

Putting the *Moral Vision of the New Testament* into Focus: A Review

JUDITH GUNDRY-VOLF
YALE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

In his new book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation—A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, Richard Hays offers a descriptive exegesis of the NT's ethical teaching that brings to light the diversity of moral voices in the NT (Part I). Can these diverse teachings nonetheless be seen as coherent? he asks, noting that the question is a crucial one if the NT is to serve as a moral guide. Hays develops a novel account of their coherence—while leaving room for the diversity—which he describes as "narrative coherence" (Part II). In brief, he argues that the unity we find is a unity of documents that retell and comment on a single story—namely, that God has acted to rescue the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus and has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church, which is called and empowered by the Spirit to enact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and to serve as a sign of God's redemptive purposes for the world whose full scope is yet to be revealed.¹ The three key images in this story—the community, the cross, and the new creation—according to Hays, provide "focal lenses" that bring into focus what is central to the NT's moral vision and show how it coheres.² In the final sections of his book, Hays forays into the hermeneutical question of how to use the NT's ethical teaching and offers his own normative proposals on five issues of contemporary relevance (Parts III and IV).

In this response I will interact with Hays's descriptive exegesis and methodological proposal (Parts I and II) rather than with his hermeneutical and pragmatic proposals. In keeping with the theme on which the Institute for Biblical Research has chosen to focus in its session devoted to Hays's book—the NT and sexual ethics—I will test

1. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 193.

2. Hays explicitly denies that all the tensions and difficulties can be resolved in this way.

this part of his thesis by focusing on Paul's teachings on sexuality and gender as reflected in Gal 3:28 and 1 Corinthians, to which Hays devotes an appendix ("Paul on the Relation between Men and Women").³ His discussion of this topic is not as extensive as the others he treats (in Part IV), yet he rightly sees that it is an important area of ethical concern for which any major proposal on coherence must adequately account. Paul's teachings on sexuality and gender are especially appropriate for conducting a test case of "narrative coherence," in that Paul's discourse on gender is, arguably, one of the most glaring examples of dissonance in the NT. The question is therefore whether Hays's proposal of placing Paul's teachings within a narrative theological framework, whose key focal points are the community, the cross, and the new creation, lends those teachings coherence.

HAYS'S READING OF PAUL

Hays begins his discussion of this topic by pointing to the diversity and tension in Paul's teachings on sexuality and gender. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul advises the unmarried to remain unmarried and to live as celibates and omits mentioning the traditional obligation of procreation. On the other hand, he counsels the married to have sex and not attempt to live a celibate life and the unmarried who "burn" with desire to get married. Further, in Gal 3:28 he affirms gender equality ("there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ") and in 1 Cor 11:2-16 he expects women to pray and prophesy just as men do in public worship. Yet there also he insists on distinct headdress for men and women in worship, which symbolized traditional gender boundaries and had hierarchical implications. (Hays, however, takes 1 Cor 14:34-35, where women are told not to speak in church, as a later interpolation, in agreement with Gordon Fee and others, myself included.) Such teaching also contrasts with a number of oft-noted incidental references in Paul's letters to female co-workers who took up the same roles as men in the Pauline communities, including those of apostle, teacher, minister, and "laborer in the Lord."

Hays insists that the diversity in Paul's teachings on sex and gender is to be understood in the light of his eschatology, which is characterized as "apocalyptic," or "dialectical." For Paul the new order is "in collision" with the present order and is in the process of replacing that order. Nevertheless, the old order still exercises influence over believers in various ways. "Already man and woman enjoy equality in Christ, however, not yet can that equality sweep away all the constraints and distinctions of the fallen order." Thus, in the light of

3. *Ibid.*, 46-56.

the recalcitrance of the old, accommodations are necessary. While oneness in Christ, mutuality, and egalitarianism is "the deepest logic of his gospel," Hays comments, Paul resists what appear to be "excesses" in this direction resulting from an over-realized eschatology (as in Corinth).⁴

Paul's diverse teachings must also, Hays continues, be seen in the light of the fundamental story to which Paul subscribes about God and God's dealings with the world through Christ, which is summarized in the motifs of the community, the cross, and the new creation. Paul's ethical injunctions are integrally related to this story. They represent his attempts to answer the questions "how do our actions manifest the presence of the *new creation* in a sin-dominated world, how do our actions correspond to the self-sacrificial love of the cross, and how do our actions serve the good of the *community*" (emphasis mine).⁵ His injunctions, as diverse and conflicting as they seem, are thus coherent in the sense that they spring from and have their place within the operative narrative. Paul's "moral vision" with respect to sexuality and gender issues, in Hays's view, is appropriately summarized by relating his views to this narrative in the following way: "The calling of Christians at the turn of the ages is to live sacrificially within the structures of marriage and community, recognizing the freedom of the Spirit to transform institutions and roles but waiting on the coming of the Lord to set all things right."⁶

I am in agreement with Hays on some essential points. Paul's teachings on sexuality and gender are characterized by diversity and tension; they are to be understood in the light of his dialectical eschatology; the question Paul faces in his ethical reflection is thus how Christians should live in the overlap of the ages; Paul's radical eschatology, as captured in the phrase "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation," is the dominant pole in his thinking. I also find helpful Hays's description of Paul and his communities as "poised on a tight-rope" and of Paul as struggling to "get it right" for his readers. And I affirm Hays's understanding of this struggle as not mere inconsistency or ambivalence on Paul's part (as some other interpreters of Paul have described it) but even as exemplary for Christians today in their own struggle to live out the eschatological tension with respect to the issues of sexuality and gender.

That much said, I would like to raise two questions regarding Hays's proposal. Has he accurately and/or adequately portrayed (1) the nature of the basic *tension between the new and the old* that accounts for the diversity in Paul's ethical teaching and (2) the complexity of the

4. Ibid., 55.

5. Ibid., 56.

6. Ibid., 55-56.

theological framework (i.e., community, cross, and new creation) within which Paul's ethical teachings may be seen as coherent. To elaborate I will take a close look at the texts Hays discusses. The upshot of my discussion will be that Hays's proposal as it stands is helpful but insufficient. Rather than replacing it, however, I would like to enrich it to show better how "narrative coherence" can do the job of highlighting the central features and tying the diverse strands of the NT's ethical teachings together into a unity, without destroying the diversity.

EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE

In Hays's reading of Paul, the tension between the old and the new that governs Paul's thought on sexuality and gender is epitomized by a *contrast between equality and difference*. The equality of the new creation is achieved by a sweeping away of the distinctions of the present order that produce constraints (as seen above). Gal 3:28 ("there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus") is taken in this sense as referring to the eschatological erasure of creational differences (cf. Wayne Meeks and, more recently, Daniel Boyarin). In my recent article on Gal 3:28, however, I have challenged that common interpretation.⁷ Even though the phrase "no longer male and female" alludes to Gen 1:27, "male and female He created them," and thus seems to negate the creational differences themselves, this interpretation goes against what I argue is the clear intention of Paul in Galatians to assert *not* the erasure in Christ of bodily-inscribed differences but of their *supposed significance* with respect to one's relation to God and other believers. I have called this program of Galatians the "adiaphorization" of differences. Even though in Galatians Paul does not develop the claim about male and female in this way so as to spell out this meaning, he does so there with respect to the analogous claim "there is no longer Jew or Greek." He argues, not that Jewish and Gentile identities—inscribed in the body through circumcision or the lack of it—are erased in Christ, so that equality is based on sameness, but that these particular identities are simply *no longer advantageous or disadvantageous* to them in Christ. This is clearly the sense of Gal 6:15, "neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but new creation," and the similar formulation in Gal 5:6. Moreover, outside Galatians when Paul reflects on ethnic identity he not only fails to erase the differences between Jew and Gentile in Christ but *argues against* reversing circumcision or getting circumcised if one is not already (1 Cor 7:18). Again the reason is that the differ-

7. Judith M. Gundry-wolf, "Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal 3:28," *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums* (ed. C. Landmesser et al.; BZNW 86; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997) 439-77.

ences are *adiaphorized*: "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing" (1 Cor 7:19). Clearly therefore Paul's understanding of the new creation in Christ as articulated in Gal 3:28 does not include a sweeping away of all bodily-inscribed differences, and the equality of the new creation, to the extent that it is realized now for those in Christ, does not depend on their being swept away. Rather, the new creation (presently) is characterized by the oneness and equality of those who *remain different in the flesh*.

When we come to Paul's explicit discussion of gender issues in 1 Corinthians, we find that he takes the same basic view as in Gal 3:28 (as I have just described it). Sexual distinctions are not erased (as implied in Paul's statements about marriage, sex, and gender-specific headdress). And when Paul in 1 Cor 12:13 takes up the tradition found in Gal 3:28, he avoids the negative formulations that suggest erasure of differences in the flesh and does not even mention the pair "male/female": "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (12:13). Presumably he is reacting to a Corinthian interpretation of the tradition as referring to the erasure of distinctions, including the erasure of the distinction between male and female, which seems to have been particularly high on the Corinthian agenda.

I conclude that neither in Galatians nor in 1 Corinthians does Paul declare bodily-inscribed differences erased in Christ. Whether he also *adiaphorizes* the sexual distinction between male and female in 1 Corinthians, as he did the religioethnic distinction between "Jew" and "Greek" in Galatians, is a more difficult question to answer. As best I can tell, he *adiaphorizes* the sexual distinction in significant ways, though not in every way. In 1 Corinthians he departs in significant ways from the conventional, patriarchal interpretations of the difference between male and female, for example, by insisting on the equality of wife and husband in the sexual relationship and omitting the obligation of procreation (as the purpose of being created "male and female"). In 11:2-16 he supports identical roles for men and women in corporate worship (praying and prophesying).⁸ It

8. It would be special pleading to say that the woman pneumatic in 1 Corinthians 11 is not functioning as the man's equal while praying and prophesying since she must cover her head, while he not. For Paul requires the head-covering not in order to show subordination, about which he says nothing in this passage, but—as he makes explicit—in order to avoid shame, namely, through the crossing of gender boundaries. His argument presupposes that deviation from conventional gender behavior was a source of shame in the first-century Mediterranean world that was the Corinthians' social setting. The common reading of v. 10 as referring to the woman's head-covering as a sign of the man's authority over her has been disputed elsewhere (see, e.g., my forthcoming article, "The Taming of the Angels: A New Proposal on 1 Cor 11:10").

would be wrong to claim that Paul rejects all conventional, patriarchal interpretations of sexual difference and their corresponding expressions in cultural and religious practice. But the fact that he does in important ways depart from such interpretations is in my view due to his belief that in Christ the differences are relativized and redeemed from such fallen interpretations. I will address later the question why Paul does not apply this insight across the board with respect to gender in the way that he apparently did with respect to the difference between Jew and Greek. My present point is that Paul did not regard creational differences to be transcended in Christ, and those differences themselves did not form the barrier to the new equality of those in Christ—rather the culturally-conditioned, unredeemed interpretations of the differences formed the barrier.

Thus, rather than following Hays in understanding the contrast between the new creation and the present order to be epitomized by a contrast between equality and difference/constraints, I see the contrast to be between the new equality that presupposes creational differences, on the one hand, and the inequality that is based on the falsely imputed significance of creational differences, which can be traced to the fallenness of the present order.

CREATION, CULTURE, AND NEW CREATION

Hays sees Paul envisioning the new creation, not only as erasing the differences and constraints, but also as being partly unable to do so in the face of the continuing influence of the present order on believers. The concrete ethical instruction therefore may emerge as a compromise between the positive demand grounded in the new creation and the recalcitrance of the old. Because of such recalcitrance, accommodation is necessary. Hays implies that Paul's affirmations of sexual distinctions and gender hierarchy are such necessary compromises or accommodations to the present order (though Hays himself does not use the terms *accommodation* or *compromise*).

Does Paul, however, portray his ethical injunctions reinforcing sexual and gender distinctions as compromises or accommodations to the present order, as Hays implies? That is, does the present order function merely as a negative construct over against the new creation in Paul's ethical thought? It does not appear so in 1 Cor 11:2-16, where Paul even *appeals* to creation, nature, and culture (a similar point could be made about 1 Corinthians 7).⁹ If this observation is correct, we must ask, what is the function of creation, its expression

9. I will not address the question of the role of the Law in Paul's ethical reflection here.

in the natural order, and culture within the tension between the old and the new in Paul's teaching on sexuality and gender? Let me first explicate what I see Paul to be doing in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and then suggest why he does what he does. I have argued in a recent article¹⁰ that Paul has two "readings" of creation in this text. First he sees creation to support equality in Christ. Second, he sees creation to imply gender hierarchy. I will first describe Paul's egalitarian reading of creation, which to my knowledge I am the first to point to, and then move on to his more commonly noted hierarchical one.

In 1 Cor 11:11 Paul affirms the interdependence of man and woman "in the Lord": "Now neither is woman independent of (χωρίς) man nor is man independent of (χωρίς) woman in the Lord."¹¹ The context suggests that this statement is to be taken as a reference to their interdependence *in Christ as pneumatic men and women*. As those who are filled with the Spirit and speak in inspired prayer and prophecy that builds up the other (cf. 11:4-5) they are essential to each other in the body of Christ. Their interdependence "in the Lord" is thus not an interdependence based on distinct (and unequal) gender roles (as some interpreters have claimed) but an interdependence of those who are different (sexually) but equal (in Christ). To ground this interdependence Paul appeals to the equivalent roles of man and woman *in creation*: "For just as the woman is from (ἐκ) the man, so also the man is through (διὰ) the woman" (11:12). This verse parallels Eve's creation from Adam with man's procreation through woman—an argument from the first creation followed by an argument from continuing creation. The point is that both man and woman are the source of the other's existence; they are thus interdependent as equals from the perspective of creation. Ultimately, of course, their source of existence is God the Creator, which Paul notes in the final clause of this verse, "all things are from God," thus further stressing the equality of man and woman from the perspective of creation. Paul can thus view creation as pointing to the equality of man and woman in relation to one another and before God at the same time as it points to their difference as male and female; creation thus grounds their interdependence as equals "in the Lord."

How does Paul come to see creation as implying not only difference but equality? We can surmise that it was his vision of the new creation, embodied in the Corinthians' worship in the Spirit, that

10. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method," *Evangelium-Schriftauslegung-Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. O. Hofius et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 151-71.

11. οὔτε χωρίς means literally "not without," as opposed to "not different from" (pace Josef Kürzinger, "Frau und Mann nach 1 Kor 11,11f.," *BZ* 22 [1978] 270-75).

opened his eyes to this understanding of creation. As the Corinthian women and men mediated the benefits of new life in Christ to each other through the gifts of the Spirit, they manifested their interdependence as equals in the Lord. That equality was not based on an erasure of the creational difference between male and female but on a reinterpretation of that difference in the light of the gospel rather than according to fallen cultural norms. Thus for Paul the new creation functions to liberate the creation from bondage to sin and inject it with the power of the Spirit. The equality of woman and man that is written into creation itself is now both revealed and realized in Christ, where "there is new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), and it is an equality with difference.

From this analysis of 1 Cor 11:11-12 we see that creation—viewed in the light of the new creation—can inform Paul's ethical thought positively. It follows that he does not treat the present order merely as a negative construct that forces ethical accommodations, as Hays seems to think, for no positive role for creation in Paul's ethical reasoning could result from such a view of the present order. A more nuanced view of the present order that takes into account both the fallenness of creation and its continuing ability to express the Creator's will is necessary as the theological backdrop to Paul's ethics.

There is also another, much different reading of creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16, however. In 11:7-9 Paul argues that the man ought not to cover his head while praying and prophesying, "for he is the image and glory of God"; but the woman ought to cover hers, for "the woman is the glory of man; for man is not from woman, but woman from man, and man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of the man." While Paul's main purpose in this passage, as I have tried to show elsewhere,¹² is to prevent shame from crossing gender boundaries through unconventional headdress rather than to reinforce gender hierarchy as such, nevertheless, in pursuing this goal he necessarily simultaneously reinforces the gender hierarchy (some might even say, woman's inferiority) underlying the cultural norms about shame that are his main concern. He argues that the man (ἀνὴρ) is the "image and glory of God" (11:7a) but does not describe the woman in this way, in seeming departure from Gen 1:27, where both sexes are embraced in the image of God. Interpreters have suggested that Paul may be dependent here on a Jewish exegetical tradition according to which Genesis 1 (creation of "man" in the image of God) is to be understood in the light of Genesis 2 (creation of the man first, then the woman from the man) and thus refers only to the male as the image of God.¹³ Then Paul makes the woman's relation to the man

12. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation," 151-71.

13. As noted in the commentaries.

determinative for her identity and role: she is his glory, created for him (11:7b-9). Similarly, in 11:3 Paul says that the "head" of man is Christ, while the "head" of woman is man. Even the most innocuous interpretation of the disputed term κεφαλή (as "source") seems not to be able to avoid the connotation of the woman's lesser place relative to the man in the cosmological order. Thus, while the arguments from creation (and the related argument from the order of the cosmos) in this passage, in my view, serve to show that man and woman owe honor to their respective "heads," to the ones whose glory they reflect by creation, and therefore should not engage in shame-causing head-dress practices, the end result is support for the gender hierarchy that is presupposed in the social practices that avoid shame.

How does Paul come to this reading of creation which is so different from the one we have seen in 11:11-12? I have already pointed to the possible influence of Jewish tradition, but even more significant is the likelihood that Paul is using first-century Mediterranean shame-honor culture with deeply ingrained patriarchy as a lens through which to read creation.

Why would Paul read creation through the lens of culture when the results can be and are at odds with what the new creation dictates? Why does he let culture, especially in its fallen form, inform his ethical reflection? Why not instead exhort the Corinthians to exit the wider shame-honor culture and develop their own value system with the requisite practices based on the egalitarian tradition in Gal 3:28? We can only make conjectures about why he does not go that route. It is possible that he is simply too conservative. Yet such a conjecture does not square well with how we have seen him to exegete Gal 3:28. A more likely explanation is the following, based on how we can observe him to proceed elsewhere in 1 Corinthians. Paul insists that the wider culture is to be taken into account in making judgments about how Christians are to behave for the sake of the church's mission in the world. Take, for example, 1 Cor 14:23: "if . . . all are speaking in tongues, . . . will they [unbelievers] not say that you are mad?"; 1 Cor 10:26, 32: "eat everything put before you [by an unbeliever who invites you to dinner]. . . Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all people in everything I do . . . that they may be saved"; 1 Cor 9:22: "I have become all things to all people that I might by all means save some."¹⁴ If the Corinthians were simply to act in ignorance of the wider shame-honor culture when it came to the issue of headdress while praying or

14. Cf. also 1 Thess 4:12. To account for a text like 1 Cor 10:32, Schnabel points to Paul's missionary interests and his desire to "preserve the attractiveness of the gospel for outsiders." See Eckhard J. Schnabel, "How Paul Developed His Ethics," in *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (ed. B. S. Rosner; Grand Rapids:

prophesying, we can conclude, they would surely have significantly reduced their potential as a church to allow the gospel to impact the culture through them. Thus we can construe Paul to insist that the Corinthians fit themselves within their broader social context—not in all but in certain respects—out of a concern that the gospel, including its vision of Gal 3:28, take root in particular cultures with deeply ingrained patriarchy.

If this conjecture is right, the question Paul is struggling over in his ethical reflection is not merely what is the ideal in contrast to what is reality (the old/new axis), although that is the overarching and dominant framework of his thought. He is also concerned about another issue: how to make the new present within a particular (fallen) culture, how to make the new present within the constraints of the old. Paul's missional emphasis, I propose, explains the function of the second reading of creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16—which can never be divorced from the first reading but must always be seen together with it! Paul operates with two readings because it is insufficient either simply to state the ideal or simply to consent to its "compromise" instantiation. Instead we ought to construe him as attempting to "enculturate" the gospel and its vision.

Thus it is not enough to say, (contra Hays), that Paul resorts to compromise when faced with the recalcitrance of the old (although he may do that as well). Paul also takes up culture (even fallen culture) in his ethical reasoning in the light of his overall strategy to impact the culture with the gospel. By positing Paul's attempt to "enculturate" the gospel we can account for his positive use of even fallen culture in his ethical reflection, which Hays cannot by operating simply with the notions of the recalcitrance of the old and accommodation. Enculturation is for Paul a positive good, even if it entails compromise, for only as enculturated can the Gospel *transform culture*. Paul saw that the only way for the gospel to take root and transform culture—even the small segment of culture called the "church"—was for the ideal to be lived out under the conditions of that culture. I am not, of course, suggesting that Paul had a worked-out methodology of enculturation, or even that he was explicitly aware of his intention to enculturate as opposed merely to accommodate. I am suggesting that by observing how he theologized we can construe his thought in such a way and that the best way to account for the actual shape of a text like 1 Corinthians is to offer such an account.

Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995) 267-97 (288). Schrage correctly points out that Paul's choice to take the judgments of others into account and consider some causes of offense intrinsically unnecessary does not make him a conformist in principle (just as he is not a nonconformist in principle; Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* [trans. David Green, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988] 203).

In the light of the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that Hays's reading of Paul's teaching on sexuality and gender entails a methodological underplaying of creation and culture. These two in fact figure significantly—in addition to the community, cross, and new creation—in Paul's theological framework for reflection on sexuality and gender. Hays himself (in the later part of his book where he deals with the pragmatic task of the contemporary application) sees creation as playing an important role in the NT's teaching on the related topics of homosexuality and divorce and remarriage.

DIVERSITY AND COHERENCE

Does Hays's proposal of a "narrative coherence" in the ethical teachings of the NT work when applied to Paul's statements on the relation between men and women? Do the focal images of the community, the cross, and the new creation as the essential points of the "fundamental story" tie these diverse teachings together, highlighting what is central, and give them unity, despite their inner tensions? On the basis of the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that the basic proposal of narrative coherence is helpful but insufficient when defined in terms of the three focal images, community, cross, and new creation. For it cannot account for the way in which creation and culture function in Paul's ethical reflection with respect to sexuality and gender, as I have tried to show. In my view, in order for Hays's proposal of narrative coherence to work it needs to be supplemented. The definition of the "fundamental story" overarching Paul's teachings on the relation between man and woman and providing a coherent theological framework for them should be expanded to include creation and enculturation of the gospel. For Paul the "narrative" that forms the framework for his ethical reflection begins already with the creation of man and woman, not first with the formation of a community and its redemption through Christ. And the story continues not simply in the new creation as a transcendent reality that replaces the old—now in partiality, then in fullness—but that also redeems and renews the present creation from within and takes root in the culture itself and transforms it.¹⁵ By expanding the fundamental story to include creation and the enculturation of the gospel, we can give an account of the coherence of Paul's ethical reflection on the relation between men and women that corresponds more closely to his actual argumentation.

15. Cf. Schnabel: "The process of critical examination and selection [of traditional social orders and conventions] gives a new meaning to many traditional contemporary concepts and ways of behavior and often *transforms their substance*" (Schnabel, "How Paul Developed his Ethics," 296; emphasis mine).