the story changes.

I argue that many narratively generated interpretations of Paul err at the point of fossilisation. An exegete or a community will propose a single narrative shape or perhaps individual and discrete narrative components (for example Dunn 1998; Witherington 1994). The narrative and the components are then somehow hardened, fixed and preserved into an interpretation of Paul and his theology that has no mode or process of development. This is clear in the work of Witherington when he speaks of a single tapestry. He writes, “it is possible to miss the overall pattern or picture that the tapestry is attempting to convey” (Witherington 1994: 1, emphasis mine). ‘The overall pattern’ suggests something fixed, permanent etc. The single narrative components are then suggestive of either an incomplete or limiting theological focus, perhaps at the very least partial interpretations; hence, the need for an ever living and dynamic application of the theology of Paul.

A better way is to suggest that Paul proposes an implicit or an explicit narrative and this narrative then becomes a focus for further reflection, development of new vision and perhaps newly formed narratives explicating his vision within new contexts. I argued that Paul proposes ‘Jesus Crucified’
as a particular character-forming vision, drawing on ‘a’ narrative held within
the story of Jesus, however, he is also calling forth a new narrative or
narratives in the Corinthian Church by a reflection on this vision. He does this
by exemplifying the narrative of Christ crucified in his ministry, his own being
and in a calling forth of a particular embodied narrative within that particular
community. The contemporary question to ask is: How would this narrative be
embodied, how would this narrative become generative of a new narrative of
a people and community formed in Christ? This in itself then calls forth a
vision of what it is to be a community gathered around the narrative of self-
giving sacrificial love.

Barry Matlock’s article in ‘Narrative Dynamics in Paul’ is helpful in
this regard. While I do not agree with his final dismissal of narrative per se, I
find his reflection on narrative creative (Matlock 2002, particularly p. 53). New
narrative expressions are always a possibility, but are somehow reflecting on
a foundational narrative. It could be argued that a similar process could
happen in a contemporary ecclesiological context. Hauerwas speaks of ‘the’
church; people within North Devon/Cornish Methodism have a view of ‘the’
church. Could it be that the Holy Spirit was calling the church to new narrative
expressions garnered from an engagement of text and place? I noted above
that Riches argues:

The personal, social and political problems of the text’s context
may find analogies in our contemporary context. And similarly,
what the writer/text was saying in such a context, the way those
problems were being addressed, may have something to say to us
in our contemporary context (Riches 2010: location 691).
In some small measure my thesis and my work with the two groups held out the potential for this to happen. However, I purposively use the word ‘potential’. There would be further fruitful possibilities for on-going work with the groups. I noted above Hauerwas’ emphasis on the disciplined sense of discipleship that can be aligned to ‘laying brick’. There would be a place for a group seeking to understand these texts for on-going reflective practice. I am of the view that continuing dialogue and theological reflection would have drawn out additional thoughts for praxis and engagement with the text perceived as Scripture. It would have been a privilege to have engaged the travelling companions more, but time, space and the itinerant nature of the Methodist ministry makes this a goal for the future and in pastures new. I envision a ‘micro-community’ studying the Bible together, teasing out fruitful new ways of envisioning the text, and relating the text to the challenges and opportunities of their contemporary context.

As a result of my research I have become more and more persuaded of the partnership I have highlighted within this thesis; more and more persuaded of the creative synthesis of interpretations using ordinary or intuitive readings and the enabling voice of scholarship.

Drawing upon figure 1 I have developed figure 2 to illustrate a new hermeneutical space as I conceive it following the specific research process followed in the Bude and Holsworthy circuit.
The hermeneutical community becomes the place to begin to embody Hauerwas’ theological themes and biblical exposition utilising the tools of the CBS and careful exegesis. Had I explored the initial roots and germs of ideas presented within this thesis further I may well have continued to work with the two groups pursuing the ideas more. I noted a number of different concepts
gleaned from the dialogical partnership, for example such things as ‘an epistemic challenge’, ‘a challenge to the previous inherited back story’. An interesting exercise might have been to try and open out what these ideas meant in a focused and concentrated manner. Similarly we may have explored other Pauline texts for the story of Jesus noting where there was nuance and what those nuances might have to say.

As I sit writing my final words of this thesis I am contemplating a move to become Superintendent of the Cleveland and Danby Circuit in the North East. While there are no plans to pursue the proposed hermeneutic in any formal way, I certainly intend to ‘try’ out the findings of my research in a new context. My research has been an enlightening and creative time for my own growth as a Methodist Minister and has enabled a greater understanding of the hermeneutical process of understanding the Pauline literature through a narrative interpretative methodology.

Does a narrative approach to Paul’s epistles help to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings? I believe it does while qualifying my endorsement of the thesis with the qualification that further work and engagement of the methodology would only enhance and nuance this assertion.
Appendices

Consent Form.

Consent:
I voluntarily agree to participate, and agree to the use of my data for the purposes of this project: ‘Can the narrative approach to Paul help to enrich scriptural engagement in contemporary ecclesial settings?’ conducted by John Henry a student at the University of Exeter. I can withdraw consent at any time by contacting the interviewer.

Note: Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Printed name of participant:

.......................................................................................................................................................................................

...

If the researcher uses your comments or contributions when writing up the study, how would you like them to refer to you? (Please note that you can request anonymity at any time with reference to individual discussions).

I would prefer to remain anonymous □ I request that my real name be used □

Signature of participant:

.......................................................................................................................................................................................

...

Signature of parent/guardian if participant is below 18 years of age:

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...

Preferred contact (e-mail/telephone/postal):

.......................................................................................................................................................................................

Signature of researcher:

.......................................................................................................................................................................................

One signed copy to be retained by the researcher, and one by the participant
The General Secretary’s Report to the 2011 Methodist Conference

Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission [The General Secretary’s Report]

Basic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission [The General Secretary’s Report]</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Contact Name and Details | Martyn Atkins  
generalsecretary@methodistchurch.org.uk |
| Status of Paper | Final |
| Resolutions | 2/1. The Conference receives the report.  
2/2. The Conference commends the report and its proposed emphasis on the Methodist Church as “a discipleship movement shaped for mission” to the whole connexion for study, response and action.  
2/3. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “Patterns of ministry: discipleship and mission” and “a fluid ‘mixed economy’” and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.  
2/4. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “God’s properties and our stewardship” and “a fluid ‘mixed economy’” and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.  
2/5. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “God’s ‘worthship’ and our worship” and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible. |

Summary of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject and Aims</th>
<th>To present to the Conference a report relating to the roles of the General Secretary of the Methodist Church as outlined in Standing Order 300</th>
</tr>
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| Main Points | • The report seeks to discern and describe a vision of the direction of travel of the life and work, worship and mission of the Methodist Church as it responds in loving obedience to the gracious prompting of the Spirit; and to set an emphasis on the Methodist Church as a discipleship movement shaped for mission.  
• The report sets out the consequent challenges; reconsiders connexionalism in the light of them; and outlines various recommendations for further work to address them in the areas of patterns of ministry; property and stewardship; |
worship; a mixed economy of traditional and new patterns of being the Church; evangelism; and partnerships.

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<tr>
<th>Background Context and Relevant Documents</th>
<th>The General Secretary’s report itself arises out of wide consultation and listening, such being natural and intrinsic elements of undertaking the type of Christian ministry required by the post.</th>
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Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission

Introduction

1. In this, the third year of my ministry as the General Secretary, I offer to the Conference and the wider Connexion a more comprehensive report than in the past two years.

2. The role of the General Secretary entails exercising leadership and ministry in several contexts, two of which are key shapers of this report. The first is my itinerant work throughout the Connexion, and this report arises from multiple conversations and experiences with Methodists and others. The second context is as a leader in the Connexional Team, a gifted and dedicated group of people charged with undertaking a great deal of work on behalf of the Connexion. In this report, when I use terms like ‘we’ and ‘our’ I am usually referring to the whole Connexion/Church, and I specify when I am referring to some part of our Connexion such as the Connexional Team.

3. My report includes a brief graphic overview of work undertaken by the Connexional Team and other groupings over the past two years. This makes clear how, in the providence of God, our focus on Discipleship | whole life · lifelong · world transforming has been expressed in a variety of authentic ways in recent times and will continue to do so. A fuller account of the work of the Team is found in the Connexional Team report to the Conference.

4. I also indicate the intended direction of travel for the next few years in respect of my role as the executive officer of the Connexion and leader of the Connexional Team, and as a colleague in leadership with many others. In particular, I signal some issues and policies that I believe require to be engaged, resolved and implemented so that, in obedience to God, our Church becomes an ever more effective discipleship movement shaped for mission in the 21st century. I believe that such an aspiration is widely owned among Methodist people, even as we acknowledge the continuing costliness of the changes we believe God calls us to make. These issues and suggestions are not so much ‘mine’, nor are they Connexional Team initiatives attempted to be imposed on the Conference. Rather I use this report to ‘mirror back’ some of the themes which we are rehearsing and reflecting upon together throughout the Connexion, with the strong recommendation that they should be explored as a matter of urgency and if approved, quickly implemented.
5. I am therefore inviting the Conference to both affirm and encourage the continuing pursuit of the direction of travel signalled here and the suggestions I outline, which I believe will enable Methodism to become a better discipleship movement shaped for mission today.

6. In describing contemporary Methodism as a ‘discipleship movement shaped for mission’ I am not claiming that this is a complete ecclesiology for our Connexion. It is not. It is however an appropriate ecclesiological statement and one consonant with recent declarations of the Conference. For example, the 1999 statement on the nature of the Church in Methodist experience and practice, *Called to Love and Praise* encourages “the Methodist people to deeper discipleship, as reflection about the Church properly carries with it a review of our personal commitment to Christ and to the Kingdom of God” in which “God’s mission and kingdom are the primary ‘givens’, from which all derives and on which all depends. As agent of God’s mission, the Church is a sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom” [emphases added]. It is also fully consistent with the themes and reflections that produced *Our Calling* and the *Priorities for the Methodist Church* and beyond (see paragraphs 8-10 below). This report therefore does not seek to provide a carefully balanced account of every important theme possible. This is not to deny the significance of themes not found or insufficiently acknowledged here. Rather, the themes I focus upon this year are those I suggest will best help the chosen direction of travel and will enable Methodism to become a better discipleship movement shaped for mission in the immediate future, and I am proposing that that description or strap-line is the key ecclesial theme to be prioritised and emphasised at this time, throughout the Connexion and by its Team.

The direction of travel discerned

7. I share with many Methodist people a desire to grow in Christian hope, passion, witness and kingdom focus. I believe we could and should grow in these Godly ways. Like many of us I long for Methodism to be a better Church in the sense that it is a more effective vessel for use by a missionary God and that includes ‘turnaround’ – and I am not ashamed of desiring that. I am convinced that God desires a healthy, more vibrant Methodism, offered anew to God as its proper ‘owner’ and as a fruitful and willing part of the One Church of Christ, for the sake of the world God loves and in Christ redeemed.

8. God has not been silent in our unfolding discernment over recent years. We have (re)stated that *Our Calling* is to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out our discipleship through worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism.

9. Following continuing prayerful listening to God and to each other we have identified *Priorities for the Methodist Church*, declaring that in partnership with others wherever possible, we would concentrate our prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority: *To proclaim and affirm our conviction of God’s love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God’s presence and action in the world and in the Church*. We also identified key ways of expressing this priority, such as giving particular attention to underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and
prayer, and supporting community development and action for justice, especially among
the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide. We committed ourselves to
developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in
ways that make sense to all involved, encouraging fresh ways of being Church, and
nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible.

10. The Team Focus processes of 2005/2008, and our embarking on the Regrouping for
Mission initiative in 2007 can be seen as discerned proper responses to our Priorities. As
can the statements made at the Holiness & Risk gathering in 2009, presented in my
report to the Conference in 2009, where participants from every District in our
Connexion reasserted our continuing desire to be more courageous Methodist disciples
in today’s challenging contexts, and urged each other to a greater acknowledged
reliance upon God. We discerned that God is not finished with us yet, but that the
challenge of continuing change lay before us, as did the promise of the leading of the
Holy Spirit. We urged and ‘gave permission’ to each other to engage in ‘holy risk-taking’
and to inhabit a new and Godly narrative about who and what we are by God’s grace.
We confirmed we are a people of lay and ordained Christians, in partnership in
leadership, worship and mission. We reasserted our intention to continue to speak
humbly, but boldly and prophetically into our culture, to live out an engaged, ‘hands on’
spirituality and to live on a big map as part of a worldwide Church in a time of enormous
changes. We declared that we are not yet ready to give up being ‘in connexion’ with
each other, and are desirous of working out what this means for us today.

11. I consider that God has made our direction of travel clear. We desire to be the best we
can be for the God we love, worship and serve. In this report I am capturing this rich
collection of discernment and declared response in the shorthand phrase that
contemporary Methodism is a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

The consequent challenges before us

12. The sharp challenge before us now is the extent to which we are willing to continue to
reshape our life together in faithful obedience to God – locally, in Circuits, Districts,
regions, and in terms of the whole Connexion – for the sake of the world. It will also
involve more sharply prioritising the work the Connexional Team undertakes on behalf
of the whole Connexion: what is done, and what is not done, in order to ‘make room’ for
what we as a Connexion deem to be absolutely necessary. We do not find this easy,
because it isn’t easy. It is costly in all sorts of ways. But I hold the conviction that it is
required of us.

13. One helpful way of focusing decision-making is to ask what our desired outcomes are.
What would we like to see happen and therefore what decisions shall we make to best
bring those things about? If we desire to be a better connexional movement of Christian
disciples shaped for mission then that shapes what we choose to do and not do with the
resources we have available to us. For example, if being a lay and ordained movement is
crucial to us, then our outcome might be to see many more lay people exercising
ministry and leadership throughout our Church. In which case we prioritise the
wherewithal to help bring that about. This gives us a mechanism for making hard
decisions when we don’t have the resources to do all we would like to do. In other
words, what we choose to be like, in response to the revelation and call of God to us, is a
matter of strategy, decision and action rather than simply aspiration. The suggested
prioritising in this report, which involves the whole Connexion and the Team as a part of
it, is an attempt to identify a first grouping of decisive intentions that give clear
expression to our desired outcome to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.
Of course if we resolve to continue this direction of travel there will be further changes
required of us.

14. There is always a fertile period for making hard choices which must not be missed, a
finite season in which the varied resources and energy needed to implement necessary
decisions are available. Sadly what often happens in organisations, including Churches,
is that decisions are not made at the point when resources and energy are sufficient to
enact them, but are then made, usually reluctantly and as a last resort, when the
required resources and energy to implement them are no longer available. Thankfully
we are not yet in that deadly and disillusioning place, but I judge that the fertile season
when we are able to properly implement the kind of decisions we need to make is fast
coming to an end. The suggestions and recommendations contained in this report
involve further changes to our life, and greater focus of our limited but still considerable
resources.

15. In terms of our Conference as a proper place to reflect on the work of God there is
another challenging theme I want to rehearse at this point. We rightly declare the
essential grace and love of God, of God’s mercy and forgiveness. We often experience
our wonderful God in these terms. But as every human parent knows, these qualities do
not mean that God may not also be disappointed with us, saddened that we are slow to
hear, to follow and obey; that we have not fulfilled our potential. We often think of
ourselves as generous, open and hospitable, but what if, in God’s view, we are not
sufficiently so? What if our frailty and decline, our oft-times lack of passion for God’s
justice and God’s world are not merely the consequences of the secularisation of
modern times but also our reluctance to change profoundly in order that we become
what God would have us be today? Though it might not sound it at first, all this is good
news, not bad! Good news because it makes plain that God has not given up on us, and
still longs and calls for our response of deeper love, repentance and faith. And in that is
our life, future and hope.

16. Love, repentance and faith are proper responses to God by a discipleship movement
shaped for mission, seeking its pilgrim way. Love means that God’s will, not ours be
done. It means that we recognise what we state in our Covenant service, that we are no
longer our own, but in trust joyfully yield all things to God. Repentance means turning
around, having a new mind, permitting God to reshape and renew you, and travelling
with God. Faith means that we trust God for our very life as Church, and in profoundly
real and concrete ways. I also believe that good leadership, strategy, management and
governance are for us signs of our love, repentance and faith. Consequently, though the
suggestions and proposals in this report are necessarily ‘organisational’ they nevertheless embody the desires and intentions of a people resolved to do the discerned will of God.

17. The partnership between God and God’s people is marvellous. God does not need human input, but chooses it. God in Christ takes our form, lives among us, and calls us to follow, to be and become like him. Partnership with people, in willing covenant, is God’s preferred way of being about the things of God’s kingdom. So there is a key part that God’s people play in God’s purposes. Gardeners tend the soil to help the harvest. Sailors raise the sail to catch the wind. I believe the wind of the Spirit is blowing and our varied Connexion is being asked to put the sail up once more.

Connexionalism reconsidered

18. The big theme of connexionalism sets the context in which all the remainder of this report must be read. We are a connexional Church and from time to time we revisit how we embody and expound the nature of our connexionalism. I consider this is one of those times.

19. It is crucial to realise afresh that our commitment to connexionalism is primarily a spiritual commitment before it is a descriptor of our structures, processes and systems. It is essentially how we feel that God has shaped us as a faith family and planted into us values of mutual dependency, inter-relatedness and accountability. From this arises our instinct to live on a big map, to engage with God’s world, through word and deed, to share life and ministry with others - particularly others in need. For some of us this is at the heart of being Methodist Christians. We possess an almost instinctive conviction that we can be better disciples shaped for mission together rather than apart, that our sum is greater than our parts. At our best we know that being in connexion is not a static or repressive thing, but a dynamic and evolving thing, because it changes in order to be a better expression of what it is. It enables our greater health as a discipleship movement shaped for mission today, while at the same time shaping us for apt service of our communities and society in the challenging contexts of the twenty first century. The word ‘connexion’ might not be as well known among us as it once was. However the rich spirituality the word embodies continues to express ‘who we are’ under God’s call and, intriguingly, is articulated almost instinctively by many people – Methodist or not - seeking whole-life and world-transforming discipleship today. In short, it could well be that the golden age of what being a connexional Christian is, is not passed away as much as just arriving!

20. By describing ourselves as a Connexion of itself suggests that we understand our origins in terms of being a ‘movement’ rather than, primarily, a ‘Church’ as classically understood. We were originally a ‘People called Methodists’ because we were ‘in connexion’ with Mr Wesley, and so readily entered into the sharing of doctrines (and doctrinal emphases), ‘discipline’ and the deploying of resources for the common good. We have always stated our readiness to change our ‘rules’ in obedience to God’s leading about our calling and purposes. We have adapted in order to meet mission imperatives
in the past and can and must do so again. At our best we do permit grace, not law, to
guide us. Our present focus on discipleship and mission is a proper expression of our
mutual connectedness today.

21. After John Wesley’s death Methodists became ‘in connexion’ with and through the
Conference. This assumed an understanding of discipleship in which individuals
accepted their part in contributing to the life of the Connexion within local societies and
so making plain from the beginning that Christianity was no solitary or simply ‘personal’
thing, but was lived out on a big map. ‘We’ and ‘us’, at least in terms of our rules and
practices, took primacy over ‘me’ and ‘I’. In similar ways, trustees of Methodist church
premises held those resources in trust on behalf of the whole Connexion – and still do.
Though we love the place wherein God’s honour dwells, and lavish love and care upon
our church properties, they were not, are not, and never can be ‘ours’ in the local sense.
Our churches ‘belong’ ultimately to God, but also constitutionally in the vast majority of
cases to our Connexion rather than simply or only belonging to the present local
congregation worshipping in them.

22. Alongside our origins as a movement, we are clearly now also a Church. We are ‘church’
in different ways within our Connexion. Our local unit of discipleship and mission was
first the local ‘class’ or ‘society’, then ‘the chapel’, and now what we usually term
‘church’. But we Methodists deploy our resources strategically within Circuits, whose
key role is to facilitate and enable the deepening discipleship and increasingly effective
mission of the Local Churches within it. This is why a missional and discipleship agenda
must continue to drive our Regrouping for Mission initiative rather than any other
rationale or aspiration, whether in Local Churches, Circuits or Districts. Of course it is the
Conference that determines the Circuits and Districts each year, and so has the existing
power to make such changes if it so chooses. The Methodist Council has already formed
a working group to examine possible models of ‘bigger than circuit’ entities in our
Connexion and in due course the Conference will be presented with its
recommendations and invited to decide the continuing extent of our regrouping for
mission.

23. Itinerancy was an early example of being a connexion. Churches were ‘sent’ a minister
and instinctively accepted them because ‘our ministers’ were in Full Connexion with the
Conference and therefore able to be deployed in our Circuits as a powerful strategic
demonstration of our belonging together in discipleship and mission. Consequently our
ordained ministry was always in a mutually enriching partnership with Methodist lay
disciples working out their discipleship and responding to God’s mission in their locality.
Partnerships in ministry are expressions of our connexionalism.

24. Our understanding of connectedness also helps us to explore the ‘world-transforming’
dimension of our discipleship. It entails and enables a recognition of mutual
dependency and inter-relation that goes beyond the walls and relationships of our Local
Churches. It forces us out, as active disciples, seeking God’s mission in the world where
we are located. Consequently Methodists, working with others within and beyond the
Christian Church, have long been committed to action for justice and the betterment of society and humanity.

25. The impulses that produce our connexionalism therefore have shaped us and continue to do so. The emphases and expressions of being in connexion with each other have changed mood and tone over the decades and centuries, and I suspect that we are moving into another era of fine tuning about what we mean by it and how we resolve to live together in a mutually acceptable and nourishing way. Different and varied patterns of being connected are now needed. Occasions when that very significant conversation can proceed in the near future as a matter of urgency have already begun, and must continue, increasingly including the full range of ages and groupings found – and largely missing - in the twenty first century Methodist Church in Britain.

26. In different ways, each of the strategic suggestions below not only expresses a prioritising of being a discipleship movement shaped for mission, but also relates to our being a Connexional Church.

What has The Connexional Team been doing on behalf of the whole Connexion?

27. Over the last eighteen months the Connexional Team has increasingly worked in a way that expresses the direction of travel we have discerned as right under God at this time, and which enables Methodism to be a more effective discipleship movement shaped for mission today. This work is both a response to decisions made by the Conference and other governance bodies in our Church, and also expresses the responsibilities that the Connexion gives to its Team to provide apt resources and to work with others to offer Godly direction, vision, leadership and management on behalf of us all.

28. In pursuit of this discipleship and mission foci the Connexional Team and other groupings have undertaken the following, to name but a few....
What will the Connexional Team be doing on behalf of the whole Connexion in the immediate future?

29. Unless the Conference determines otherwise the Connexional Team will continue to proceed in the same direction of travel, seeking, on behalf of the whole Connexion, to implement those things which will enable contemporary Methodism to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

To give just a few graphic examples, under several headings:
Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission... financial and structural

Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission... development and personnel
Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission...
property

Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission...
ministries
Specific proposals for prioritising deeper discipleship and more focused mission

30. I now outline a number of issues and proposed actions that I regard ripe for implementation. Before outlining these suggestions it is crucial to realise that each of these is happening already to some degree in our Connexion, and are discerned as necessary and desirable by many Methodists.

Patterns of ministry: discipleship and mission

31. The *Fruitful Field* project is working to enable a new, visionary, realistic and sustainable shape to our learning and training patterns. What comes to the Conference this year is an outline of the drivers of the project so far. Further recommendations will be brought to the Conference of 2012. The direction of travel is clear, but like all major policies, it will require the repeated support of the Conference else it becomes merely a part or almost-finished initiative and thus inevitably fails to deliver its potential.
32. Within and beyond the *Fruitful Field* project are a number of convictions about the future patterns of resourcing and ministry in our Church that I believe to be widely-held among us and required with some urgency.

33. One key theme is that the ministry of the whole people of God must now increasingly shape the way we actually use and prioritise our resources. I offer some examples.

34. The resourcing of **circuit ministry/leadership teams**. These teams of lay and ordained leaders have, in many places, already begun to engage the new opportunities and challenges presented by local contexts, changing patterns of resources and by implementing the *Regrouping for Mission* initiative. In many places circuit teams are taking seriously the commitment to outward-facing, world-transforming discipleship beginning in their own locality, resulting in a host of healthy ministries, projects and initiatives. Encouragement, training for and support of such enabling leadership in our Church are now discipleship and mission fertile and therefore a priority.

35. Similarly, I consider that it is strategically vital that we put greater investment in **small group leadership** in our Church at this time. Our origins are classes and bands but today we are not very good at prioritising small, safe places where together we share faith and life, encourage one another, ‘watch over each other in love’ and deepen our common discipleship of Christ. How marvellous it would be if we were to discern and identify, train and help to resource those who have a gift and calling to lead small groups in our Church in a wide variety of contexts and venues. Say, several hundred over the next few years?

36. Another area that we are realising to be of ever-increasing importance is ministry among **children and young adults**, the numbers of whom participating in the life of our Connexion has fallen hugely over a century for a variety of complex social, cultural and religious reasons. In light of the undisputed fact that a sizable majority of those who choose to follow Christ do so in childhood or as young adults, the longer term consequences of such ‘missing generations’ are plainly evident. We are not lacking responses to the needs of children and young adults, as – to mention but a few - the arrival of the Youth Assembly, its President, some elements of the exciting Youth Participation Scheme and the VentureFX project – our pioneer ministry scheme among young adults - and a significant rise in children’s and youth workers throughout the Connexion all make clear. Nevertheless many Methodists feel that more extensive and focussed participation and shared ministry with children and young adults is required, whether it be through a re-imagining of local ‘Sunday school/junior church’ leadership and a greatly increased recognition of its importance and need for support, or seeking to respond positively to the insights and challenges posed by the ‘Missing Generation’ report before us in relation to those who are often younger parents. We must continue to seek positive and possible ways forward in respect of such crucial groupings.

37. As the nature, number and size of many Circuits changes, the identification, stationing, training and resourcing of those appointed to be **Superintendent ministers** is also
strategically significant and acutely urgent. We are fast moving into a new world, where ‘pastoral charge’ is also necessarily ‘missional charge’, greater team building, collaborative working and multiple partnerships are normative and indispensable, and vision, spiritual leadership and organisational change management are all vital and closely interconnected. Consequently I consider that much clearer expectations and resourcing of Superintendency is necessary, even to the point of requiring dedicated training to be undertaken both prior to and whilst exercising this vital ministry in our Connexion.

38. I suggest too that the time is ripe to revisit the issue of more local pastoral ministry in our Church. This was mooted by one of my predecessors as Secretary of the Conference, Dr Nigel Collinson, under the phrase ‘a pastor in every church’. At that time, just over a decade ago, our Church decided not to pursue that policy. Our commitment to discipleship and mission suggests it is right to revisit the issue with some rigour and urgency.

39. Recent years have seen an increasing provision of diaconal ministry and a shortage of presbyteral ministry available to the Conference for stationing: both these taking place in the context of increased numbers of lay employees undertaking an unprecedented variety of ministries in our Church. Whether or not we are now moving into a time of overall oversupply or undersupply of presbyters and/or deacons is unclear, but in either case the need to reconsider how both lay and ordained ministry is used throughout the Connexion enabling us to be a better discipleship movement shaped for mission remains. Many Circuits believe that we have reached the point whereby the number of full time, stipendiary presbyters and deacons we have – and/or are able and willing to pay for – has now reached a critical point. Also, particularly in respect of presbyters, many consider that the policy of spreading essentially pastoral duties ever more thinly throughout a Circuit has now reached the end of its usefulness or workability. In respect of deacons too, their undertaking of mission and service ministries, often at the interface of church and wider community, in a time of lessened Connexional grant-giving, presents us all with challenging issues of prioritising.

40. Into this changing context the issue of local pastoral ministry re-emerges naturally. A focus of pastoral and missional identity, even in very small congregations, is both discipleship and mission fertile. In many instances, if we are honest, this local ministry will be required to offer loving ‘hospice care’ for a faithful and loyal, but weak, tired and aged congregation – and many of us know how precious and blessed such care is. Such local ministry can be more focused, regular and intimate than is often possible for ordained ministry ever more thinly spread. Local ministry, as part of a circuit leadership team, also enables the better focusing and releasing of resources for new ministries discerned to be needed to be implemented.

41. However, as is the way of Christian ministry, death and resurrection belong together. The focusing of care and encouragement able to be provided by local pastoral ministry will result in many instances in new life and renewed witness. We know this because it is
increasingly already happening throughout our Connexion. In such cases, we rejoice. In terms of both death and new life therefore, local pastoral ministry can assist our prioritisation of discipleship and mission.

42. There are significant issues involved in any serious exploration of local pastoral ministry that must not be underestimated. Should it be local ordained ministry rather than lay ministry with or without numerous dispensations to administer Holy Communion? We may have to revisit what it means to be in ‘pastoral charge’. And what are the relational and operational issues of local pastoral ministry with ordained circuit staff and circuit lay leaders? Other Churches have explored models of local ministry from which we can learn and benefit. However, notwithstanding these real and complex issues, sufficient numbers of Methodists have suggested that the Holy Spirit is urging us to reassess our situation in this respect, and I recognise the significance and potential of that.

43. We are all aware of the continuing, significant role of Local Preachers and increasingly Worship Leaders in our Church. A review of Local Preacher learning, training and continuing development is well under way and is integrated into the wider challenges and opportunities of the Fruitful Field project. The review itself takes place in a time of fast change. Now several years into a commitment to train and deploy worship leaders, how are these lay ministries to best relate to each other for the leading of worship of the people called Methodists today? How do these lay ministries relate to ordained presbyters, particularly in contexts where numbers of such are reducing, or where presbyters (and some deacons) focus their leading of worship very regularly in particular churches in the Circuit? What opportunities and challenges do bigger Circuits present to Local Preachers, and ‘local preaching’ more generally, throughout our Connexion? And how can the future of local preaching and worship leading connect with the other ministries identified as priorities in this section, holding out real possibilities of greater coherence, health and strength to our Connexion when relationality and continuity seem to be highly desirable for very many people?

44. Crucially all these expressions of a greater embodiment of the ministry of the whole people of God throughout our Connexion must take place in a context of increasing commitment to embed safeguarding and creating safer spaces for all in every environment in Methodism. For such is understood properly as gospel grace rather than simply ‘law enforcement’ and is entirely proper for a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

45. We must not be under any illusions about the implications of prioritising such ministries and pursuing this direction of travel. To prioritise such ministries as these inevitably impacts on the overall learning budget sustainable by our Church at this present time. To choose to spend a greater proportion of our budget on such ministries and resources inevitably reduces the resourcing of other ministries, learning and development than has been the case in the recent past.

God’s properties and our stewardship: resources of discipleship and mission
46. One has to be careful how it is said, but many of us think and state that we still have too many church buildings. I agree, and because of the understandable sensitivities of the subject, some further comments are necessary.

47. Although possibly as many as a thousand of our buildings have fulfilled their gospel purpose and been sold off in various ways over the last decade or so, we still have well in excess of 5200 church properties. This, for a denomination with an overall ‘roll’ of c582000 people, c8500 local preachers (active and ‘sat down’), c1750 active presbyters, c125 active deacons and several hundred lay employees is a huge number. Nor, in the light of what I stated above, is the single remedy or response to appoint a local pastor to each and leave everything else as it is! A several pronged engagement is required of us.

48. Given this broad context it is hardly surprising that when travelling extensively around the Connexion as I do, one is led inevitably to the conclusion that we spend too great a proportion of our finite resources of people, time and money on maintaining our many buildings. The loyalty of Methodist people is incredible and our faithfulness astonishing, but we do have an understandable tendency to too readily associate the sustaining of the life of our chapels with the work of God’s kingdom, which while not antithetical are not actually synonymous.

49. This isn’t to say that our church buildings are not a great treasure, rightly to be loved and cared for. Our renewed focus on heritage as witness and mission is absolutely right for those properties that especially embody our diverse and impressive history. Some of our chapels are magnificent and most of our growing numbers of new rebuilds and refurbishments are imaginative, enhancing our worship and enabling more effective Christian mission and service.

50. Nor is the assertion that we have too many chapels a statement simply about size or sociological location: the big survive and the small close down; town and suburban churches remain but rural and inner city properties go to the wall. It is far more nuanced than that. For example, many very small churches have crucial roles in communities of various types.

51. Consequently a better assertion is that we almost unquestionably have too many church buildings, meaning too many in the wrong places, too many unfitted to sustain our life as a discipleship movement shaped for mission today. Our buildings are assets - both capital and liquid - for God’s kingdom, our communities and our congregations. We are at our best when we regard our ‘plant’ as resources for God’s mission rather than an inheritance to be preserved at all costs like the family silver. A more sacrificial, strategic approach is needed. What kind of spaces do we need to be the discipleship, missional movement God wants us to be in the twenty first century? Do we need to own them all? Will we readily enter an ever-wider range of partnerships if we discern that the mission of God is thereby enhanced? Are we willing to be rigorously connexional about what we do with the resources released when our church buildings reach the end of their life? Can we encourage each other to release God’s resources for the calling of discipleship
and mission today with glad and thankful hearts? How do we enable each other to not regard each closed church building as a failure, rather than the Christian cycle of death and resurrection? Are we able to put a ‘mission accomplished’ sign on our closing premises and allow ourselves to hear the whisper of the Spirit, ‘well done, thou good and faithful servants’?

52. A further aspect of this issue is a hard choice about resources. Many of us are convinced that we must continue to identify and resource ‘centres of excellence’ throughout our Connexion. These can and will be large and small and located in a number of contexts. What they will share in common is a wide recognition that God is doing something that requires the Connexion to focus resources that help fan it to even greater life, rather than effectively try to spread the fire over large areas of damp grass and wonder why it is quickly extinguished!

53. One probable consequence of this in some instances is that the ‘dependency model’ of poorer chapels being helped by wealthier ones to the extent they have been in times past cannot be sustained. Though a proper expression of our connexionalism, in cases when long-term dependent chapels are unresponsive to the discipleship/mission priority of the Connexion and yet require continuous resources to enable their simple survival, we may have to decide that they should not be sustained.

54. We also need to recognise, in the spirit of our Priorities, our commitment to work in partnership with others wherever possible, that partnership may be the way God calls us in relation to some beloved but underused buildings. Visionary plans and new partners may require us to take more risks than would a quiet death, but disciples of Jesus are risk-takers. The recent conference in Manchester One church: 100 uses illustrated the range of exciting possibilities for church buildings, even in a time of financial stringency. These return some of our tired buildings from being worship centres empty for most of the week to being vibrant centres of community life, social engagement and contemporary mission - with worship at their heart. We must continue to seize the moment, as it will not be with us forever, or even very long.

55. In order to strengthen our ability to act in a more profoundly connexional way about our church properties, many of us think that we need to revisit the suggestion made by past President of the Conference, Tom Stuckey. Namely, that decision-making about the life, ministry and future of local chapels could and should not remain primarily in the hands of those chapels. This is contentious. It is technically already possible of course. But I consider that further clarity about where decision-making lies is required and that further changes would benefit our Connexion, while recognising the anger and hurt such suggestions may well generate to members of local chapels, and therefore the need to properly engage with those responses with grace.

56. To summarise: many of us believe that we need fewer, better buildings. Better in the sense that they are located, configured and enabled by our polity to shape
contemporary Methodism to be a better discipleship movement shaped for mission. This is, of course, a key driver of the Regrouping for Mission initiative.

God’s ‘worthship’ and our worship

57. All the reflections in this report arise from an almost unspoken assumption that worship is the highest calling of the Christian Church. Worship is everything that the Church offers to God in response to God’s love: its wonder love and praise and therefore its ministries, property and resources, all as an offering of worship to God. Consequently, reflection and action about how Methodism becomes a better discipleship movement shaped for mission is always located in the privilege of worshipping God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

58. I include here brief comments I hear often among us about the nature of our formal public worship.

59. I hear many declare ruefully that our contemporary Methodist worship touches neither the ‘heights’ nor the ‘depths’, and I confess to having some sympathy with that view. Our formal worship often seems to lack the exuberance, vitality and easy spontaneity of some acts of worship of other Christian groupings. Nor, often, does it seem to convey a deep sense of God's presence and peace, the profound sense of awesome nearness of some acts of worship. In a society like ours today which gravitates towards what best fits or meets discerned needs (whether or not thought to be shallow or selfish by others), much Methodist worship today seems to fall between a number of stools, and appears to provide adequate spiritual nourishment for very few people other than those already committed to and participating in it. This is both worrying and strange. Worrying because such a sober view of our worship poses questions about our being the people of God and disciples of Jesus Christ. Strange because Methodist doctrines are laden with possibilities and hope, as is Methodist ecclesiology as a part of our doctrine, and consequently providing no evident reason why our worship should not leave us all ‘lost in wonder love and praise’.

60. So we need to take special care about reflecting on our worship as ‘God-bearing’, near and transcendent, vital and majestic, challenging and enthralling. We need also to hold in healthy balance the synergy between our gathering and our dispersing, ensuring that each nourishes the other. For without such, our desire to be a better discipleship movement shaped for mission falls at the first hurdle. But I also suggest that an honest pursuit of the kinds of deliberate policies in the direction of becoming a discipleship movement shaped for mission, such as those made in this report, are themselves intrinsically connected to the nature of our public worship, rather than distinct or separate from them.

A fluid ‘mixed economy’

61. The increasingly ‘mixed economy’ of our Connexion demands a more strategic and fluid approach than we currently possess in terms of both ministry and property. Praise God
that there are so many fresh expressions of Church and new communities flowering among us! But if the special is to become normative, as I believe it must in order to help us to become more rooted in discipleship and mission today, then new patterns of ministry and new policies regarding our premises must be permitted to grow up and enabled to flourish.

62. This requires a long, hard look aiming to bring about as light a touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches, but which inadvertently paralyse or render stillborn some of the new congregations emerging among us.

63. In this and other ways we require to reassert our commitment to pursuing governance that enable what is discerned as the leading of the Spirit. Our CPD, which is in many respects a permissive document, must be presented so that it is realised and increasingly experienced to be so.

64. Ministry and property are the two main factors in our annual spend and budgeting as a Church. Our resolve to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission today, and our intention to move to longer-term and better budgeting processes requires, I believe, a further commitment. Namely that the whole Connexion chooses deliberately to use our giving, budgeting and spending processes to facilitate what we feel God is calling us to become as the priority, rather than simply choose to sustain what we have. Without this critical change in mindset and the prioritising that results from it, my fear is that the lessons learned from and signs of hope offered by fresh expressions, lay ministries, the creating of new disciples among un-churched, de-churched and never-churched people whom God loves, will not become rooted and established so as to reshape us to be more fully kingdom focussed.

Evangelism.... making more disciples of Jesus Christ

65. Evangelism is part of our calling, and is identified as a priority for us. Making more disciples of Jesus Christ is an essential driver of the Regrouping for Mission initiative properly understood, and the desire that others experience the love of God in Christ is key to the aspirational statements of the Holiness and Risk gathering. Given that our original connectedness lies squarely in ‘offering Christ’ in appropriate and apt ways, it would be odd if this were not so.

66. Yet for all this, we Methodists openly acknowledge that making new disciples in appropriate and apt ways is what we feel least good and confident at. Some of us wonder if we should engage in evangelism at all, and others question that we could. I believe we could and we should. That said there is proper emphasis on ‘appropriate’ and ‘apt’ ways of offering Christ today, clearly, graciously and intentionally seeking and finding ways whereby many may come to love God in Christ.

67. A key to evaluating contemporary patterns of evangelism is to ask the ‘outcome’ question: in offering Christ to someone what do I expect will happen? What will the person who says ‘yes’ to Jesus be expected to become like? A feature of poorer
evangelism is always to suppose that we are recruiting for the Church rather than inviting a person to experience God’s supreme love which shapes, reshapes and fills their life, and so transforms the world for good. To be sure, Christian discipleship takes place in a community and we would contend necessarily so. But this simply reinforces the point that essentially our Christian communities (churches) do not exist to perpetuate their status quo but rather to provide a mutually fertile environment for growing in Christ, with permeable membranes that enable others to join and do likewise.

68. Evangelism is therefore transformative, containing within it all the passion of piety and social justice inextricably connected together. It relates directly to the invitation to live out whole-life, life-long and world-transforming discipleship. It is both fuelled by and enables worship, and expresses itself in service and learning and caring. These are manifest in dozens of proper and fruitful ways by hugely different people, which is all to the good. It is no ‘narrow’ thing. New disciples more easily enable others to become disciples and so nourish Christian communities both established and new. A Christian discipleship movement inevitably includes a commitment to making new disciples of Christ.

69. *Natural Church Development* is one of the most highly regarded models of congregational audit in recent years. It identifies several ‘indicators’ which together suggest the overall health of a local church. Essentially it involves the congregation being enabled to identify both the strongest and weakest indicators in their local church. Significantly, it then suggests that better health overall comes about by focussing greater resources on the weakest elements, on the basis that the strongest elements will be sustained, at least for some time, without need for large levels of continuing resources.

70. Taken together, I suggest to the Conference that making more disciples of Jesus Christ through apt and appropriate ways is a key priority for our Connexion today. This involves committing ourselves, even in a time of scarcity, to put a disproportionately degree of resources and energy to this end, as the acknowledged weakest ‘health indicator’ throughout our Connexion. Such a priority is the direction of travel for my own ministry and leadership, and that of the Connexional Team through its specialists of various kinds, over the next few years, and in presenting this discipleship emphasis I am inviting the Conference to reaffirm the current importance of this aspect of *Our Calling*.

**The rich landscape of partnerships in the work of God**

71. The *Priorities* we own together begin ‘in partnership with others wherever possible…’ The Connexional Team, on behalf of the Connexion and in some cases enacting the resolutions of the Conference have entered a growing number of partnerships, some signalled earlier.

72. The possibilities of hugely fertile partnerships that deepen discipleship and enhance mission today are wonderfully prolific and various.
Ecumenical Partnerships

73. There are those long-term covenantal partnerships with other Christian Churches to which we rightly continue to commit ourselves and which still hold out fruitful and faithful possibilities for us all. For example, we should remain committed to exploring and extending the meaning of our Covenant with the Church of England, and our continuing developing relationships with the United Reformed Church.

74. There are also growing opportunities to share in the work of God with newer Christian Church communities and with organisations that focus on specific Christian ministries which we recognise we need in order to be helped and strengthened as a discipleship movement shaped for mission today. For example, some Christian groupings are much better at ministering to generations of people which are acknowledged largely ‘missing’ from our Church at the present time. With mind to the Wesleyan ‘Catholic Spirit’ (which Rowan Williams drew upon tellingly to open the new Synod of the Church of England) I consider that we are right to choose to explore how to partner others in the work of God’s kingdom whenever possible, rather than choose not to do so, while recognising and accepting that there are often some differences in perception and understanding between us. This includes not only formal ‘Churches’ but partnerships with groupings focussing upon particular ministries, and so engaging us in ‘natural ecumenism’ in doing so.

The Methodist ‘family’

75. We also live in a time of growing opportunities for deepened partnerships with other Methodists around the world, which is a diverse and exciting faith family. The All Partners Consultation in June 2010 provided wide and fruitful opportunities of working closer together as ‘People called Methodists’ in many lands. We are also deepening relationships with the United Methodist Church tradition, and mutually formulating a renewed concordat between us which will be presented to our respective Conferences for decision in due course. Similarly, work has begun and is planned to continue in exploring what the Memorandum of Understanding we signed with the Methodist Church in South Korea in 2007 might become, to our mutual benefit.

76. In every developing partnership I note a Methodist commitment to discipleship and mission, evident in a passion for Christ, for peace and justice, for the healing of the nations, the conservation of the planet, and the needs of a world which grows more fragmented and divided even as it becomes ‘smaller’. In this year when the World Methodist Council meets again it is my intention and that of my senior colleagues in the Connexion Team to pursue these partnership opportunities for witness and ministry with vigour, and I trust that the Conference affirms that intention.

77. Alongside these various partnerships, the nature of Methodism in Britain is itself changing fast, presenting wonderful opportunities and no small challenges to our Connexion at this time. Like most of Europe, longer-term immigration, recent migration, asylum and other factors have resulted not only in a more pluralist Britain, but also a
considerably more diverse family of Methodists living, worshipping and witnessing in Britain. In most major cities there are now Methodist fellowships and congregations based on language, ethnicity, tribal grouping and nationality. Some of them are regarded - and regard themselves – as part of ‘our’ Connexion, and some not.

78. I consider it a missional priority and a requirement of Christian discipleship, hospitality and mutual learning that our Connexion seeks to enable new congregations and fellowships, both language-based and ethnic/national groupings, to belong to us and us to them in apt and mutually enriching ways that do not currently fully exist. This is one important aspect of the work being undertaken through the Belonging Together project, and is of considerable urgency.

79. Then there are those parts of the Methodist ‘family’ – for example MHA or Action for Children – who offer to us routes of Christian ministry and profoundly important service, and from our greater mutual support would arise benefit to all.

‘Wider Ecumenism’

80. Finally there are opportunities of partnerships of multiple kinds with other groupings in our communities, with and without faith bases. As a Church we are deeply committed to such partnerships and deepening dialogue, working together with the marginalised, for the common good and for justice in these times of stringency and cutbacks with a wide range of others who share these aims and values.

81. My report this year has not focused at any length on many ‘social holiness’ themes, though these are intrinsic to Methodist discipleship and mission, and are crucially important. Various demonstrations of our commitment to Christian service, community engagement, inclusion and transformation are to be found in various reports to the Conference, and demand our debate, decision and support. Particularly given the broader social and political context in which we find ourselves I commend to the Conference the paper, “What is ‘the Big Society’ and how could churches respond?” and the major piece on poverty, urging that in this respect as in others, we continue to offer a prophetic and clear Christian voice into the key debates of our society at this time, together with a commitment to active engagement, health, justice, hospitality and generosity that has always characterised our movement and given expression to our understanding of discipleship and mission.

*** RESOLUTIONS
(cf Daily Record 5/6)

2/1. The Conference received the Report.

2/2. The Conference commended the report and its proposed emphasis on the Methodist Church as “a discipleship movement shaped for mission” to the whole connexion for study, response and action.
2/3. The Conference directed the Ministries Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “Patterns of ministry: discipleship and mission” and “a fluid ‘mixed economy’” and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.

2/4. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “God’s properties and our stewardship” and “a fluid ‘mixed economy’” and to bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.

2/5. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled “God’s ‘worthship’ and our worship” and to bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.
Local Vision Statement written by my colleague Revd. Neal Street.

I have been asked to lead you through a Draft Five Year Plan that was circulated with your agenda. I hope you have taken time to reflect on it. There will be time to speak to it in a few moments:

If we truly believe that God is intent on saving His world, then mission will be our Circuit focus. Our part, to engage people in a conversation about Jesus Christ and what He has to say to 21st Century Devon and Cornwall.

And so in a context of Prayerful Obedience to God’s Spirit.

Joel 2: 28 - Your OLD Men will dream dreams....

I have a dream - of a Circuit:

[1] Where we will, naturally, move toward centres of excellence for worship, and invest in them appropriately. Those centres of excellence will be vibrant in worship, will be efficient, sustainable, communities that glorify God. They may or may not have their own buildings. The Gospel would be preached, taught and explored in relevant and contemporary ways, that make sense to those who have much faith and none! I have a dream.......

[2] I have a dream:... That in every community around our circuit there is a home, a Cell, a fellowship, where God is discovered in prayer, praise and through His word. These homes are open to all, these cells are places of mutual support, hubs for forming friendships that lead people into a closer relationship with Christ. They are safe places to discover more about ourselves and God. I have a dream:.......

[3] I have a dream.... Of a Circuit looking for new opportunities to grow.

A Circuit with imagination – thinking out of the box, investing in new forms of church; planting seeds of hope, community, fellowship. Fresh expressions of Circuit and Church that touch those who will never COME to us. This Circuit believes that to GO – and do new things for God - is the Spirit led direction of travel..... I have a dream.....

[4] I have a dream of a Circuit where EACH member uses their God given gifts and skills. A Circuit where lay people are trained, and
encouraged to take the initiative. A place where the work of the Kingdom is prioritized in an ever busy world.

Where those of us who are set apart to love and care and pray, are freed to do that! Freed to train, freed to exercise a ministry of pastoral care that becomes a beacon of hope to the lonely, the bereaved, the hopeless and bewildered.... I have a dream...

[5] I have a dream of a church that lives beyond the constraints of this world.... A community where all things are possible because of the commitment of members; a place where offering to God is natural, tithed, and a priority.

[6-6a] I have a dream of a church council where PROPERTY and Finance, have an appropriate focus on an agenda, because all is in place, advice is accepted and acted upon, because only the best will do for God.

[7] I have a dream of a church that loves and cares for those who work on its behalf. That offers the resources to perform their role effectively and well.

[8] A Circuit Meeting that puts pastoral care for its Staff and their families, at the head of the agenda. Trustees that take time to ensure the effectiveness of their ministry is not compromised in any way.... I have a dream

[9] I have a dream of a church that is the safest space that can be created.... Where people are confident that they are protected... nurtured and loved in total security.... ...... I have a dream....

[10] I have a dream of a church without boundaries, A Christian community without confusing lables, an ecumenical church that sees itself as a whole community of faith. A connected Circuit of connected churches, and always connected with a 21st century world. A church that speaks the language of the day, that uses the technologies of the moment and that MAKES NEW FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST, because this Circuit KNOWS CHRIST and longs to MAKE CHRIST KNOWN.

I have a dream..... and that dream begins here and now, with me......
I offer you a five year plan......
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