Introduction

This revised version of my dissertation seeks to forge connections between two movements in today's theological disciplines. The first is the so-called "apocalyptic" interpretation of Paul and the second is often called "virtue ethics." "Apocalyptic" names the movement of scholarship that followed on the heels of the work of Ernst Käsemann in the middle of the last century and was given formation most notably by J. Christiaan Beker and J. Louis Martyn.[1] Recently Douglas Campbell in his way and Susan Eastman in hers have taken up and extended this interpretive school.[2] Close to the heart of such exegesis is the concern for the centrality of the revelation of Jesus Christ as the all-determining and world-making reality. In other words, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, in Paul these apocalypticists find Karl Barth's emphasis on the absolute primacy of Christology. As such, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ cannot be secondary or subordinate to any prior systems of meaning, ideas, ethics, beliefs or principles. Christ *himself* is the reality, and everything must be seen in his dominating epistemic light. In the field of Pauline studies, this has often meant doing battle with the still-influential (even if disavowed) residue of Bultmannian Existentialism, often transposed into the various hermeneutical guises of a pesky and hard-to-nail-down liberal Protestantism. Equally, however, such a Christological primacy places these apocalypticists at odds with so-called "Lutheran"[3] interpretations of Paul that subordinate Christ to an *ordo salutis* wherein natural law always precedes revelation. Furthermore, the same sort of Christological relativization,

1. The major works are Martyn, *Galatians*; idem, *Theological Issues*; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*; idem, *Apocalyptic Gospel*; idem, *The Triumph of God*.

2. Campbell, *Deliverance*; Eastman, *Mother Tongue*.

3. I am no scholar of Luther, and I am aware that his thought is complex, voluminous and itself the subject of rigourous debate. Though I try to say as much along the way, mentions of Luther in this book should not be taken as claims about what Luther himself thought, but rather to the particular named aspects of *appropriatations* of Luther, which I take to be fairly consistent with the *presentation* of Luther in the secondary sources I cite. The same is true of the word "Lutheran," as in the present instance. My apologies to my Lutheran brothers and sisters for this necessary oversimplifcation.

apocalypticists claim, is discernable in certain sociological hermeneutics of the so-called New Perspective wherein Christ's "meaning" is determined by his place in salvation history.

Virtue ethics, while something of a misnomer (see below), is nevertheless a "field" that has grown up in the last thirty years or so largely following the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. It usually finds its place within moral philosophy as one school among deontological and utilitarian alternatives. Broadly, MacIntyre and others seek to revive the ancient or classical ethical theory wherein character, community and narrative play central parts. Both in its Christian and non-Christian guises, the revival of virtue reaches back to the resources of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas.

My claim is that a virtue ethic, or, as I will refer to it below, a classical account of human agency, has much to contribute to an apocalyptic reading of Paul's letters. Martyn and others have rightly recovered the centrality of Christ for Paul. But they have been less clear about the place of the church and more specifically about human agency in such an account (see chapter 1). At times we are left wondering what such an emphasis on the revelation of Christ *looks like* apart from simply emphasizing its reality. Furthermore, as I suggest in chapter 1, Martyn and other have sometimes struggled to articulate a coherent place for genuine human action in God's apocalypse of Christ. In spite of protests to the contrary, it sometimes looks as if the human being is simply an individual, passive bystander being acted upon but never truly acting.

Martyn himself, in a recent article, appears poised to address this. There he begins to develop the notion of the Spirit's "participation" in human action, a participation in which Christians truly do *act*.[4] He points to a "Christological dual agency" in which "God has elected to participate in the *corporate morality of a community as community* . . . the *Corpus Christi*."[5] In the community we find that God has made a "newly competent moral agent."[6] A central contention below is that in Alasdair MacIntyre's work we find needed resources for unpacking what such a competent Pauline moral agent might look like in much more detail. Specifically, on the whole, apocalyptic interpretations of Paul need a thicker ecclesiology in order to avoid coming up short in considering agency. An ethic of virtue moves us beyond such problematics by giving us a coherent account of

4. Martyn, "Gospel Invades Philosophy," 28.
5. Ibid., 30–31, italics original.
6. Ibid., 31.

the formation of a genuine agent that takes her place within the context of corporate ecclesial practices.

Of course, a compelling synthesis of apocalyptic and virtue is in many ways already embodied in the theology of Stanley Hauerwas (though he does not work it out through exegesis of Paul). Douglas Harink's essay "Apocalypse: Galatians and Hauerwas" in his *Paul Among the Postliberals* points to the Christological emphasis Hauerwas shares with Martyn and other apocalypticists.[7] For both, apocalyptic names the "authentic Christian . . . mode of taking seriously Christ's Lordship over the public, the social, the political . . . Apocalyptic theology treats issues of concrete enslavement and power within a political-cosmic horizon and in terms of final judgment. It disavows all privatization of Christian faith . . . it rejects notions of the cosmos as a 'seamless web of causal relations.'"[8] This much is exactly right, and such similarity is due in part, as Harink notes, to the shared influence of Barth.[9]

Harink's account obscures, however, an important difference between what each party means by "apocalyptic." While for each this centrally denotes the place of Christ, for Hauerwas this Christological focus is nuanced by a strong ecclesiology and appreciation for the human actor. Thus, for Hauerwas "church becomes the necessary correlative of an apocalyptic narration of existence. It is the eucharistic community that is the epistemological prerequisite to understanding 'how things are.'"[10] Harink rightly remarks that for Hauerwas "the truth about 'the way things are' with the universe can finally be told only through concentrated attention on God's action in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by those caught up of the life and practices of the new creation people called church."[11]

While this is certainly descriptive of Hauerwas, it is hard to find such an ecclesial emphasis in Martyn and his followers. For the latter the church, and an account of human agency therein, has not yet found its proper footing.[12] We are left wondering what *difference* it makes that for Paul Christ is the one-off, non-negotiable, invasive, world-determining power. What is the force, that is, of the emphasis that "Jesus Christ *is* the

7. Harink, *Paul*, 67–103.

8. Ibid., 74.

9. Ibid., 83.

10. Ibid., 75.

11. Ibid., 76.

12. Eastman, *Mother Tongue*, e.g., 165, 197, is perhaps poised to make the church central with her comments about the the "relational matrix" that exists "in Christ."

apocalypse for Paul?"[13] Vitally important as it is to get this (nonfoundationalist) claim straight, such Pauline exegesis has for the most part yet to see that Paul's answer over and over again is "church." The church is the site of the formation of Christians as they are habituated into holy practices.

This, I claim, among other things, is what MacIntyre's account of human action helps us to see. The church is a community of practice and to become skillful at such practice is to live what MacIntyre calls the life of virtue and what Paul in Romans calls the life of δικαιοσύνη, justice. My more specific claim in this book will be that we find in Romans a classical account of human action in many ways like the one MacIntyre develops in his work, but not finally reducible to it. In other words, I am trying to push something like a MacIntyrian virtue ethic through Paul via Romans.

The particulars of my thesis develop as follows. Chapter 1 sets up the problem by first providing an account of MacIntyre's work on human action and then offering a critique of human agency in modern Pauline scholarship in light of MacIntyre's work. The following three chapters offer a re-reading of central chapters of Romans that seeks to establish that it is possible to situate Paul within a classical model of human agency.

Chapter 2 is on Romans 5:12–21 and takes the first step of establishing that for Paul the church is recognizable by its qualitative difference from those in Adam in that it is *just* and so performs just deeds. The grace of God in Rom 5:12–21 does not effect an abstract forensic transaction, nor result in an "imputed status" before God. Rather, I suggest Paul argues that Christ makes possible for the church a *just practice*. This reading reconfigures the usual assumptions regarding the relationship of divine and human in this passage, since the just practice in which the church actively participates is an obedience that is always already gifted.

If chapter 2 tells us *that* Christ has made the church just, chapter 3 takes up Rom 6–8 and argues that here Paul tells us *how* it is that this has come about. I press here for what I call "participation [in Christ] by practice." I argue that by "sin" and "justice" in Rom 6 Paul does not name cosmic powers to which the church is or is not enslaved, but habits of the body inclining Christians to behave in certain just or sinful ways. Paul goes on in Romans 8 to say that these habits are the product of the church's cooperation with the Spirit, wherein it puts to death its passions, which have their seat in the body. By killing the body in this way the bodies that make up the church die with Christ, and at the same time are made alive by his Spirit. The church thus imitates Christ's death by the death of its

13. Harink, *Paul*, 78.

own sin-tending bodies in a way that literally and physically connects it to (participates it in) Christ.

Chapter 4 picks up here and argues that Rom 12–15 gives the specifics of what the just life looks like—its "content" in day-to-day ecclesial actualization. I argue that Rom 12–15 is not the "result," the "outworking," or the "implication," of salvation, but its very content. This section in some ways parallels parts of Plato's or Cicero's *Republic*, or Aristotle's *Politics*: it prescribes roles, chastises certain vices, and commends certain virtues. This section of the letter, therefore, provides the final complement of a classical theory of human action: a description of the virtues and vices, specific actions and rules that make up a "practice" in the MacIntyrian sense. At the heart of this section stands the practice of ἡ ἀγάπη, the "love feast" or Eucharistic meal, from which the rest of Paul's exhortation gains its sense.

Finally, in the conclusion, I bring these various exegetical threads together, offering preliminary theological syntheses and pointing to directions for further study. I suggest we can see that Paul has a classical account of human agency, centered in the church as the pneumatic body of Christ, but that the exact contours of this agency need further development along theological lines. As such, it is important to see this book is not so much *doing* Pauline virtue ethics as arguing that he has such an ethic in the first place. In this regard, I argue that to try to "fit" Paul's account of the church in Romans into a MacIntyrian practice is ultimately to domesticate it in a Pelagian direction.

As I develop an account of Pauline agency through Romans I am concerned to avoid, and push beyond, two common and in some ways opposite undesirable readings: (1) A view of the Pauline agent in terms of something like a *simul iustus et peccator* dynamic wherein the Christian agent makes very little or no progress in holiness; (2) a radical and rather instantaneous transformation wherein human agency and training gives way to a sort of magical theosis. Both of these, I argue, are hyper-Augustinian soteriologies foreign to Paul.[14]

14. This concern to sort out what holiness actually looks like and how it works (the basic questions of agency) is shared by Eastman, *Mother Tongue*, 3: "How does one sustain such change over time? This difficulty concerns the intersection of Paul's language of death and new life with the daily lives of individuals and communities—lives that of necessity unfold in at least a somewhat linear fashion. Without some such linearity and continuity, one cannot speak of genuine transformation, but only of a continual replacement of the 'old' by the 'new.' But without a radical break with the past, one may slip into a kind of determinism, or at the least an evolutionary model of history, that is quite foreign to Paul's apocalyptic convictions."

Finally, my hope is that this project stands in the position of contributing to the theological project of giving the apocalyptic movement in Pauline theology some ecclesiological legs. This includes spelling out a coherent account of human agency in Pauline theology and in developing more fully what Paul expected the church's on-the-ground practice to look like (a project only half-begun here, since our focus is on agency). In other words, this is a first step at developing a Pauline and apocalyptic theological ethics after MacIntyre.