

**A Reading of Ephesians in the Light of the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur**

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*I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.* (Eph 3.16-21)

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**Abstract**

*This thesis applies the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur to the Epistle to the Ephesians with the aim of investigating how the reader might live her life in response to the text. Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity is used as a theoretical framework for exploring the existential appropriation of the text by the reader. The first half of the thesis is an introduction to, and critical engagement with, the basic principles of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics: the autonomy of the text, the relationship between biblical texts and history, and the referential quality of metaphor and narrative. In the second half of the thesis these principles are applied to Ephesians. Paul’s identity as the one who testifies to the revelation, and his status as a paradigm of a life lived out in response to the narrative of the text, is explored. Then the focus shifts to the reader, and her appropriation of the life of Christ. Ricoeur’s summary of the Christian life, as an interchange of death and childhood, is tested against the metaphors of spiritual death and childhood in the text to discover whether the Epistle can sustain Ricoeur’s reading. Both a Freudian and a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion are employed to test the status of the Father in relation to the reader as she takes on the sonship of Christ. Finally the ethical implications of the new narrative identity of the reader are explored, using the narrative ethics set out in Oneself as Another as a prism for reading the ethics of Ephesians, with special attention to the problematic passages on slavery and patriarchal marriage. The conclusion reflects upon the ultimate aim of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical strategy: to reach a second naiveté where, beyond the practice of criticism, the text calls the reader.*

**Preface**

Introducing his autobiography, Richard Coles, former pop star and Anglican priest, quotes Ephesians 3.7-8,[[1]](#footnote-1) outlining the story of St Paul and his conversion from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle of Jesus Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2) He sets his own life in the context of the narrative of conversion articulated in the Epistle, which does not narrate Paul’s personal story, but the journey from death to life of all Christians.

The idea of a Christian life as an outworking of Ephesians is the central theme of this thesis, which explores how the narrative identity of the reader can be lived out, formed and shaped by the narrative of the Christian life set out in the text. And although the narrative of conversion may seem straightforward, there are elements of discordance. The very need to remind readers of the text to avoid such basic sins as stealing shows us that the passage from death to life narrated in Ephesians is not without its setbacks or detours. These setbacks are honestly explored by Coles right from the outset: “I am a sinner. My best efforts to return Christ’s generosity are inadequate, and even devalue the currency they’re paid in”.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nonetheless, the narrative of the saints set out in the Epistle can be profitably read into the narrative of his life as he crafts it. Writing an autobiography is a self-conscious attempt at creating a narrative in retrospect. The concern of this thesis is not so much the question of how one might distil a life story in order to conform it to the pattern of the text, but rather how one might live out the promises of the text in the light of the text, using the hermeneutics of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur as a key.

**Chapter** **1. Introduction**

This thesis is primarily an attempt to read Ephesians in the light of Paul Ricoeur’s theory of narrative, specifically in terms of his concept of narrative identity. It will begin with a general introduction to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, focussing on his theory of the autonomy of texts and the relationship between historical truth and its representation in texts, and then present a brief introduction to Ricoeur’s thought on narrative. It will analyse the narrative of Ephesians in terms of the narrative identity of the reader in response to the text. This narrative identity is influenced by the identity of Paul, who is set up as a paradigmatic example of a life transformed by the narrative of the text, and also by the existential appropriation made by the reader of the life of Christ. The text will be explored in response to Ricoeur’s own summary of the Christian life, as a journey from death to childhood,[[4]](#footnote-4) to test whether the metaphors of death and childhood within Ephesians can sustain such a reading. In taking on the sonship of Christ, the reader is brought into relationship with the Father. This relationship will be explored under the prism of both a Freudian and a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion in order to test the transformational claims made about the life of the reader incorporated into the life of Christ. The thesis will then explore the ethical implications for the readers of their new life together in Christ, proclaimed by the Epistle, in dialogue with Ricoeur’s narrative ethics as set out in *Oneself as Another*.[[5]](#footnote-5) In light of the application of the various critical readings of the text, the conclusion will attempt to enter a second naiveté and ask how, beyond “the desert of criticism”, the Epistle can “call us again”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**1.1. Why Ricoeur?**

Paul Ricoeur’s work on hermeneutics, metaphor and narrative, and his interpretations of biblical texts, have been highly influential for theologians and biblical scholars, despite the fact that he was neither of these. He is an attractive dialogue partner for the Christian reader of the Bible for several reasons: his starting point of reading the text from within the Christian tradition, as a listener who approaches the text with a willingness to hear what it has to say; his ultimate aim of moving beyond the concerns of scholarship to a place where the text can call him again and change his life; and, finally, his refusal to fit the Bible to any preconceived theological project and his willingness to allow the text to speak for itself, honestly grappling with the tensions and contradictions that might arise from such a reading.

The first challenge of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics to the Christian scholar is his warning against seeking some kind of false objectivity, against reading the text from nowhere:

Anyone who wished to … stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated objectivity would at the most know everything, but would understand nothing. In truth, he would seek nothing, not being motivated by concern about any question.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Ricoeur is clear about his own set of presuppositions; he is a “listener” to the text, [[8]](#footnote-8) assuming that the text has something meaningful to say to him, that what the text proclaims is worth hearing. This is a risk, and in taking this risk Ricoeur is making a wager: that what he has risked by submitting himself to the Bible as a listener “will be returned a hundredfold as an increase in comprehension, valour, and joy”.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This wager with the text is not simply a speculative one, but one that goes to the heart of Christian faith. Ricoeur’s second challenge is to read texts in order to be transformed by them. This is set out in his early book *The Symbolism of Evil*: “Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again”.[[10]](#footnote-10) While he has a clear sense of the value of a critical approach, he also wishes to go beyond it, to a place where the call of the text can be truly heard. This aim is further articulated in his concept of the hermeneutic arc, where we move from a pre-critical naiveté, through criticism, to a second naiveté beyond criticism where the text can transform our reality.

Central to the middle stage of the hermeneutic arc is the application of the hermeneutics of suspicion. This involves the crucial awareness that ideological distortion is present within texts and that a rigorous application of the critique of ideology can help us read a text with some awareness of its ideological context, and therefore understand it better. But suspicion works both ways. For Ricoeur suspicion must also be a critique of the self. Because we participate in the structures of domination and the violence of human society before we are in a position to analyse or understand them, they intrude even upon our dialogue with ourselves. This means that, *contra* Descartes, self-knowledge is as open to doubt as knowledge of things.[[11]](#footnote-11) Ricoeur is clear that we need, as far as possible, to deconstruct our own prejudices so that we can allow the world of the text to *be*, without interference from our own distortions, be they conscious or unconscious.[[12]](#footnote-12) A critique of the illusions of the subject – and here Ricoeur looks to the three masters of suspicion – Freud, Marx and Nietzsche – must be part of the route to self-understanding.

The challenge inherent in this arc is, on the one hand, to use scholarship as a tool to open up the text, and crucially to free us as readers from the pre-critical assumptions of the first naiveté, but, on the other, to go beyond scholarship and allow the text to speak to us. The wager of this thesis is that in studying the text, and bringing to bear the tools of scholarship, I, and perhaps the reader, can be called again to a more faithful living out of the narrative of the text. An exciting, if daunting, task for the Christian reader.

As a third challenge, Ricoeur’s concept of a polycentric and intertextual reading of the text is compelling. Ricoeur is happy for the Bible to present “holes, lacunae, zones of indetermination”[[13]](#footnote-13) that open up space for the reader to interpret and complete the text. He resists any urge to find one true meaning of the Bible,[[14]](#footnote-14) allowing it to mean all that it can mean. A polycentric reading refuses to try to bring the questions that the different strands of biblical discourse ask of each other to a univocal, coherent answer, but leaves the oppositions in tension, to speak for themselves. This polycentric reading of the Bible depends on a canonical reading. For Ricoeur, what he calls “the space opened within the very closure of the canon”,[[15]](#footnote-15) is liberating for the reader, because it allows the reader to place “side by side two texts stemming from highly different settings and quite distant ages, and reflecting literary genres that are far removed from each other”.[[16]](#footnote-16) In this canonical space, we can use the insights of Ephesians to comment on Genesis, say, without having to worry about the strikingly different origins of the texts, as long as we do not confuse our interpretations with the intentions of the author. If the means by which such a reading has come about are made clear, we ought to consider any exegesis that “knows what it is doing, how it does it, and in whose name it does it”.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Finally Ricoeur’s work on narrative and narrative identity provides a theoretical framework for seeking to elucidate the narrative identity of the reader proposed by the text, and how this might be lived out by a reader in front of the text. This framework of narrative identity will be crucial to this thesis.

In using Ricoeur’s philosophical framework as a key to reading Ephesians, I wish to draw the reader’s attention to a helpful distinction that Dan Stiver makes between Ricoeur’s particular theological views and the validity of his philosophical framework: “I am not so interested in Ricoeur’s particular theological views as I am in the value of his philosophic framework as a resource for Christian theologians across the theological spectrum. In other words one can go in a variety of theological directions on the basis of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical philosophy”.[[18]](#footnote-18) While I may not agree with Ricoeur on the resurrection or the afterlife, for example, I nevertheless see great value in his hermeneutic philosophy as a basis for reading the bible.

**1.2. Narrative and Ephesians**

At first glance, a narrative reading of Ephesians may seem a rather odd endeavour to embark upon. The text is not, in its genre, a narrative. It has no plot and does not recount a sequence of events. Rather it is a letter, or at least that is how it presents itself with its opening and closing greetings.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is a commonplace to divide the main section of the letter into two parts: chapters 1-3 expound theology and chapters 4-6 explore the ethical application of the first section, the *paraenesis*.[[20]](#footnote-20) No doubt the interplay between instruction and ethics deserves a more nuanced account than this,[[21]](#footnote-21) but as Sampley points out, the division is made rather neatly by the doxology at the end of chapter 3.[[22]](#footnote-22) For our purposes, the important point is that neither section is an explicit narrative. To begin the essay, there will be a short discussion of the rationale for a narrative analysis of Ephesians.

One of the first commentators to apply narrative analysis to Pauline Epistles was Richard Hays in his investigation of the narrative substructure of Galatians.[[23]](#footnote-23) The validity of such an approach depends on there being a demonstrable relationship between the discursive quality of the Epistles and some underlying narrative from which the discussion arises. Hays attempts to demonstrate this using Northrop Frye’s distinction between *Mythos* and *Dianoia*.[[24]](#footnote-24) The *mythos* is the plot of a narrative, the linear sequence of events, whereas the *dianoia* is the theme, the plot reconfigured as a unity by which each episode is interpreted. The theme is not something abstracted from the plot, but something that arises organically out of it. He also uses Ricoeur’s distinction between the “episodic” and “configurational” dimensions of narrative to make this point further:

The activity of telling does not merely consist in piling episodes on top of one another. It also construes significant values out of the scattered events. To this aspect of storytelling corresponds on the side of story-following an attempt to “grasp together” successive events. The art of telling and, accordingly its counterpart, the art of following a story requires that we be able to elicit a configuration from a succession. This “configurational” operation constitutes the second dimension of narrative activity.[[25]](#footnote-25)

In his work on parables, Ricoeur puts this in another way. Symbolic language demands an interpretation, not one which is superimposed from the outside, but an interpretation that responds to the symbol. A story, according to Ricoeur, calls for “a new speech-act which would paraphrase the first one without exhausting its meaningful resources”.[[26]](#footnote-26) For Hays, Paul’s letters are that very speech act, which seek to “rearticulate in discursive language the configurational aspect of the Gospel narratives”.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Hays therefore draws three methodological conclusions: first, stories have an inherently configurational aspect to them, which exists in an organic relationship to the sequence of events narrated; secondly, the restatement of the theme, *dianoia,* is not a repetition of the plot, but is shaped and constrained by it, because the theme can never be completely abstracted from its context in the narrative within which it was first expressed; thirdly, it is therefore legitimate to investigate the story that lies behind reflexive discourse.[[28]](#footnote-28) One clear example of discursive analysis having a narrative substructure is literary criticism, which attempts to set out the *dianoia* implicit within the narrative it analyses. It is important, however, to make a clear distinction between literary criticism and the *dianoia* of the Epistles. Paul is, as Hays puts it, “one whose view of reality is totally determined by the story, and he seeks to demonstrate to others the story’s inexhaustible significance for shaping the life and thought of the believing community”.[[29]](#footnote-29) The story is therefore not simply the story of the Gospel, but our story in so far as the narratives of our lives are shaped by the Gospel. In contrast to Hays, this thesis is not an analysis of the narrative substructure of Ephesians, and it makes no claims about any story “behind” the text; rather it looks at the story in front of the text, the story of the reader as she appropriates the epistle and allows it to transform her life in Ricoeur’s process of *mimesis₃,* which we will set out below.[[30]](#footnote-30) As Timothy Gombis puts it, Ephesians is “a gospel script that invites performances by communities of God’s people”.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Douglas Campbell develops this point further. He cites Romans 8.29, “because those whom he knew beforehand he also chose beforehand to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”. He argues that this places the story of Jesus at the centre of a divine plan to redeem humanity, a redemption which is explicitly linked to brotherhood with Christ, “to bear the image of the son is to be his brother … His story – whatever that might be – is ‘our’ story”.[[32]](#footnote-32) And not only is it our story. The Father plans the entire narrative and sends his son. The story must factor in the relationship between these characters: “The Father will not be the Father without a Son to send and to sacrifice; the Son not a Son without a Father who has sent and surrendered (and whom presumably he also obeys)”.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Paul too functions as a character in this narrative, a character who is at once an exemplar of our own participation in the narrative and the bearer of the good news that we *can* participate in the story of Jesus. John Barclay explores the paradox in Paul’s story – he was “set apart” from his mother’s womb, and therefore by the will of God, independently of the normal processes of historical causation.[[34]](#footnote-34) There was never a time when Paul “was not set apart and called by grace”.[[35]](#footnote-35) Nevertheless, he came to know this atemporal reality in a specific event in his life, which is to say as part of a time-bound narrative.[[36]](#footnote-36) Paul’s story is a story of the grace of God as it works both inside and outside of history.[[37]](#footnote-37)

As a story of God’s grace, Paul’s story is relevant only to the extent that it exemplifies this. He is part of the story of the Gospel. This makes an important point about the temporality of Christ’s story, in which Paul participates. The cross and the resurrection are certainly “historical” events that function as part of a narrative, but they are not simply influential events in a linear progression. They are events in history, but events that puncture “other times and other stories not just as a past event recalled but as a present event that, in an important sense, happens anew for its hearers in the revelation of Jesus Christ”.[[38]](#footnote-38) The crucifixion shapes Paul’s life, in dying with Christ at his baptism, but is made present anew in all his sufferings and experiences. Barclay notes the use of the perfect tense in Galatians 2:29: “I have been [and thus continue to be] crucified with Christ”.[[39]](#footnote-39) The crucifixion and the resurrection happen time and time again in the life of Paul and in the lives of all believers.

One critique of the narrative approach to the “Pauline Gospel” comes from Francis Watson.[[40]](#footnote-40) He argues that the Epistles conceive of the saving actions of Jesus Christ not as a narrative, on a horizontal plane, but in their unity and coherence as one singular saving act of God, a definitive “vertical” incursion. “Paul’s gospel, then, is not itself a ‘story’, since its vertical construal of God’s act as a movement of descent and ascent inhibits the linear temporal extension that a ‘story of Jesus’ would require”.[[41]](#footnote-41) For Watson, Paul’s gospel is essentially “nonnarratable”.[[42]](#footnote-42) There is certainly a difficulty in matching up the unified actions of an eternal God with their narrative instances in time, because they ultimately affect all time everywhere. Nevertheless, the saving acts of Jesus happen in time, and they are paradigmatic and transformative for the lives of people, people like Paul and the readers of Paul’s epistles, who exist in real time. All Christian lives share in the paradox of Paul’s calling, that they were chosen by God before time began and yet realised this at a particular point in time in a way that transformed their lives, so much so that Ephesians repeats the ποτέ..νυν/then…now distinction[[43]](#footnote-43) to express the very real change that has happened – you can’t get more temporal than that. The epistles relate to the significance of lives lived, the life of Jesus, the life of Paul and the life of ordinary believers. Insofar as a life gathered together must be narrative in character, the epistles narrate and require a narrative response in the stories of human lives narrated by them.

One key quality of narrative configuration, especially for people who are still alive, is that the story remains unfinished. In a wider sense this is true of all Christian life; we await the “fullness of time” when Christ will “gather up all things in him” (1.10). While, as we shall see, there is more of a sense of realised eschatology in Ephesians, it still falls into the “now” and “not yet” paradigm of Pauline theology.

Before exploring the text along narrative lines, I will acknowledge some presuppositions about the characters we shall explore. Paul is the implied author of the letter; no opinion shall be offered on whether the historical Paul wrote the text. Paul is explored as a literary character within the epistle. Our second character, Jesus Christ, shall not be explored in relation to the Gospel narratives, the “narrative substructure” of the text. The focus of Ephesians is on the relationship of Christ to the narrative identity of the believers. Their life stories are incorporated into Christ, just as Paul’s was, and this is the fundamental “story” of the text, the passage of readers from death to life through their appropriation of the saving narratives of Jesus Christ. It is in this sense that we will explore the story “in front of the text” rather than the story behind it.

Similarly the thesis makes no judgements on the original recipients of the text. The implied readers of the text are “the saints who are in Ephesus”.[[44]](#footnote-44) Ricoeur is clear, just as meaning is not associated with authorial intent, neither is hermeneutics governed by the original audience’s understanding of the text, “the Letters of Saint Paul are no less addressed to me than to the Romans, the Galatians, the Corinthians, etc”.[[45]](#footnote-45) (Tertullian makes the same point as he argues against Marcion’s naming of Ephesians as Laodiceans: “But of what consequence are the titles, since in writing to a certain church, the apostle did in fact write to all?”[[46]](#footnote-46)) For Ricoeur, only a dialogue can have a defined “you”: a text is open to anybody who can read: “From the moment that the text escapes from its author and from his situation, it also escapes from its original audience. Hence it can procure new readers for itself”.[[47]](#footnote-47) Nevertheless, in order to construct the reader as a character, some limitations have to be set or the construction becomes meaningless. Of course anybody can read a text, and no reader will come to the text conforming exactly to the picture of the reader drawn by the text. Despite the opening greeting, the picture of the reader we shall draw could apply to any Christian anywhere. [[48]](#footnote-48) This is not to say that non-Christian readers cannot usefully read the text: the thought-provoking essays by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek in *Paul Among The Philosophers* demonstrate the philosophical relevance and importance of the Pauline Gospel to those without Christian faith.[[49]](#footnote-49) Nevertheless, the assumption made by the essay is similar to the assumption made by the Epistle, that “the reader” is “faithful in Christ Jesus” (1.1).

The reader’s identity will be explored in response to Ricoeur’s summary of the Christian life:

The process of becoming conscious is ultimately the process of seeing one’s childhood in front of oneself and one’s death behind oneself: “before, you were dead…”; “unless you become as little children …”[[50]](#footnote-50)

The thesis will test whether the text of Ephesians can substantiate an identity based on a narrative reversal of death and childhood. Secondly, the ethics of the paraenetical section will be read in conjunction with Ricoeur’s characterisation of the ethical life, set out in *Oneself as Another,* as*:* “aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions”.[[51]](#footnote-51) Before looking at the text, the thesis will explore three presuppositions of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics – the autonomy of the text, the relationship between the text and history, and the place of narrative – in the light of some of the criticisms levelled against them.

**Chapter 2. Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics**

**2.1. Autonomy of the text**

Ricoeur argues for the threefold autonomy of the text: the text is autonomous from the intention of the author in writing it;[[52]](#footnote-52) from the cultural and sociological conditions in which the text was written; and from the person or people for whom the text was originally written.[[53]](#footnote-53) This autonomy is based on his analysis of the difference between a face-to-face dialogue and the act of reading. Despite their differences, both require interpretation. Any attempt to understand either written or spoken discourse faces the interpretative problem of polysemy: that individual words mean more than one thing, and that combinations of words can have more than one meaning. Whether listening or reading, to understand is to interpret.

At a most basic level, the task of interpretation is to create a univocal discourse from the polysemic resources of language.[[54]](#footnote-54) In a conversation this can be achieved through question and answer in order to find the intention of the speaker (although, inevitably, the speaker’s conception of their own “intention” will be changed by the process of being questioned.) Understanding in conversation is by no means a straightforward business. We are not dealing simply with the message conveyed, but with the action performed in conveying it – the illocutionary act – and with the consequences provoked by saying it – the perlocutionary act. By the same message – pass the salt – I could be pleading or commanding, engendering pity or fear.[[55]](#footnote-55) For Ricoeur, to understand is always to reconstruct. We cannot directly intuit another’s reality – even in everyday life – we must always reconstruct it through the mediation of our own experience and perspective.[[56]](#footnote-56) Nevertheless, the quest for understanding the intention of a conversational partner is dialectical. It also relies on a sensitivity to the context of the conversation.[[57]](#footnote-57) Readers, on the other hand, no longer have this possibility of questioning the author and they do not participate in the context of the writing as a listener does in a conversation. They have themselves and the text.[[58]](#footnote-58)

It is in this sense that a text differs from a conversation. A conversation is wholly determined by its context, by who is talking to whom, where, when and for what reason. The reader of text, on the other hand, could be anybody who can read. Furthermore, as we have said, she has no means of dialoguing with the author. Meaning is determined not by a specific context, but by an unlimited number of different readers who interpret one text. No conversation makes sense outside the context of the people speaking; exactly the same words would mean different things in different conversations. Conversely, all texts can be read outside of the context in which they were written, even when they were not designed to be. By the act of writing the psychological intention of the writer is lost to the reader, and thus the meaning of the text is liberated from it.[[59]](#footnote-59)

If a text is valued in two entirely different times or places, it has necessarily transcended the particular circumstances in which it was written and opened itself up to multiple recontextualisations in different times and places. The hermeneutical consequences of this autonomy depend on the purpose for which the text is being read. A historian can, of course, read the text in order to learn something about the person who wrote it and the context for which it was written. However, although such a historical understanding might *aid* the search for meaning in the text, it would not *determine* the meaning of the text. It is perfectly reasonable to read the New Testament, for example, in the light of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, even though the authors of the text could hardly have intended it to conform to doctrine set centuries after it was written. Francis Watson argues that “in the creed, ecclesial interpretation encounters the limits within which it must work and beyond which it must not stray”.[[60]](#footnote-60) As long as the reader is not claiming any false equivalence between the intentions of the author and later developments in understanding the text, there is nothing inherently wrong in reading the doctrine of the Trinity out of the New Testament, as long as this constitutes a valid reading of the text. As Gregory the Great puts it, scripture grows with its readers.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Historical readings of texts are useful for two purposes. The first is as a hermeneutic of suspicion, which prevents the interpreter from making false assumptions that her reading of the text is a straightforward précis of the intentions of the author, or the Biblical narratives a straightforward account of empirical history. The second is that historical-critical readings of the text can be a useful heuristic device, a way of seeing something new in the text that adds to the sum of our knowledge about it and the range of interpretations it is possible to make. Our understanding of the text is fuller if we consider how different people might have read it, even though we must be suspicious of our own reconstructions of people and situations from history. Social-scientific readings of texts have been especially useful heuristic devices. Applying models, either historically or in the light of social-scientific research, has greatly aided our understanding of Ephesians, as Arnold, Shkul and Roitto have more than adequately shown in their studies.[[62]](#footnote-62)

This threefold autonomy of the text has some important consequences for hermeneutics. No longer must hermeneutics focus on the person who wrote the text, their life story, or the sociological and historical condition in which they found themselves, in order to guess what that person may have been trying to say. The focus of hermeneutics can be on the text itself. Neither is it necessarily the work of hermeneutics to reconstruct the world of the original readers, to see what they may have understood by the text. While a letter, say, may be written in a specific context, once it has escaped from that context into the public domain, it is open to anybody who can read.[[63]](#footnote-63) Its value and meaning will be determined by everybody who reads it, not restricted to some attempt to imagine what its original readers may have understood by it. The focus of hermeneutics, therefore, can be on the text itself and not a reconstruction of its intended audience.

Even if we had a clear and precise commentary by the author, giving an account of their intentions in writing a text, we would not be saved from the need for guessing and interpretation. Apart from the banal point that such a commentary would in itself require interpretation, we read texts for different reasons than authors write them. The reasons why a work is worth reading does not necessarily equate with the reason why an author wrote it. For instance, the Song of Songs may not have been written as an allegory of the love of God, but the fact that the author may not have intended such a reading (not that we will ever finally know) does not invalidate the readings of the many people throughout history who have found the love of God in the text. An important factor in the continuing significance of that text is not its value as a piece of romantic poetry (if that was its original intention) but its place in the Biblical Canon. It is a pretty safe assumption that the text was not written to read in the context of the Christian Canon, and yet that is how it is read by many people.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Nicholas Wolterstorff mounts an attack on what he calls “textual sense interpretation”.[[65]](#footnote-65) He defines the “textual sense” as “that totality of meanings which the sentences comprising the text have in that linguistic context which is the text”.[[66]](#footnote-66) Wolterstorff correctly points out that the search for the sense of the text, autonomous from authorial intention, cannot result in one meaning of the text.[[67]](#footnote-67) This is certainly not what Ricoeur is attempting to achieve; part of Ricoeur’s definition of a good interpretation is one that takes account of the fullness and potential diversity of what the text can mean.[[68]](#footnote-68) To illustrate the problems of textual-sense interpretation, Wolterstorff takes the example of Locke’s metaphor “reason is the candle of the Lord” and asks why we interpret the sentence metaphorically rather than literally.[[69]](#footnote-69) If, as Wolterstorff suggests, there are no contextual reasons for assuming that texts are consistent and fulfil our expectations, we cannot arrive at a metaphorical reading from the context of the sentence alone. There is no inherent textual reason to assume that reason cannot literally be a candle, *ergo* it is not the textual context alone that determines our metaphorical reading. He argues that authorial intent is therefore a better guide to determining our reading. “The actual reason we don’t interpret that sentence in the Lockean text literally is surely that Locke would have had to be mad to say that seriously, whereas we all know that he wasn’t mad”.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Actually, many readers will approach the text without a precise or reliable diagnosis of Locke’s state of mental health when writing. Some readers may read the text without any knowledge of Locke at all. Nevertheless they will still probably take the sentence to be metaphorical rather than literal. This is not so much because of any assumptions they may make about Locke, but because of their own experience of the world, which tells them that reason cannot literally be a candle, so some other form of reference is being made. Similarly, they probably won’t engage in some deep historical study as to what “reason” meant to the people of Locke’s world and time, but they will bring their own understanding of “reason” (and indeed “candle”) to the text. The textual sense and the context of the sentence are important, but they determine meaning in relation to the world of the reader, rather than autonomously or in conjunction with a reconstruction of authorial intent.

Philip Esler, in his analysis of a lyric poem, “The Wild Swans at Coole” by WB Yeats, attempts to show that Ricoeur’s theory of the distanciation of the author from the text is fundamentally flawed.[[71]](#footnote-71) The basis of his argument is that the interplay between the facts of Yeats’ biography and the text itself is significant to the meaning of the poem even though the text of the poem could theoretically be separated from the details of Yeats’ life and given a universal message about “the transience and sadness of human life set against the unchanging beauty and energy of the natural world”.[[72]](#footnote-72) It is of vital importance to Esler that within the poem are “the signs of a real person’s actual experience that presses with such power against the language”.[[73]](#footnote-73) However, Yeats is not the only person whose real experience presses against the language. The reader comes to the poem with a wealth of experience and perspective that may be illuminated or changed by the poem. If the poem does not in some way speak to this reality, then it will not be read. For the poem to be meaningful, it must be meaningful to the reader.

Since direct intuition of another person’s reality is not possible, but must be mediated, the extent to which Yeats’ biography is important to the reader’s appropriation of the poem will depend upon the reader’s mediation of Yeats. Even after years of extensive historical research, any reconstruction of Yeats will differ significantly from reader to reader, just as different people who met Yeats would have had varying takes on him. The truth about the interaction between Yeats’ life and his poetry would not have been, in the last analysis, fully accessible to either Yeats or the people who knew him well. Such truth would be mediated by judgements affected by time, memory and perception. This is all the more the case for those of us distanced from him by his death.[[74]](#footnote-74) We might be able to begin to make judgements about which reconstructions of Yeats are more or less valid, given the historical and textual evidence we have available to us, but I would hesitate to say that better historians make better readers of poems. In the end the reader will make a judgement on the extent to which the poem points to beauty or truth beyond itself. A certain amount of knowledge of Yeats’ life will certainly aid this process. A reconstruction by the reader of Yeats’ reality might ground the poem in the poignancy and depth of real life in a way that transforms the poem for some readers. But if a reader can apply the poem to a different context with equal validity or depth, a context that speaks either to them personally or to a group of readers, then it would seem rather churlish to disapprove, as Esler does, on the grounds that they are “colonising” the text.[[75]](#footnote-75) Every reader colonises the text. The fact that some carefully use the weapons of historical research or social-scientific models to make their appropriation does not in itself make their reading any more valid than another.

While Esler’s criticism of Ricoeur fails when confronted with poetry, there is a more serious case to be answered in the case of a letter, especially a letter that makes certain promises, like Ephesians. Wolterstorff makes this claim convincingly with regard to the illocutionary acts of discourse present with a text. He takes the example of a promise. He compares a promise to a mathematic or literary text. He questions whether in those first two cases there is any intrinsic value in getting back to what the author meant. In the case of a novel, the joy in the novel might be seriously impaired by the painstaking historical labour of working out what the author intended; in the case of the mathematician, it is sufficient simply to follow the proofs that he sets outs. In the case of a promise, however, while it may be interesting “to imagine what someone might promise with those words you wrote”, most people would actually be more interested in “what you actually did promise me”.[[76]](#footnote-76) If I had written you a letter promising something, then this would almost certainly be the case. If you didn’t understand what I had promised, you might write to me for further clarification. You would want to know if it were a genuine promise, or if I were attempting to deceive you. The problem with this argument is that it puts the text into a kind of dialogical situation, where there is a distinct “you” and “I” in communication with one another. However desirable such a communication might be between the biblical authors and Christians today, in many cases we cannot be entirely sure who they are, let alone, as Dan Stiver points out, whether they were trying to deceive us or not.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Questions of deceit become fundamentally important when we approach texts like Ephesians which many commentators take to be pseudepigraphical. Yet we will never know, finally, whether the text was written by Paul, and if it was not, whether the intentions of the author were deceitful. No amount of historical research could ever adequately answer that second question, which depends so utterly on the psychology of a person whose identity we can only guess at. If the meaningfulness of the text rests so entirely on the trustworthiness of the intentions of the author, then the only honest response is to remain agnostic as to its value. If, on the other hand, we wish to continue to approach the text as faithful Christians, then our assessment of meaning must rest on something other than the intentions of the author. Arguably, for those Christians who look to the canon, in the case of a text like Ephesians its reception by the Church and inclusion in the biblical canon is a much better guarantor of its value than whatever learned reconstructions we might like to make about an author who remains obscure.

People read texts for different reasons and there can be no final judgement over why a text is worth reading. If it continues to be read, its relative importance will continue to change depending on the questions people bring to the text. No reader can fully escape the cumulative effect of previous readings of the text. This process happens quite independently of the intention of the author. What comes to seem important and life-changing about a work does not have to have been intended by the author to be recognised as an integral part of the text.

If we focus on the text itself, rather than attempts to probe the psychology of the author or the sociology of the context behind the text, we are still faced with the interpretative problem of polysemy, the multiple and sometimes mutually contradictory interpretations that a text can lead to. How can the reader judge in this conflict of interpretations? Ricoeur is clear that while a text can lead to an unlimited number of differing interpretations, this does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid.[[78]](#footnote-78) Using the text, it is possible to prove some interpretations as invalid, because they contradict what the text says. The text limits possibilities as well as opening them up. He likens the process of making an interpretation to the logic of guessing. We cannot ultimately define what makes for a good guess, but we do use methods to validate our guesses in dialogue with the evidence before us.[[79]](#footnote-79) When we guess we are playing a game of probability – asking both whether our guess is probable in itself, and whether it is more or less probable than other potential guesses. Applying this to textual interpretation, Ricoeur argues that there are clues in the text.[[80]](#footnote-80) The clues “contain at once a permission and a prohibition”. They allow us to make guesses on the basis of the text and furnish our interpretation with evidence but, on the other hand, they stop us from making interpretations that contradict them. He argues that a good explanation accords with two basic principles of interpretation: congruence – that there is not disagreement between the text and the interpretation – and plenitude – that the interpretation is aware not only of its own congruence with the text, but takes account of the fullness and potential diversity of what the text can mean. It is an important principle for Ricoeur that the text means all that it can mean. A better interpretation, for Ricoeur, can be judged quantitatively: it takes account of more facts in the text, and more potentially valid readings of those facts, than a mediocre explanation that might be called “narrow or forced”.[[81]](#footnote-81)

He makes use of a further metaphor to illustrate the game of interpretation, that of the court. Like the interpreter, the court reaches its judgement, one of several possible readings of the evidence, using the principles of probability. But there is a big difference between the practice of a court and the interpretation of texts.[[82]](#footnote-82) In the court there is a final word, when all the appeals have been exhausted. The interpretation of texts can come to no such satisfying conclusion. In the court, the last word is a necessary part of the juridical process, and it is backed, ultimately, by the use of force. Any attempt at a last word in history, literary criticism or the social sciences would be called “violence”.[[83]](#footnote-83)

It is the concept of the self confronted with the text that saves Ricoeur’s interpretation from pure subjectivity. He does not wish us to impose our own “finite” understanding upon the text,[[84]](#footnote-84) rather to be exposed to a text, which through our exposure to it, enlarges us.[[85]](#footnote-85) A principle running through Ricoeur’s work, one to which he ascribes a kind of ontological vehemence, is that language is not simply a system closed in upon itself that refers to nothing but itself, as some structuralists and deconstructionists would have it, but that language is referential – it refers to truths outside of itself, it refers to the world. He makes a clear distinction between sense and reference. Sense is present in a closed lexical system – semiotics. It has no relation to reality, rather is self-referential, “its words returning to other words in the endless circle of the dictionary”.[[86]](#footnote-86) But when lexis and grammar are combined in text, this produces discourse, which, unlike the system of signs that make up language, is referential; it makes truth claims about a reality that exists outside of language. For Ricoeur, the referential quality of language is not limited to descriptive language – which has a clear referential function – but concerns metaphor and poetry as well. All discourse can tell us something about the world, which is why it plays such an important function in the “long route to self-understanding.”[[87]](#footnote-87) Our job is to interpret texts, and through our interpretations, to interpret ourselves in front of them.

**2.2. History, truth and meaning**

A second challenge to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is the elusive relationship between the truth of historical events and their representation in texts. While Ephesians does not recount conventional narrative history, the truth of the descent/ascent of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, is clearly key to the whole text. Hengel justifiably argues that Ricoeur offers no adequate reflection on the importance of historical research to biblical interpretation, even if he asserts its indispensability.[[88]](#footnote-88) Vanhoozer poses a fundamental question when he asks, in the light of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, why we should hearken to the Gospel rather than to Huckleberry Finn.[[89]](#footnote-89) If there is no discernible connection between the gospels and historical truth, and if the point of the Gospel is to open up the world in front of the text, dislocated from any historical events, why shouldn’t a work that makes no truth claims on reality be just as powerful a tool for this process of self-actualisation? This question is central to the interpretation of a faith based on historical events - a point made rather forcefully by Paul (1 Corinthians 15.12-19). The resurrection is not just a way of interpreting the world that leads to greater self-understanding, but an event in a particular time and place that changes the world for ever. However, the nature of the event in itself is lost to us; we can only access it through a series of texts which interpret it.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur explores the nature of documentary proof: “Under the condition of a broad agreement among specialists, one can say that a factual interpretation has been verified in the sense that it has not been refuted at the present stage of accessible documentation”.[[90]](#footnote-90) Ricoeur is typically cautious about the relationship between the methodological conclusions of historians, based on the evidence available to them, and the events themselves. “The alleged facts are certainly not brute facts, even less are they doubles of the events themselves; they remain of a propositional nature”.[[91]](#footnote-91) Ricoeur is clear, “no such thing as a historical reality exists ready-made so that science merely has to reproduce it faithfully”. [[92]](#footnote-92) What happened is beyond the reach of the historian and must be postulated “like the Kantian *noumena* at the origin of all empirical phenomena”.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Even if the resurrection could be proved beyond all reasonable doubt to have happened, that would not in itself get us very far. A spiritual guru who learns to resurrect himself from the dead would be a startling event that would fundamentally challenge our preconceptions about the world, but it would not change the cosmic order of the world in the way that Christians claim of Jesus’ Resurrection. Such a person may have simply discovered a physical and scientific means of resurrection which would only seem miraculous because we would have never experienced it before. In purely physical terms, the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11.44), or the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7.11-17), and the resurrection of Jesus are not necessarily distinct: human beings who were once dead became alive. In terms of the significance Christians ascribe to these events, and their cosmic effects, they are events of a completely different order. Three very similar and in one sense equally extraordinary events mean very different, if perhaps related, things. This should lead us to distrust any idea that biblical interpretation is purely an historical attempt to get back behind the text to the event itself. The events in themselves would not get us to the vital question of what they mean, for that we need their interpretation. Events without interpretation are banal, they tell us very little. Even if we could access the basic “facts” of the event, this would tell us nothing about what they mean, for they would, in themselves, be open to a number of mutually contradictory interpretations. In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur explores the concept of an “Ideal Chronicler”[[94]](#footnote-94) – one who could be an absolutely faithful witness and absolutely sure about what happened.[[95]](#footnote-95) The problem with such a figure is that while they might be a reliable transcriber of events, they would have absolutely no idea of their significance, because significance can only be determined afterwards. Without a knowledge of the future it is impossible to determine the significance of the present. Understanding of events is therefore as potentially inaccessible to their witnesses as anybody else.

Nevertheless, the question of historical truth remains an important one for a Christian seeking to use Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. In terms of the raising of Lazarus, whether or not the event actually happened is probably not the fundamental question.[[96]](#footnote-96) The narrative gives us a glimpse of truths about Jesus that for the Christian remain true whether or not this particular instance of these truths happened in this particular way at this particular time. The important point is what the story tells us about Jesus, and this is true, for the Christian, regardless of whether the events of the story actually happened. The same could not be said of the resurrection. If the raising of Lazarus did not happen, it does not make our faith vain – Matthew, Mark and Luke manage to write world-changing Gospel accounts without narrating it; if, on the other hand, Christ was not raised from the dead, then we are more to be pitied than anybody else (see 1 Cor 15.19). Kevin Vanhoozer puts this rather well:

The theological realist claims that some such reference to historical events is necessary if the story is ultimately to make sense. Unless something in the history of Jesus happened which in some way altered the human condition, the Christian theologian will be doomed to continual frustration in the attempt to demonstrate the intrinsic connection between the fate of the particular man Jesus and the universal possibility represented by Christ.[[97]](#footnote-97)

So what place does the Resurrection have within Ricoeur’s philosophy? Before we explore this more fully, it is important to note one caveat. Ricoeur is attempting, as a philosopher, to write philosophy within the limits of reason alone, thus betraying his Kantian influence. He makes an explicit distinction between what he might or might not say as a philosopher working under this bracketing, and what a theologian might say.[[98]](#footnote-98) As James Fodor points out, “Not surprisingly, theologians find themselves troubled by, or at least not fully satisfied with, Ricoeur’s metaphysical coyness”.[[99]](#footnote-99) To a metaphysical coyness we could certainly add an historical coyness. Both are related to the limits of the methodology under which he is working. His reluctance to assert the truth of the resurrection in a positivist historical sense must be interpreted in that light, even though the Christian commentator who does not place herself within those limits may want to go a bit further in her faith commitment to the historicity of the resurrection, regardless of its susceptibility to empirical verification. In saying this, I am making no claims about Ricoeur’s own beliefs. Like Michael DeLashmutt, “I do not wish to treat Ricoeur as a crypto-theologian whose true confession has somehow been obscured by phenomenological bracketing or who can only truly be understood through a re-reading in the light of faith”.[[100]](#footnote-100) I am simply pointing out where his self-confessed perspective is not mine.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Ricoeur sketches three views of the resurrection. The first sees the resurrection as primarily a past event in history. He associates this view with Hegel.[[102]](#footnote-102) Secondly, he outlines the existential appropriation of the Resurrection, which sees the Resurrection in a kind of eternal present, relived as it is reappropriated by new people. He wants to go beyond both these approaches, and presents a third view in which the Resurrection is eschatological and therefore a promise of hope for the future. For Ricoeur, “the Resurrection is the sign that the promise is henceforth for all; the meaning of the resurrection is in its future, the death of death, the Resurrection of all from the dead … The meaning of the Resurrection is in suspense insofar as it is not fulfilled in a new creation, in a new totality of being”.[[103]](#footnote-103) He associates this view with the eschatological theology of hope of Jürgen Moltmann. There is great power in the view that the Resurrection is an event whose promises and true meaning have yet to be fully realised. It is certainly a view in sympathy with Ephesians, where we await the full meaning of the resurrection in the fullness of time when all things shall be summed up in Christ (1.10). As Ricoeur notes, we live in the Pauline “already” and “not yet”.[[104]](#footnote-104) In all this, Ricoeur is fundamentally interested not in what DeLashmutt calls the mechanics of the resurrection,[[105]](#footnote-105) but in the meaning of the resurrection for the believer, and indeed for the world. This is surely the fundamental point of the resurrection, although it is fair to say that there is an inadequate expression in Ricoeur’s thought of the relationship between the truth of the event and its meaning.

**2.3. Metaphor and narrative**

Having explored some of the challenges to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics in general, we will now explore and introduce his work on narrative, which is the theoretical framework for this reading of Ephesians in terms of the narrative identity of the reader. Ricoeur’s work on narrative stems from his analysis of metaphor in *The Rule of Metaphor.* He summarises the classical analysis of metaphor, which he later goes on to dispute, using Aristotle’s poetics: metaphor is the substitution of one name for another, achieved by deviation from a word’s literal meaning. This is done either because there is no appropriate literal word to be used, or as a function of rhetoric “to ornament discourse, to make it more pleasing”.[[106]](#footnote-106) A metaphor is used because of resemblance, and is in that sense an abridged simile. Because a literal meaning could have been used in place of the metaphor, it is simply a substitute or a transference of meaning from one name to another. There is no semantic gain – that is to say, the use of metaphor tells us nothing new about reality.[[107]](#footnote-107) In the positivist sense, metaphor is therefore simply emotive and has no cognitive value.

By moving away from analysis of metaphor on the level of naming to the level of utterance, Ricoeur sees the use of metaphor not as mere substitution of one name for another, but as a conscious tension between two interpretations – the literal meaning of the word and its figurative use.[[108]](#footnote-108) The metaphor exists not as distinct words but as the ensemble of two concepts brought together.[[109]](#footnote-109) It exists not in and of itself, but through the process of interpreting the two contradictory meanings. He compares it to Gilbert Ryle’s concept of a “category mistake”, bringing together two things that should not be united, and through the apparent misunderstanding allowing a “new, hitherto unnoticed relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed”.[[110]](#footnote-110) In this sense metaphorical utterance, by breaking the established rules of language, “redescribes a reality inaccessible to direct description”.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Metaphors, therefore, tell us something new about reality.[[112]](#footnote-112) In a similar way narrative, too, redescribes reality.[[113]](#footnote-113) Like metaphor, narrative is a semantic innovation that brings together heterogeneous elements. In both cases something new springs up in language. In the case of narrative this “new” thing brought to light is the weaving together of goals, causes and chance into a temporal unity by means of plot. The plot, as a way of reading disparate events, events that might never have been brought together as a causal chain, is an interpretative tool as powerful as the metaphor. The very process of defining causality, of saying that one thing has led to another, is central to the narrative process, which differs from a mere chronicle in explaining the course of events it describes. By selecting certain events and actions as causes of other events and actions, the narrator is explaining rather than simply recounting. And by explaining the narrator is making an interpretation. With his concept of narrative identity Ricoeur relates this semantically innovative process of narrative to the crafting of the subject.

**2.4. Mimesis**

Ricoeur explains the process of narration in his analysis of *mimesis*, which he describes as a mimetic arc, beginning with *mimesis₁,* the shared pre-understanding of the writer and the reader or hearer. This understanding precedes the act of creation or configuration of the text, which is *mimesis₂*. However, as we have seen, the arc is not complete until the text is appropriated by the reader – and this act of reading is *mimesis₃*.

In his analysis of *mimesis₁,* Ricoeur shows how certain presuppositions are essential to the process of emplotment. He divides this preunderstanding into three categories, the meaningful structure of action, the symbolic resources of action grounded in cultural symbols and the temporal character of action.[[114]](#footnote-114) The first category relates to our shared understanding of action itself. The very nature of action implies an agent and a goal. Without understanding the basic structure of an action as meaningful, and without a familiarity with terms such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success and failure, any reader of a narrative would be lost.[[115]](#footnote-115) In order to understand a story we need to understand what Ricoeur calls “the language of doing something”[[116]](#footnote-116) and the basic structure of plot – that one action leads to another.

Secondly, human actions have deep cultural significance. Ricoeur points out that “the same gesture of raising one’s arm, depending on the context, may be understood as a way of greeting someone, of hailing a taxi, or of voting”.[[117]](#footnote-117) Actions exist within a symbolic system that must exist prior to its representation in text, and be understood by writer and reader alike. Even if the reader does not share with the writer an understanding of the social connotations of the particular act in the narrative, the reader would certainly recognise that actions have social significance, and seek an understanding of that significance within the context of the narrative they read.

Thirdly, actions exist within a temporal structure: if one thing leads to another, then they exist in a temporal relationship with one another. Without a shared preunderstanding of chronology, most plots would make very little sense. In order to represent action, human acting must be preunderstood – as Ricoeur says, “literature would be incomprehensible if it did not give a configuration to what was already a figure in human action”.[[118]](#footnote-118)

*Mimesis₂* is the act of configuring the world by means of plot. It is a mediation between *mimesis₁* and *mimesis₃*. Ricoeur identifies three mediations. First there is a mediation between individual events and incidents on the one hand and a story that constitutes an intelligible whole on the other. As with metaphor, this is a bringing together of heterogeneous elements: the events that make up a narrative do not form a meaningful narrative by themselves; they form a meaningful narrative because they are placed together in causal relationship with one another. The process by which they are brought together is not necessarily obvious or easy. The relationship between an event and the story as a whole is reciprocal, because the event is given meaning by its placement in a narrative, just as the story as a whole is an interpretation of events.

The second mediation is not between events and story, but between heterogeneous elements such as psychological motivations, physical processes, agents, unexpected consequences and chance, which are present within and brought together by the causal process and the story as a coherent whole. The third mediation is the temporal mediation between the episodic quality of narrative – first this happened, then this and then this – and what Frank Kermode calls the “sense of an ending”,[[119]](#footnote-119) which brings together these distinct temporal episodes into one temporal whole. In order to comprehend a story, the reader must have a sense of how and why the succession of episodes led to such a conclusion that gives them meaning as part of a narrative. This conclusion, while not necessarily foreseeable, must be a plausible bringing together of such diverse episodes. And once the story has been read and the conclusion reached, it brings about a reversal of time: since the ending governs the whole story, we read the conclusion back into the events that led to it. The development of plot works backwards from its ending.

Summarising these three mediations that bring together heterogeneous events, elements and moments in one narrative, Ricoeur uses the phrase concordant discordance:[[120]](#footnote-120) The elements are fundamentally dissonant, but they are brought together in the consonance of a unified narrative. Despite the concordance of the narrative, the discordance of the elements remains.

*Mimesis₃*, the act of reading, is the place where the world of the text intersects with the world of the reader. It is reminiscent of Gadamer’s concept of the fusion of horizons. Ricoeur stresses that the world of the reader is a real world “where real action occurs and unfolds in its specific temporality”.[[121]](#footnote-121) The poetic configuration, the world of the text, therefore, influences and changes the world through the act of reading. And through the act of reading the text refers to truths beyond itself. A text is not simply a closed system of signs but makes reference to a world that exists outside of it. And the world is therefore opened up by this reconfiguration, as Ricoeur points out: “For me the world is a whole set of references opened by every sort of descriptive or poetic text I have read, interpreted and loved”.[[122]](#footnote-122)

The importance of the reader for the creation of meaning in text is paramount for Ricoeur, and it is the act of reading rather than the act of writing that is the key literary act. What Ricoeur calls the effects of fiction, its revelation and its ability to transform the world, are effects of reading.[[123]](#footnote-123) Without the reader, a text does not fulfil its function as a configuring act, and no world is opened up in front of the text.[[124]](#footnote-124) Even the structure of a text is primarily brought about by reading; after all, structural analysis is in itself an act of reading.[[125]](#footnote-125) “Reading then becomes a picnic where the author brings the words and the readers the meanings”.[[126]](#footnote-126) Reading is not, therefore, an attempt to follow what the author has prescribed, but a way of bringing the possibilities of the text to light through interpretation.[[127]](#footnote-127)

**2.5. Narrative identity**

Ricoeur’s articulation of narrative identity arises from what he describes as the central question of narrative, “who?”. By giving a name to the agent of an action, we are asserting that the person who performed one action is the same as the person with the same name who performed a previous action. For example, if we were to conclude that Paul wrote Ephesians, we would be saying that the Paul who wrote Ephesians was the same Paul who wrote Galatians. To say a person remains the same through the multiplicity of diverse states is to make a big ontological claim. We might, following Hume and Nietzsche, want to dismiss the identical subject altogether as an illusion bringing together a “pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions”.[[128]](#footnote-128) Or, as TS Eliot would have it:

Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;

You are not those who saw the harbour

Receding, or those who will disembark.[[129]](#footnote-129)

Ricoeur dismisses the notion of an irreducible core to a person who remains a constant throughout the dynamic processes of life, what he calls *idem* identity. Such an identity would fail to account for the discordance and change which is so much a part of human selfhood. Instead he posits an *ipse* identity.[[130]](#footnote-130) *Ipse* identity is about being self-same, a definition of selfhood that is a constant search for and re-evaluation of selfhood – a hermeneutical process that resists easy resolution. It is akin to the processes of both history and fiction, which both seek, in different ways, to answer the narrative question of “who?”. Ricoeur uses the example of two self-portraits of Rembrandt at different stages of his life. The two people depicted are demonstrably different, yet we can say that it is the same person because, however different they might appear, they have the same name, a name that posits a narrative relationship between them. Through a series of events one has become the other; that is what is declared by the name.[[131]](#footnote-131) This concept of narrative identity is expressed in the Four Quartets. While we can say with no certainty that those who saw the harbour receding are the same as those at any given point on the voyage or those who disembark, we can say that a narrative may be constructed by them about the sequence of events, a narrative that puts those events in relation to one another, a narrative relation founded on a narrative identity of the individual. Such a narrative identity brings us to some kind of truth about how the sequence of events is experienced without necessarily making any ontological claims about the subject.

Michael DeLashmutt asks an important question about the relationship between the concept of narrative identity and resurrection: “Can a narrative identity, which is lived in full awareness of the limitations of ﬁnitude, enjoy the hope which is expressed in Christian theology?”[[132]](#footnote-132) An awareness that the narrative comes to an end is a fundamental part of narrative that is lived authentically. How can we square this sense of living up to death with resurrection from death leading to eternal life? *Ipse* identity is fundamental here. It is the declaration of the subject which posits a narrative relation between discordant events that allows us to recognise a self-same subject through a life. Similarly it is the word of Jesus, “It is I, the same”, that posits a concordance between the discordance of the crucifixion and the resurrection.[[133]](#footnote-133) Because Jesus declares himself to be Jesus, we too can recognise the narrative thread. This sense of the reality of death is key for Ricoeur. He quotes approvingly the reformers’ phrase “the Kingdom of God is hidden under its contrary, the cross”.[[134]](#footnote-134) It is through finitude that infinitude is realised. As TS Eliot would have it, “only through time time is conquered”.[[135]](#footnote-135)

**Chapter 3. A Reading of Ephesians in the Light of Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics**

Before starting the reading proper, it is worth briefly noting some previous attempts to use Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as a key to reading biblical texts. Ricoeur himself has done extensive exegetical work on the Old Testament, most notably in dialogue with biblical scholar Andre Le Coque in his work *Thinking Biblically*. Here the fruits of his polycentric and intertextual approach, in dialogue with the text as it has been received throughout Christian tradition, are clear to this reader at least. Similarly his work on the parables[[136]](#footnote-136) shows the value of his thinking on symbol and metaphor when applied to biblical exegesis. Other scholars have taken up the challenge of his hermeneutics to write interpretations on Job[[137]](#footnote-137) and the Joseph narrative.[[138]](#footnote-138)

John L. Meech uses Ricoeur’s dialogue between the self and the other as a prism for exploring Paul’s I as a communal rather than an individual designation. He argues that while Ricoeur avoids the trap of Bultmann’s individualism, Ricoeur’s concept of selfhood needs a further detour into the self in community.[[139]](#footnote-139) Valérie Nicolet-Anderson critiques Meech in her work on the self in Romans, written in dialogue with Foucault and to a lesser extent with Ricoeur.[[140]](#footnote-140) She argues that his general focus on Paul, rather than a specific letter, renders his reading “superficial and indirect”.[[141]](#footnote-141) Her own reading of Romans includes a helpful discussion of categories of the self in Romans through the prism of *Ipse* and *Idem* identity.[[142]](#footnote-142) There has been some work on Ephesians by scholars in dialogue with Ricoeur. Elna Mouton[[143]](#footnote-143) wrote a perceptive essay on Ephesians in dialogue with Ricoeur, employing Van Gennep’s concept of liminality. This thesis will argue that Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity fits better than liminality with Ephesians as way of expressing the same basic point – the dynamic and improvisational quality of the ethics of the text. Her longer work on Ephesians, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically*, engages with Ricoeur and hermeneutical theory at a wider level in her struggle to appropriate Ephesians.[[144]](#footnote-144) Bradley J. Matthews’ doctoral thesis on Christian maturity in Ephesians and Colossians does not reference Ricoeur, but covers some of the same ground as this thesis in its exploration of maturity in the text and in seeking to make a contemporary appropriation of it.[[145]](#footnote-145)

David Ford used Ephesians as the biblical source for his theological investigation of self and salvation, in dialogue with Levinas, Jüngel and Ricoeur.[[146]](#footnote-146) Ford's work, following Andrew Lincoln,[[147]](#footnote-147) focuses on questions of identity and the self. In his work on Ephesians, he takes the imperative to sing in 5.19 as the basis for his exploration of the worshipping self: “the act of singing in community draws the self out of itself into relationship with others”.[[148]](#footnote-148) In contrast to this study, which aims to take a broad view of Ricoeur’s thinking, Ford makes a virtue of concentrating on *Oneself as Another* as his source for Ricoeur’s thought.[[149]](#footnote-149) Nevertheless, Ford’s dialogue between Ricoeur’s narrative ethics and Ephesians was influential to this project, and such a dialogue forms the basis for the final chapter. This project goes beyond Ford by using Ricoeur’s narrative ethics to grapple with the difficult issues of patriarchal marriage and slavery, employing a hermeneutic of suspicion in reading Ephesians.

Finally, this thesis is influenced by the premise, if not so much the content, of Timothy Gombis’ book, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God.* The book does not reference Ricoeur, but its project, of presenting Ephesians as a drama we are called to perform, “a gospel script that invites performances by communities of God’s people”,[[150]](#footnote-150) is similar in scope to the project of crafting the narrative identity of the reader in terms of the narrative of the Epistle. Gombis reads the text through the prism of “divine warfare ideology from the Old Testament”, which according to Gombis, “saturates the letter”.[[151]](#footnote-151) Gombis’ emphasis on the powers results in his concluding argument that the hijacking and perversion of God’s world by the powers constitutes the “main problem in the drama”.[[152]](#footnote-152) While the powers are certainly key to the Epistle, the focus of this study is far more on the relationship between the self and community in the text. The powers, after all, have ultimately been defeated (1.21-22).

**3.1. I**, **Paul**

Before we begin to analyse Paul as a character in the text, and our relationship to him as reader, it is worth dealing briefly with the distinction between the author of the text and the character we encounter within the text as Paul. While a reading of a text in the light of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics will not pay undue attention to the author, it is worth noting that Pauline authorship of the Epistle continues to be disputed. Although the academic consensus probably comes down on the side of pseudepigraphy, there are still scholars who vigorously defend Pauline authorship.[[153]](#footnote-153) It is not the purpose of this study to answer this question. The important point is that it was received by the church as a Pauline text,[[154]](#footnote-154) and thus became, in the fourth century, an expression of the canonical Paul, an expression recognised by the guardians of the Pauline tradition. All the letters of Paul are a distillation and therefore a reconfiguration of his character, role and theology – it would be impossible to comprehensively represent a life’s thought in text. What the historical Paul thought and felt is lost to us, and in any case would only be partially configured by any texts that he wrote. If we are to accept the decision of the Church to include Ephesians in the canon, then we must trust that it faithfully bears witness to Paul’s thought as the Church received it, and accept the text of the Bible as we receive it. As Lincoln argues, no text gives the reader “immediate access to its author”.[[155]](#footnote-155) The author in the text, even when the text was actually written by the person named as the author, is always a construct of the reader.

For the purposes of this study, we are not interested, therefore, in a historical character lost to us, whether that be Paul himself in his own reconstruction of his thought for a particular set of circumstances we will never entirely grasp, or the motivations of someone who felt moved, for whatever reason, to represent and therefore reconstruct Paul’s thought for the early church. We are interested in the reconstruction of Paul presented in the text, whether by Paul himself or someone else, and the relationship of the Paul of Ephesians to the canonical Paul represented in the other canonical letters and the narratives of his life in Acts. When Paul is cited in this essay, it is as implied author, as a literary character in the Epistle: no conclusion has been drawn over whether the Paul in Ephesians is in fact the historical Paul, or over the complex and ultimately opaque relationship between the two.

Paul functions as a character in this narrative, a character who is a paradigm of our own participation in the narrative and the means by which our own potential to participate in the story of Jesus is revealed. Barclay’s essay, which makes this case, is focussed primarily on Galatians. Whereas Galatians explicitly recounts Paul’s story (Galatians 1.11-2.21), in Ephesians, the knowledge of the narrative substructure is assumed (3.2). An understanding of how Paul came to be the Apostle of the Gentiles and how he came to receive the revelation is assumed rather than narrated. Similarly we do not hear why or where he is a prisoner, or how he has suffered. In 3.2-3, Paul takes it for granted that the reader has already heard of his story.[[156]](#footnote-156) This begs a historical question – what did the writer expect his or her intended readers to know about Paul and his ministry? – which is beyond the scope of this study. We could ask a similar question about the reader’s prior knowledge of Jesus, which is implied in 4.21. Exactly what the reader is expected to know about Paul and Jesus is a significant gap in the text. Shkul argues, convincingly, that the gaps in the text are as significant to its meaning (that is to say, the meaning at which the reader arrives)[[157]](#footnote-157) as what the text says. Whatever this gap may have meant for the first readers of the text, for us, the fact that we, as readers, are expected by the text to come to the text with prior knowledge of Paul and Jesus nicely mirrors, and gives textual sanction for, the canonical situation in which we find ourselves: we read into Ephesians our wider understanding of Paul from the Pauline corpus and the narrative of his life in Acts. However, while we can hardly avoid reading Ephesians in conjunction with the Pauline corpus, and indeed the rest of the Bible, we must be wary of simply harmonising the oppositions that arise. Reading the Bible along with Ricoeur is a polycentric exercise in which meaning lies in the tension between contradictions rather than a naïve synchronisation of them.

This thesis will focus on how Paul is presented in the text of the Epistle. On the one hand, there is the relationship between Paul and the reader; on the other, the description of Paul’s role. In terms of the relationship, as Macdonald notes, there is a greater distance between Paul and his readers in Ephesians than in much of the corpus.[[158]](#footnote-158) Specific interest in matters of concern to the community is absent. Macdonald also points out a lack of familial language in Ephesian 1.1-2 and suggests that descriptions of group members as members of the family are less frequent than in other epistles – most notably, Paul does not address the readers as “my brothers”.[[159]](#footnote-159) For Best this is significant because the use of “brothers” in the other Epistles to some extent balances Paul’s unique status by incorporating him into a wider body of Christians, rather than setting him apart.[[160]](#footnote-160) However, as Elna Mouton notes, Paul does anchor his audience to himself by the use of the inclusive first person plural deictic ἡμᾶς. In comparison to ὑμεῖς, which occurs only three times in 1:2, 13, forms of ἡμᾶς occur eleven times in 1:2-14.[[161]](#footnote-161) This sense of being in it together is further reinforced in 2:2-3 when Paul emphasises a shared past of disobedience with the reader. As Darko argues in his study of kinship lexemes in Ephesians, the metaphor of kinship is important in Ephesians, which, despite the absence of the specific use of the brotherhood metaphor, nevertheless binds believers together as fellow adopted children and members of the household of God. In this, as Darko asserts, it is consistent with the wider Pauline corpus.[[162]](#footnote-162)

Furthermore, in spite of the sense that Paul does not know the readers personally – he has heard of, rather than directly experienced, their faith in the Lord (1.15) – there is a great deal of affection and mutuality in the address. Paul does not cease to give thanks for the readers in his prayers and asks for their prayers also (1.16, 6.19). Best points out that the element of prayer for the readers (1.3-14; 15-23; 3.14-21) is more extensive than in the other epistles.[[163]](#footnote-163) As Esler notes, “[t]his is not some empty banality but rather an illustration of how the historical Paul sought to maintain interpersonal contact with fellow Christ-followers even when he was physically absent from them”.[[164]](#footnote-164) There is an emphasis on both the horizontal and vertical aspects of faith and love: Paul gives thanks not only for their faith in the Lord Jesus, but also their love towards all the saints (1.15). This is a clear recognition of the importance of mutual love between Christians. But love of fellow Christians is grounded in the love of Christ, as Paul prays at the end of chapter 3 that the reader may “know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge so that you may be filled with the fullness of God”. (3.19)

In terms of the presentation of Paul’s role, there are two threads that run through the Epistle. On the one hand, Paul is Apostle (1.1) /Servant (3.7) /Ambassador (6.20), all three of which relate to being an intermediary; and, on the other hand, Paul is a suffering prisoner (3.1, 3.13, 4.1, 6.20).[[165]](#footnote-165) These two sets of images culminate in Paul’s self-description in 6.20 as ambassador in chains for the Gospel. The combination of ambassador and chains picks up these two threads of intermediary and prisoner. The description of Paul’s suffering bookends the material on him in chapter 3, the primary exploration of Paul’s ministry in the passage. The chapter starts by declaring that “I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus” (3.1) and ends with a prayer that the readers may not lose heart over Paul’s suffering, which is in fact the readers’ “glory” (3.13). The relationship between Paul’s suffering and the place of the cross shall be explored later, but it is worth highlighting the importance of suffering as testimony. Ricoeur notes that the word martyr comes from the Greek for witness, and to witness is in some sense to risk martyrdom:

The witness is capable of suffering and dying for what he believes. When the test of conviction becomes the price of life, the witness changes his name; he is called a martyr … society, common opinion, the powers that be, hate certain causes, perhaps the most just ones. It is necessary, then, that the just die.[[166]](#footnote-166)

This is not to say that martyrs always die either honestly or for just causes. However, the fact that witnessing implies more than simply narrating events, but potentially an engagement to death, changes the nature of testimony. “The martyr proves nothing, we say, but a truth which is not strong enough to lead a man to sacrifice lacks proof”.[[167]](#footnote-167) The active nature of testimony by the suffering witness is described with some colour by John D. Caputo as he describes Paul:

This proclamation requires fidelity, a Pauline willingness to be shipwrecked, jailed, snakebitten, persecuted, and run out of town … Paul fought the good fight and stuck to his guns unto death, visiting and sending letters to a small band of brothers and sisters, at a great personal peril, and eventually effected a revolution under which we today still live. [[168]](#footnote-168)

Ricoeur asserts that testimony is no longer simply an action of speech but an action in itself which attests to the interior man, his conviction and faith.Testimony about facts and events, and testimony about meaning and truth, are not necessarily distinct, therefore. There is not an intrinsically different quality to testifying as an eyewitness to the life of Jesus and testifying to an encounter with the risen Christ. As Ricoeur says,

Paul himself interpreted the lightning-struck encounter with the resurrected Lord on the way to Damascus as an appearance which links his experience to the chain of eyewitness testimonies of the life of Jesus and of the resurrection (Acts 22.14, 15; 26.15-20).[[169]](#footnote-169)

And yet what Paul testifies to is not his encounter with the risen Lord, but the resurrection itself, to which he was not an empirical witness, but which is the meaning and truth of his experience on the road to Damascus. In Ephesians he makes clear that he is one of a group of people to whom a specific revelation has been made (3.5), but he is not interested in narrating the experience of revelation so much as its content. As Mouton puts it, “The real point is not Paul’s apostleship, nor his person, but the truth and legitimacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ”.[[170]](#footnote-170) The conduct of his whole life, including his suffering and death, becomes the action of his witnessing to Christ whom he has not seen. He is a witness to Christ in the sense that Stephen is a witness to the resurrection in Acts: by hearing and accepting, and then testifying and suffering and dying (Acts 7.54-60).

The other thread running through the epistle, the description of Paul as Apostle/ Servant/ Ambassador, carries the sense of an intermediary. Ephesians begins by asserting Paul’s claim to a leadership role as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. In classical Greek, the term ἀπόστολος was a collective noun for a group of people sent on out on a journey, voyage or mission. In the New Testament it is used in various different ways with different implications. The traditional use of the term as a kind of baker's dozen[[171]](#footnote-171) of the twelve plus Paul is probably a late understanding and only found consistently in Luke/Acts and Revelation.[[172]](#footnote-172) Paul uses the term Apostle for Epaphroditus (Phil 2.25; 2 Cor 8.23); Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16.7); and Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 2.7). 1 Corinthians 15.5 implies that the apostles were a wider group than simply the twelve, although certainly a defined group. Nevertheless, Paul's concern to emphasise his apostolate, especially in the face of doubt, would suggest that it was considered a mark of authority, authority stemming, in Paul's case, from his conversion and calling. It seems that there were various definitions of being an apostle current at the time; some more like being an envoy from one church to another, others denoting a special role, akin to the role of the twelve, with whom Paul wished to declare his equivalence as a witness to the risen Christ. Paul uses apostle in both these senses, but in this opening (1.1) the text is claiming more for Paul than simply being an envoy, especially as he is keen to point out that his authority comes from the will of God (1.1).

Διάκονος (3.7), according to Macdonald, was used in the ancient world to describe the agent of an important person,[[173]](#footnote-173) or as Hoehner puts it, the servant of a king.[[174]](#footnote-174) Best sees a certain humility in the use of the word.[[175]](#footnote-175) The somewhat paradoxical tension between a word that is both humble (in stressing the subordination of the person designated) and grants status (by stressing the importance of the person whose agent he is, God himself) is surely the point. Here Paul is the intermediary of God, bearing an important gift for the community. The gift is the gospel for which Paul is ambassador. This ambassador brings a message of peace, the end of hostility between Jews and Gentiles (2.14), on behalf of God. But there is an irony here: the message of peace is brought by a victim of the violence whose ultimate defeat he declares. RA Wild articulates well the irony of Paul’s preaching with all boldness “*Parrhesia* most properly refers to the mode of speech which befits a free human being. It is, therefore, first and foremost associated with freedom, whether this freedom be conceived of in the political, moral or even cosmic order”.[[176]](#footnote-176) The role of ambassador is normally one that would command respect. For Paul, ambassador from God, higher than any sovereign, it means imprisonment, just as for Jesus it meant death on the cross.

The text emphasises God’s role in assigning Paul’s authority as an intermediary. In 3.2-3 and 3.7-8 this divine commission is made clear. Paul’s authority is key to the text as, unlike much of the rest of the Pauline corpus, authorship lies with him alone and the authority is not shared with co-workers. This is emphasised in the language of the passage, as Macdonald notices.[[177]](#footnote-177) The emphatic “I, Paul” at the beginning of chapter 3 is followed up by a consistent use of “I”, “my” and “me”. The nature of this authority lies principally in being a recipient of, and the most important articulator of, the revelation that “the gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel”, (3.6) in what Macdonald calls “the most concise expression of the Christian message found in Ephesians”.[[178]](#footnote-178) He is a minister or servant of this Gospel with a universal mission to make everybody see this mystery, to enlighten the world. It is the special apostolic role of Paul to interpret the mystery of the Gentiles being accepted as God’s children and to tell the Gentiles of their new status: his apostolicity has a clear function.

Not only does Paul tell the revelation, he also interprets it – it is his insight that the reader must understand, through his prism, that the reader comes to Christ (1.9; 3.3, 4, 9; 5.32; 6.19). The word insight (3.4), σύνεσις, is used in LXX Daniel (1.4, 17; 9.13, 23; 10.1, 11)[[179]](#footnote-179) to describe the understanding of dreams and visions. It is an understanding that comes from God, but its interpretation belongs to Paul. This does not close down the interpretative space for the reader, however. We do not have Paul’s insight, except to the extent that he has written it down in his epistles, epistles that require interpretation, because Paul is hardly around to question. Nevertheless, if we are to submit to Paul’s insight, we must use Paul’s epistles as a hermeneutical key to the gospel, since it is Paul’s insight that we must interpret. As Ricoeur says of testimony, it is hermeneutical in a double sense because, in the first sense, it gives us something to interpret and, in the second, it calls for an interpretation.[[180]](#footnote-180)

Paul is not alone as an apostle, even though he is the only one mentioned by name. The church is built on the foundation of the Apostles (2.20), the mystery is revealed to them along with the prophets. This is significant when compared to the similar passage in Colossians 1.26, which simply states that the mystery has been revealed to all the saints.[[181]](#footnote-181) This narrower focus on a defined authoritative group is further evidence of the importance of the role of apostle. It is one of the roles ordained by God in the Church (4.11). As M. Jeff Brannon remarks, it is notable that Paul allows for no alternative revelations from God to other believers. He sees himself and his fellow apostles as a “final authority” of sorts.[[182]](#footnote-182) Paul makes this claim most forcefully in Galatians 1.6-9, where he writes that even an angel from heaven could not preach an alternative gospel. The divine origin of Paul’s power is continually stressed (3.3, 3, 7). His insistence in 3.8 that he is the least of the saints makes it clear that, in the view of the text at least, his role does not derive from any special virtue inherent in his personality, but because God has given him the grace to fulfil this specific role, a role he must fulfil in obedience to Christ, the revelation of the mystery revealed to him.

The nature of the mystery revealed remains rather mysterious. First, as Muddiman remarks, there is question of timing: was the divine plan revealed at the Resurrection (1.20), uniquely to Paul (3.3), by Jesus preaching (2.17) or must we wait with eschatological hope for a full understanding (2.7)?[[183]](#footnote-183) There is a certain indeterminacy to all this. There is also an apparent contrast between the simplicity of message itself – summed up so concisely in 3.6 – and the rather high-blown language used to describe it. The simplicity of the message leads Muddiman to translate μυστήριον as secret rather than mystery.[[184]](#footnote-184) Muddiman makes the distinction in English between a mystery, which cannot be fully articulated – it remains a mystery – and a secret, which once revealed ceases to be a secret.[[185]](#footnote-185) The term in Greek can have both senses.[[186]](#footnote-186) The μυστήριον is fully revealed to everybody – including the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. There is clearly a contrast between its use in the NT and its use in Greek mystery cults, where the secrets, far from being universally revealed, were kept as secrets in the hands of initiates, to “give the impression of profundity”, as Muddiman acerbically comments.[[187]](#footnote-187) There is certainly nothing particularly esoteric in this mystery or its revelations – Lincoln distinguishes it from contemporary apocalypses and visions where heavenly secrets are revealed.[[188]](#footnote-188)

And yet the use of ἀνεξιχνίαστος to describe the riches of Christ – that is, the news Paul is bringing to the Gentiles – and πολυποίκιλος to describe the wisdom of God as the church manifests it – the church which reveals the mystery to the authorities and powers – suggests that the mystery is not so simple after all. Lincoln describes ἀνεξιχνίαστος as painting “the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it”.[[189]](#footnote-189) It is used in LXX in Job and Romans 11:33 to describe the inscrutability of God. Hoehner argues that it should be translated not as inexhaustible but as unfathomable.[[190]](#footnote-190) There is some paradox involved in a secret that can be summed up in one sentence and is simultaneously unfathomable – such a secret must retain some of its mystery. πολυποίκιλος is a *hapax legonomen* in the Greek Bible. It gives the sense of many-sided, manifold or intricate. According to Hoehner, outside the NT, Euripides uses it to refer to intricate embroidery and Eubulus to flowers of many colours.[[191]](#footnote-191) Again there is a sense that the wisdom of God, revealed through the mystery, remains to some extent beyond human grasp. And, it has to be said, that while an important facet of the mystery of God’s love is revealed through the text in a clear and comprehensible way – that Gentiles are fellow members of the body of Christ and co-heirs to the promise alongside the Jews – the “why” remains mysterious. Why God elected the Jews and why, through Christ, this election is potentially extended to all people at a particular time in history and not before is not revealed. God’s love and God’s purposes remain mysterious. As Ricoeur says, the God who reveals is the God who conceals.[[192]](#footnote-192) The love of Christ surpasses knowledge (3.19). The love of God, who loves in this way, with this set of historical manifestations culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, remains a profound mystery, but a mystery to be lived out not in esoteric speculation, but in the knowledge which comes from living in community, a community grounded in Christ.

A further point needs to be made about the mysterious quality of the revealed mystery – that is, its eschatological dimension. In 1.9-10, the mystery is defined as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) all things in Christ. The verb means to “sum up”. Matthews makes the distinction between the subjugation of all things under Christ and the unification of all things in Christ, which is the future hope of the mystery.[[193]](#footnote-193) Equating this eschatological hope with Christian maturity, Matthews argues that the fact that the mystery is not yet fully revealed has important hermeneutical and eschatological consequences for Christian believers:

The proposal that Christian maturity is the glorious, eschatological life of believers in essence claims that it is their glorious selves and their glorious environment that is already eschatologically realised, but not yet attained. Furthermore, because this maturity is partially veiled in divine mystery, the attainment of it involves a temporal process of creative, personal, and interpersonal interpretation.[[194]](#footnote-194)

An eschatological perspective is equally significant for Ricoeur in his concentration on the divine mystery. The ultimate reason for rejecting the imposition of a falsely concordant metanarrative on the *peripeteia* of the Bible is a compelling Biblical imperative to look forward to the last day. The fact that “The Kingdom Heaven is at Hand” keeps history open.[[195]](#footnote-195) The fact that there will be a last day, and we do not entirely understand what that will mean, acts as a limiting concept because “I am always short of the Last Judgement”.[[196]](#footnote-196) Until the last day we can never make the discordant finally and ultimately concordant, so the discontinuity of differing visions of the world, especially the differing visions present in the Bible, is protected. The Kingdom to Come becomes the basis of his exegesis, and in a sense a connecting thread for the whole canon – Ricoeur goes as far to say that “the whole of theology must be reinterpreted according to the norm of eschatology”[[197]](#footnote-197) – and yet, despite holding the Bible together, eschatology remains the ultimate principle which keeps the Bible open, because until that time we see only through a glass, darkly.

Nevertheless, however mysterious, it remains key to the text of Ephesians that the mystery is transmitted by Paul and his insight into it. Esler makes a fundamental point about the collective memory of Paul transmitted to the Christian community by the text. He starts with the observation, similar to Ricoeur’s mimetic cycle, that the very act of writing autobiography actively transforms the self.[[198]](#footnote-198) Assuming that the depiction of Paul in Ephesians is not strictly autobiographical, but pseudepigraphical, Esler nevertheless argues that the authors who depicted Paul would have

transformed themselves in the process of constructing the past. Their accounts of Paul must have been or become autobiographical for them … Writing of Paul, the exemplary Christ follower, they were also writing of themselves. Evoking the image of his identity linked to his suffering and imprisonment they were also invoking theirs.[[199]](#footnote-199)

The text, by setting Paul up as a paradigm of the Christian life, invites the reader to reconstruct their own life-narrative along these lines. The reader is encouraged to live out, as Paul lived out, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, both as a messenger to those who do not yet know, and as somebody prepared to suffer on account of it. This is perhaps hinted at in 3.13, where Paul’s sufferings are identified as “our glory”. They are “our glory” at some level because we are expected to experience them. The reader is invited to reconstruct their identity in Christ by living out the Pauline narrative.

**3.2. The narrative identity of the reader**

***3.2a. Introduction: The reader and Christ***

Elna Mouton argues, convincingly, that the narrative of Ephesians is the narrative of the believers’ journey from being outside of Christ to being “in Christ”.[[200]](#footnote-200) Living out the promises of the text is dependent on incorporation into the life of Jesus Christ. As with Paul, there is no biography of Jesus in the letter. Key events, such as Christ’s pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection and exaltation, are taken as a given. However, the relationship between the events of Christ’s life and the reader is emphasised. We were chosen in Christ before the beginning of the world (1.4). By being in Christ we have obtained Christ’s inheritance (1.11). We are raised in Christ, and seated with Christ at God’s right hand (2.6). Christ’s narrative is our narrative.[[201]](#footnote-201) To be a Christian is to be in Christ, and being in Christ extends backward before the foundation of the world, and forward into our exaltation with Christ.

It is often noted that there is a relative lack of focus on Jesus’ crucifixion in Ephesians in comparison with the rest of the Pauline corpus.[[202]](#footnote-202) As Barth points out, the cosmic significance of the cross described in Colossians 2.14-15 is replaced by the political and cosmic consequences of the resurrection.[[203]](#footnote-203) This is not to say that the cross is entirely absent. It is alluded to in 1.7, 2.13, 2.16 and 5.2: Jesus’ blood is our redemption and the forgiveness of our trespasses; it brings near those who were once far off; the cross reconciles Gentiles and Jews, putting an end to hostility between them; and finally it is an example of love for us to imitate as we attempt to live in love as Christ loved us. However, none of this amounts to a comprehensive theology of the cross, or even to a summary of its articulation in Pauline thought.

Nevertheless, the gaps in the text are as significant to its meaning as what the text says. Just because a theology of the cross is not explicitly elucidated in the text does not mean it cannot significantly underlie the meaning the reader constructs. After all, the text assumes that we read in what we know of Paul to the text, surely the same must be true for Jesus, especially given the reference in 4.20-21, which implies that the reader has already learnt Christ from some other authoritative source. As readers we are asked to bring our knowledge of Christ to bear upon the letter. It is a valid reading of the emphasis on Paul’s suffering, say, to see an allusion to the cross, even if this connection is not explicitly drawn (*contra* Macdonald).[[204]](#footnote-204)

Similarly, while the process of dying to the old life and rising to the new is not explicitly linked to dying with Jesus as in Colossians or Romans 6.6-11, this does not mean that the reader cannot take death as implicit to the process of resurrection. There would be no resurrection, after all, without a crucifixion. Perhaps most significantly for the reader seeking to follow Paul’s exhortation to live in Christ, the radical self-offering of the cross is given as the example of Christ’s love for us, which is to be imitated, as we see in 5.2. If Christ’s love is explicitly exemplified by the cross in the text, it is hardly irrelevant to our reading.

A further reference to the crucifixion is possible in the descent/ascent motif in 4.8.[[205]](#footnote-205) There is some debate over whether this refers to the crucifixion, incarnation or descent of the spirit,[[206]](#footnote-206) but there is no particular need to take one view to the exclusion of the others. Descent and ascent are key motifs of Christ, reflected in John 13-15, and are part of the theology of all three events; the reader is free to read these events from Christ’s life into the text.

However, Muddiman notices an interesting point about the chronology. If the descent refers to the incarnation or death of Jesus, this assumes that the descent precedes the ascent, as in the crucifixion or the incarnation. If the passage refers to the descent of the spirit which follows Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the ascent would precede the descent. There are no textual clues to solve the problem of chronology. Muddiman explores the possibility opened up by this ambiguity that the descent and ascent are supposed to be simultaneous, given that, as he remarks, “this is what verse 9 says”.[[207]](#footnote-207) In this case we can see a reference to the crucifixion, where Jesus is both lifted up, as the Serpent is lifted up in the wilderness, a type of Christ for John (see John 3.14), and descends to the lowest depths of pain and suffering. The paradox of the cross is that it is both a moment of humiliation and of exaltation, of descent to death and yet a physical lifting up. We as readers are caught in the movement of this paradox: as we die to an old life, we rise and are exalted to a new life with Christ and in Christ. The humiliation of the cross becomes our glory as the suffering of Paul is our glory (3.13), and as Paul’s greatest honour – being ambassador of the Gospel – imprisons him in chains for the sake of the Gospel.

Ricoeur emphasises the primacy of the existential interpretation of the New Testament,[[208]](#footnote-208) which is to say that the fullest meaning of the resurrection, for example, is not played out in a historical event whose specifics can only be glimpsed through testimony, but in the meaning of the event and the transformation it effects in the life of the reader. For Ricoeur, Paul is the textual warrant for this process because he does not interpret the death and resurrection in terms of the events themselves; he writes no narratives, rather relates them to the lives of readers.[[209]](#footnote-209) The classic expression of this is Romans 6.4-5,[[210]](#footnote-210) where the death and resurrection of Christ become events in our lives.

The existential nature of the resurrection is key to Ephesians: “but God … even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (2.4-5), and the significance is extended further to Christ’s ascension, in which we share. However, Barth is justly critical of a narrow focus on the existential significance of the resurrection. He rightly emphasises that it has a cosmic implication regardless of any individual appropriation of it.[[211]](#footnote-211)

This, in fact, echoes Ricoeur: “Freedom in the light of hope has a personal expression, certainly, but, even more a communitarian, historical, and political dimension in the dimension of the expectation of the universal resurrection”.[[212]](#footnote-212) And Ricoeur’s sense of the communal dimension of the resurrection, and indeed an ethical life lived with and for others, saves him from overly individualistic existentialist appropriations of the Resurrection, such as Bultmann’s.[[213]](#footnote-213) And yet it is clear that the liberating effect of the resurrection on the lives of those who are in Christ is central to the proclamation of Ephesians: we too have been raised with Christ. Even its cosmic relevance is proclaimed with a kind of existential significance – because, through the resurrection, the principalities and powers have been defeated, we can live free from fear. However, we must be careful to maintain the “we” and resist reducing it down to the “I”. Ricoeur points out that the hermeneutical implications of this work both ways. Because we decipher our own lives “in the light of the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ”, so the death and Resurrection must be interpreted in view of our own experience of life: “the meaning of Christ and the meaning of existence which mutually decipher each other”. [[214]](#footnote-214)

***3.2b. An interchange of birth and death***

For Ricoeur, the narrative of the Christian life is an interchange of birth and death. Quoting Ephesians and the gospel of St Matthew, he says:

The process of becoming conscious is ultimately the process of seeing one’s childhood in front of oneself and one’s death behind oneself: “before, you were dead…”; “unless you become as little children …”[[215]](#footnote-215)

This growing into a second childhood is influenced by Ricoeur’s theory of the hermeneutic arc, where we move from a naïve reading, through criticism and the hermeneutics of suspicion, to a second naiveté where the text can call us again. Part of my motivation in using Ephesians as a kind of test case for Ricoeur’s hermeneutics was to see if the narrative identity of the reader in Ephesians could sustain such a reading. This section will seek to plot the narrative of the Christian life as narrated by Ephesians in dialogue with Ricoeur.

Crafting a narrative of a life while we are still living it is a tricky business. For a start we have no real sense of any kind of beginning, as Ricoeur points out:

[M]emory is lost in the hazes of early childhood; my birth and, with greater reason, the act through which I was conceived belong more to the history of others – in this case to my parents – than to me. [[216]](#footnote-216)

Our ending is equally mysterious. When we die, it will be an event not so much for us as for the people who survive us.[[217]](#footnote-217) We tell the story of our lives with no beginning or ending except the ones we attempt to create for ourselves. The ending, at least, will always be provisional and open to constant revision as we continue to live our lives. The significance of events in our early childhood will be a subject for constant reinterpretation and exploration, but ultimately beyond our grasp. We simply do not remember what happened and, even if we do, the process of causation is opaque.

In recounting the narrative of the Christian life, Ephesians seeks to provide that beginning and end. We learn that our story starts before the beginning of time: God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (1.4). We also get a clear sense of our ultimate end: we will be gathered up in Christ in the fullness of time (1.10). In the midst of this beginning and end, projected back before creation and forwards beyond the end of time, we learn that in some real sense what is to come has already been achieved: we have been raised up and seated with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places (2.6). All this can only be an article of faith – the readers can only believe in their origin, destiny and present state – in the meantime they must live in a world in which they may face suffering, like Paul (3.13); they must stand firm against the forces of evil, which are still active in the world (6.11); and must even curb their own tendencies to sin: Paul would not warn them against stealing (4.28), lying (4.25) or sexual immorality (5.5) for nothing. Even with an eye to an identity that transcends the evil of this world, an identity that presupposes that evil has been defeated once and for all, they must still exist within it.

The word for the foundation of the world in 1.4, καταβολή, captures this sense of starting our reflections upon life *in medias res*.[[218]](#footnote-218) Its literal translation is “thrown down”. This links with Heidegger’s concept of “being in the world”.[[219]](#footnote-219) Ricoeur describes this as the experience of being “thrown” into the world.[[220]](#footnote-220) We are in the world before we know it. We act before we begin the attempt to understand what action is or to submit it to analysis. We participate in the world before we can set ourselves up as subjects in opposition to objects that we can analyse. According to Ricoeur, no philosophical analysis can escape our status of “being in the world” and we cannot see beyond a perspective that precedes our analysis of it. This “renders null and void the ideal of the self-transparence of the fundamental subject”.[[221]](#footnote-221) Ultimately we cannot understand ourselves because we are too immersed in life to be able to take an objective standpoint. Ephesians takes this one step further: we are in the midst of some great cosmic narrative that stretches back not only to before our own throwing into the world, but to before the world itself was thrown down. Navigating our place in the midst of this narrative is key to reading the Epistle.

There is a certain irony in Ephesians in the juxtaposition of the great cosmic narrative in the opening blessing (1.3-14) and the minutiae of moral decisions as they relate to the smallest unit of society, the household (5.21-6.9), in the ethical section. This irony is due to one of the central paradoxes of Ephesians: that socially insignificant and marginalised Christians are in fact seated with Christ in the heavenly places (2.6); that the lowly prisoner in chains (3.1, 4.1, 6.20), least of all the saints even among his own (3.8), is the ambassador of God (6.20); that the figure dying on the cross, in the depths of suffering, is the saviour of the world (2.16). He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens (4.10).

The significance of the cross and resurrection are not wholly relegated to faith in what happened before time began, what will happen at the end of time and a present state seemingly so at variance with everyday existence: the readers also learn that they who were spiritually dead, a spiritual death manifested by the sinfulness of their lives, are now alive in Christ (2.1). This new life, or rebirth, is what Ricoeur calls “the eschatological event in existential terms”.[[222]](#footnote-222) We live in a realised eschatology.

Much has been made of the realised eschatology of Ephesians. It is one of the theological distinctions some commentators make,[[223]](#footnote-223) contrasting it with the imminent expectation of the *parousia* in the undisputed letters of Paul. Nevertheless, as Hoehner and Muddiman assert,[[224]](#footnote-224) there is still a tension between realised and future eschatology in Ephesians. There is still a future aspect to the fulfilment of God’s plan: the Ephesians are saved, without question, but await the fullness of the promises of God, as heirs to those promises.

Mouton, in an essay on Ephesians influenced by the work of Ricoeur, uses the concept of liminality to describe the position of the reader, somewhere between the “now” and “not yet” of Pauline eschatology. Liminality was coined by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. He applied it to describe the rites of passage used to mark the transition of one phase of life to another, such as birth, puberty, marriage and death, and especially rites of religious initiation.[[225]](#footnote-225) In crossing from one phase of life to another there is often a time of liminality, when a person is not fully in one stage or another, but “betwixt and between”.[[226]](#footnote-226) Rites of passage serve as means of providing guidance for the responsibilities of the new stage.[[227]](#footnote-227) Mouton characterises the narrative of Ephesians as a journey from being outside Christ to being “in Christ”.[[228]](#footnote-228) The position of the reader, according to her, is one of liminality between the two states. Certainly Ephesians falls well into Van Gennep’s schema of separation, transition and incorporation.[[229]](#footnote-229) There is a clear separation from the life the reader led before,[[230]](#footnote-230) and the reader awaits full incorporation into Christ at the end of time. There is some question over whether the “liminal” state can really last a lifetime, but it is certainly a creative appropriation of Van Gennep’s concepts, despite its stretching of liminality into something more like permanence.

The apparent contradiction between the high claims made about the cosmic position of the readers, seated in the heavenlies alongside Christ (2.6), and the continuing need to make even the most basic ethical demands of them, such as to avoid stealing (4.28), shows that this journey is not a straightforward and categorical move from spiritual death to spiritual life, or from a pre-liminal to a post-liminal phase, to use the jargon. Rather the journey consists of what Mouton describes as “a constant wrestling” to understand and live out the implications of their new-found life in Christ. [[231]](#footnote-231) As we shall see, the exhortation to Christian maturity in the paraenetical section, the continued need to grow into Christ, provides textual warrant for this sense that all is not finished. Even in terms of their own self-understanding of their position, Paul is still compelled to pray that, “you may have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled will all the fullness of God” (3.18). If our understanding of the gift of new life must still grow and increase, it is no surprise that Paul must still beg us “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4.1). For Mouton,

The structure of this movement is a continual recycling of their life and worldview – an ongoing reinterpretation of traditions, language and behaviour in terms of Jesus Christ. By inducing a process of continuous reorientation to Christ, Ephesians serves as a warning against any form of moral stagnation, false stability, absolute certainty, or closed ethical system.[[232]](#footnote-232)

The Ephesians are called to a Trotskyite state of permanent revolution – at least until the fullness of time.

If this is, in fact, a valid reading of the text, Ephesians seems lacking in advice and encouragement on the practice of repentance and the forgiveness of God. While it is clear that past sins, committed at a time of spiritual death, have been forgiven, and there is a recognition of the need for mutual forgiveness (4.12), some encouragement that the forgiveness of God is available to those Christians who fall into the kinds of sin they are warned against committing, and some advice about the practice of repenting those sins, might seem to be a concomitant to the call to a permanent re-evaluation of practice. Instead, the text gives dire warnings that fornicators or impure people will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (5.5). There is clearly some tension here between the optimistic description of the reader as seated in the heavenly places (2.6) and the warning that following a certain course of action they will forfeit their inheritance and presumably be thrown down to earth again (5.5). There are no comfortable words on confession, such as in 1 John 1.9.

The concept of liminality has great value as a heuristic device for reading Ephesians. Certainly Mouton’s ethical call to arms against moral complacency is important, especially because, as she goes on to point out, the ethical injunctions of Ephesians on subjects such as patriarchal marriage and slavery are not immune to the imperative to reorient our practices continually to Christ.[[233]](#footnote-233) Nevertheless, liminality does not do justice to the very real sense in which death is behind the reader (2.1). The reader is already raised with Christ (2.6). Doubtless, we must still discover the full implications of our new life in Christ, but, as faithful readers, we are in no way “betwixt and between” life and death.

There is still a problem to be solved between the uniform destiny and status of those who are saved, and the very real differences in behaviour practised by different individuals at different stages in their Christian journey. There is both a concordance in terms of ultimate end and present reality, and a discordance in the degrees of realisation of the implications of that status. Our salvation has been declared unto us, and is in one sense fully realised in Christ, yet in another sense is still to be worked out in the practice of our lives. My feeling is that given the emphasis in Ephesians on growth into spiritual maturity, Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity is a better solution to the concordance/discordance dilemma of the state of the saints of Ephesus than liminality.

*Ipse* identity is one way of accounting for both the concordances and discordances of the state of spiritual maturity of those, who like the Ephesians, have been saved by faith.[[234]](#footnote-234) We can compare the *ipse* identity of being given a name to the declaration of salvation. A name is given to a person by others, usually by their parents, and it is this name – and its constancy over a lifetime – that is a symbol of the recognisable identity of a person which develops through the varied events, perceptions, discourse and bodily functions that make up what in narrative terms we call a life.[[235]](#footnote-235) Even if there is a dispute over a person’s name, it is still the symbol of what is distinguishable about that person from another person, whichever of the potential names is used. A person does not grow into a name, and there is no sense of liminality about being known by one name rather than another. Yet a name that remains constant in no way precludes major life-changing experiences along the way; it assumes no irreducible core of selfhood; it does not posit anything other than a life which is both concordant and discordant.

Most people cannot remember being given a name, and similarly, according to Ephesians, salvation stretches back to before we can remember, to before the foundation of the world. Salvation too comes from the outside. Like a name it is something given rather than something achieved. In his exegesis of St Paul’s concept of justification, Ricoeur analyses St Paul’s notion of justice. It is no longer concerned with “the ethical quality of a person”, rather “[t]o be ‘just’ is to be justified by an Other; more precisely, it is to be declared just, to be counted as just”.[[236]](#footnote-236) Justice comes from the outside, from the future, from the transcendent. This is not to say that justice does not have a present quality, but that the present indwelling of justice is the manifestation of the eschatological event where the person will be counted as just. And that present indwelling of justice, although it may originate in the eschatological future, is perceived as having already happened:

For St Paul, in fact, the eschatological event is present, already there, in such a way that justice, although it is extrinsic to a man as far as its origin is concerned, has become something that dwells within him, as far as its operation is concerned; the future justice is already imputed to the man who believes; and so the man who is “declared” just is “made” just, really and vitally.[[237]](#footnote-237)

It is worth noting that the language of justification is not the language of Ephesians.[[238]](#footnote-238) The more generic term salvation is used. As Te-Li Lau puts it, Ephesians described people as being saved through faith; Paul typically uses the phrase “justified out of faith”.[[239]](#footnote-239) Nevertheless, the same principle of a state that is declared rather than earned applies. The same eschatological fulfilment of that declaration holds true.

The declaration of salvation, when a person moves from spiritual death to life, does not preclude a dynamic growth into spiritual maturity or, indeed, a number of setbacks along the way, but like the declaration of a name, it remains a constant even while the person in question changes. As Nicolet-Anderson points out, for the Christ believer, conversion poses the first challenge to an *idem* identity that remains constant.[[240]](#footnote-240) She is writing about Romans, where baptism is described as dying with Christ (Rom 6.3-4), and the old self of believers is no longer (Rom 6.6). This revolution of self-understanding is experienced as a complete loss of sameness. The old ways of life need to be reconfigured to match this new eschatological state; as she puts it, “Paul is concerned with making *what* they are match *who* they are”.[[241]](#footnote-241) This is a dynamic process.

Like liminality, an *ipse* identity of salvation requires a constant re-evaluation of and growing into the full implications of what that salvation means, but unlike liminality, an *ipse* identity can give full credit to the fact, declared in the text, that salvation has been fully achieved and is not, in itself, something that still needs to be grown into. Like the two self-portraits of Rembrandt, a spiritually mature Christian may look very different from the same Christian at the beginning of their journey of faith, yet both are declared to be saved, and there is a narrative of salvation which links them. Salvation, like any identity in this world, is fundamentally a narrative, not an atemporal constancy.

 ***3.2c. Death is behind us***

So, looking at the transition from death to life in terms of an *ipse* narrative identity, we shall turn to the first part of Ricoeur’s characterisation of the Christian journey, which is seeing one’s death behind oneself”.[[242]](#footnote-242) To justify this he directly quotes Ephesians: “before, you were dead…” The phrase in Ephesians is ambiguous.[[243]](#footnote-243) The participle is in the present tense, so it could imply that the Ephesians were previously dead, through trespasses and sin,[[244]](#footnote-244) or reflect the more positive idea of Romans 6.11;[[245]](#footnote-245) in this case it would translate as, you being dead to the sins and trespasses in which you once walked. Nevertheless, 2.5 makes clear the parallel between spiritual death and sin – if there were no such identification, then God would not need to make us alive. This view is repeated in 5.14, in what is assumed to be a fragment of a baptismal hymn: “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”.

The idea that a life of sin, alienated from God, is a kind of spiritual death has deep roots in both the Old and New Testament.[[246]](#footnote-246) The closest parallels are with the Johannine literature, especially 5:24 and 1 John 3:14. In both, becoming a Christian is an eschatological moment when the believer passes from death to life. They both present what Best calls “a realised eschatological conception of death”.[[247]](#footnote-247) This is not a threefold conception, where a person is born alive, dies through sin and then is born again in Christ, but rather the notion that life outside of Christ is a kind of death: all life and light is found in Christ, everything outside Christ is in darkness and death. This is not simply an existential condition for individuals, but cosmic and social, as Petrenko writes: “The term ‘death’ describes a world-order under the dominion of evil cosmic powers in antagonism against God”.[[248]](#footnote-248) Sin, therefore, is the result rather than the cause of spiritual death.[[249]](#footnote-249)

The use of the phrase, “by nature children of wrath”, suggests something akin to the later doctrine of original sin. Muddiman, dismissing any association, argues that it is self-evident that the passage contains no such implication.[[250]](#footnote-250) It is, indeed, self-evident in the sense that original sin was formulated as a doctrine later than the writing of Ephesians, and there could be no explicit reference to a doctrine that had not yet been articulated. However, meaning does not necessarily lie with original intention. The question is not so much whether original sin was intended by the writer – it could not have been – as whether it is a valid reading of the text. Lincoln, at least, is clear that some parallels can be found between the doctrine and the text:

If original sin refers to the innate sinfulness of human nature inherited from Adam in consequence of the fall, then such a notion is not entirely alien to the thought of this verse when it speaks of the impossibility of humanity itself, in its natural condition, escaping God’s wrath.[[251]](#footnote-251)

In one sense Ephesians, in Lincoln’s reading at least, offers a deconstruction of the doctrine of original sin because it describes the existential condition of humanity without God, that is to say spiritual death, but does not seek to explain how this came to be. Ricoeur is also keen to deconstruct the concept of original sin, not in order to destroy it, but in order to arrive at the meaning behind its intention. For Ricoeur original sin is false knowledge because it relies on false concepts such as the “quasi-juridical knowledge of the guilt of the new born and the quasi-biological knowledge of hereditary taint”.[[252]](#footnote-252) He does not want original sin to be seen as a dogmatic explanation of what happens when a baby is born, but rather a symbol of the position human beings find themselves in as sinners.

For Ricoeur, original sin is useful fundamentally as a critique of the Pelagian view of freedom, a freedom in which each individual would have a unique and isolated capacity to choose, regardless of their environments, history or habits.[[253]](#footnote-253) Instead, evil is something that we are born into, not in the sense that it is somehow passed on biologically by our parents, but in the sense that we are born into a world where we have no choice but to learn the evil behaviour going on around us, not simply from our parents and the people we live among, but from the political and social systems we are born into, political systems based not on love but competition, domination and control. We cannot make moral decisions in isolation from the accumulated moral decisions that have been made by everybody before us. This is not to abdicate us from any moral responsibility for what we do, but by tracing evil back to Adam, we discover what Ricoeur calls the situation of every person:

Evil has already taken place. I do not begin evil; I continue it. I am implicated in evil. Evil has a past; it is its past; it is its own tradition. Hence the myth unites in the figure of an ancestor of the human race all these traits we have just enumerated – the reality of sin anterior to every awakening of the conscience, the communal dimension of sin, which is irreducible to individual responsibility, the impotence of will that surrounds every actual fault.[[254]](#footnote-254)

This sense of the impotence of those who are spiritually dead in the face of the evil they are born into pervades Ephesians. The most important expression of this is the emphasis given to the necessity for God’s agency in our salvation. It is clear that without God we would be powerless to effect our own salvation. We were chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (1.4). Our redemption is in Christ, through his blood, and therefore by implication not through our own act of will (1.7). When we were dead through sin, it was God who made us alive together with Christ (2.5). In 2.8-9 the absolute reliance on God’s agency in salvation is spelled out explicitly:

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

The negative counterpart to this positive assertion of our absolute reliance on God for salvation is in the futility of the moral efforts of those alienated from the life of God.[[255]](#footnote-255) This is explored in 4.17-19. According to Lincoln, the term ματαιότης (4.17), futility, describes the ultimate pointlessness of any intellectual or moral perception the Gentiles might have.[[256]](#footnote-256) They have become darkened, ἐσκοτωμένοι, in their thinking (4.18). To be sure, they share their part in culpability for this state, it is explicitly attributed to their “ignorance and hardness of heart” (4.19). Yet read in conjunction with the sense in 2.4 that all were born into this state, “we were by nature children of wrath”, we can see the deadening effects of an evil that we are born into and choose to continue.

There is of course another factor in the condition of those who are spiritually dead. In Ephesians evil is not simply the result of the accumulation of evil choices by men and women throughout history. Non-human hostile forces are clearly at work in the “world of the text”. The first reference is in 1.21, which asserts Christ’s primacy over all rule, authority, power and dominion. There is a scholarly debate over the use of these terms, whether they refer to human or angelic powers, and whether such powers are good or evil.[[257]](#footnote-257) We face the interpretative problem of polysemy,[[258]](#footnote-258) and the interpretative freedom that opens up. The language of powers can be used of both human and supernatural agents. This does not in itself allow us simply to choose the application that best suits our purposes. Wink uses this to read both supernatural and social forces into his understanding of the powers in Ephesians.[[259]](#footnote-259) As Arnold points out in his critique of Walter Wink’s demythologising exegesis of the language of powers, “because one term may have five different applications does not mean that all five applications may be used simultaneously”.[[260]](#footnote-260) To back up his point, Arnold uses the example of the term ἄγγελος, which can refer to both a human messenger (Luke 7:24) or to supernatural messengers (Luke 12.9).[[261]](#footnote-261) This double meaning does not leave us free to choose which meaning to apply in any given example: the context of the use of the term makes it clear, at least in these cases.

However, the context of Ephesians does not necessarily make the meaning come through. As Hoehner says of the terms ἀρχή and ἐξουσία, they both could denote either human or angelic rulers, even taking into consideration their context in Ephesians.[[262]](#footnote-262) The interpretation is a guess – an informed guess based on textual evidence, but a guess nonetheless. How then are we to interpret them? Arnold uses his research into the magical tradition to suggest that the first readers would have clearly read supernatural forces into the text.[[263]](#footnote-263) The problem with such a reading is that it relies on extra-textual perspectives to understand the text. It relies on a reconstruction of the world in which the text was written to interpret the text. Such a process is inevitably circular. A reading with Ricoeur will always seek to understand the text in and through the text itself, rather than relying on a reconstruction of a world lost to us. Secondarily, in the case of the biblical canon, it will bring to bear intertextual perspectives from the interpretative space opened up by the closure of the canon.[[264]](#footnote-264)

Two factors seem to suggest that the language of powers is primarily intended to refer to evil angelic forces, one textual and one intertextual. The supernatural nature of the forces is confirmed in 6.12, where Paul makes it clear that the Ephesians must struggle against the forces that are not flesh and blood, using the same language of ἀρχή and ἐξουσία. We can read the use of the terms in 6.12 back into the use of the terms in 1.21. Secondly, in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26, Paul describes three of the same terms (ἀρχή, ἐξουσία and δύναμιν) as enemies to be destroyed and put under Christ’s feet, providing evidence that in Pauline Christianity such words are used to describe supernatural evil powers.

In 2.2, a sinful life is described as following the ruler of the power of the air, which is categorised as “a spirit at work among those who are disobedient”. In his exegesis of 2.1-2,[[265]](#footnote-265) Wink resists an interpretation of the power of the air as referring to a supernatural evil being. In his view, τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος should not be translated as “the spiritual powers whose dwelling is in the air”[[266]](#footnote-266) but as an abstract quality: “it is rather the invisible dominion or realm created by the sum total of choices for evil”.[[267]](#footnote-267) The powers of the air are not, therefore, personified forces of evil but “opinions, beliefs, prejudices, hatreds, racial and class biases, taboos, and loyalties that condition our perception of the world long before we reach the age of speech”.[[268]](#footnote-268) This goes along with Barth’s interpretation and comprehensive list of what the language of powers may refer to in Ephesians:

It is probable that Paul means by principalities and powers those institutions and structure by which earthly matters and invisible realms are administered, and without which no human life is possible. The superior power of nature epitomised by life and death; the ups and downs of historic processes; the nature and impact of favoured prototypes or the catastrophic burdens of the past; the hope or threat offered to the present by the future; the might of capitalists, rulers, judges; the benefit and onus of laws of tradition and custom; the distinction and similarity of political and religious practices; the weight of ideologies and prejudices; the conditions under which all authority, labor, parenthood , etc., thrive or are crushed – these structures and institutions are in Paul’s mind.[[269]](#footnote-269)

This list is an interesting overview of how we might interpret the language of powers, specifically the “ruler of the power of the air”. Despite its usefulness, Barth, in my view, goes too far in arguing that such a list explains “what Paul means”, or what is “in Paul’s mind”. The intentions of Paul, or whoever wrote Ephesians, are lost to us. The text makes clear reference to supernatural evil.

For Wink the use of “the ruler of the power of the air” is a sign of a wider project of demythologisation of the powers at work in the text. Again we should resist any suggestion that the project of demythologisation is that of the author: the intention of the author is lost to us. At times Wink’s interpretation does not seem consistent in itself, especially as he allows the translation of ἄρχων as Satan in this context:[[270]](#footnote-270) it would be a strange project of demythologisation that taught a personal centre of evil in one word and then demythologised it in the next two. Nevertheless there is an interesting parallel between Wink’s exegesis and Ricoeur’s view of original sin.

In 3.10 the mystery is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church. The devil, whom Lincoln refers to as an “ultimate personal center of evil”,[[271]](#footnote-271) is referred to in 4.28 and again in 6.11 – where the wiles of the devil provide the primary motivation for putting on the armour of Christ. Finally, as we said before, 6.12 sets out the terms of the cosmic battle to be fought, not against human enemies, but against forces of spiritual evil in the heavenly places.

Along with those commentators who resist the demythologisation of evil in the text,[[272]](#footnote-272) it seems clear that the world of the text is one in which evil forces are at work. Along with Barth, we can see that there are clear textual and intertextual reasons to assert three basic interpretations of the matter of the text: We are responsible for the evil we commit (2.3, 4.19, also Rom 1:20; 3:23); our lives are inextricable from the influence of angelic and demonic forces (2.2; 4.27; 6.11-12); and victory has been achieved by Christ over these powers (1.10; 1.21 and also Rom 8:31-39).[[273]](#footnote-273)

For Ricoeur, construing the matter of the text is only part of the interpretative task. The act of reading is the place where the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect. This is the third part of the mimetic arc, *Mimesis₃,* outlined in *Time and Narrative*. Fundamental to this understanding is Ricoeur’s assertion that the world of the reader is a real world “where real action occurs and unfolds in its specific temporality”.[[274]](#footnote-274) A text has meaning because it speaks to the world of the reader, and changes it. This particular reader has no direct experience of personal supernatural evil and remains agnostic about its ontological reality. It would seem that a phenomenological experience of supernatural evil is part of the world of many readers of the text, and Arnold’s attempt to see how Ephesians might speak into that world is a valuable heuristic exercise but can hardly constitute a final interpretation of the text for a reader who does not bring this worldview to the text.[[275]](#footnote-275) Arnold himself implies this: “The question of demythologising the “powers” needs to be left to the modern interpreter who seeks to make the epistle relevant in terms of today”.[[276]](#footnote-276) I am suspicious of any attempt, like that of Wink, to read twentieth-century concepts like demythologisation back into the intentions of the author, whatever they may have been.[[277]](#footnote-277) So while being clear about the text’s assertion of personal supernatural evil, and without wishing to make any ontological judgements as to the truth of such claims, I shall, along with Ricoeur, interpret the powers as a symbol.[[278]](#footnote-278) Ricoeur’s work on evil, especially in his early work *The Symbolism of Evil*, is helpful here.

The simultaneous assertion of supernatural evil and our own responsibility for evil remains a paradox, and it is a paradox that runs right through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. We see this tension in the myth of Adam. On the one hand, responsibility for Adam’s sin is placed firmly upon Adam: “Because you … have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “you shall not eat of it”, cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 4.17). God is pretty clear in his attribution of responsibility to Adam, to Eve and to the Serpent independently of the influence that one might have brought to bear upon the other. And yet human responsibility for evil is not unambiguous. As Ricoeur notices, there is a conflict of myths included in the single myth: while radically asserting human responsibility for the evil choices made, in a way that could be interpreted as a critique of other myths about the origin of evil that place the responsibility firmly in the hands of a supernatural agent of evil, we nevertheless have to confront the ambiguous figure of the serpent.[[279]](#footnote-279)

The serpent, at the very heart of the Adam myth, stands for evil’s other face, which the other myths tried to recount: evil already there, pregiven evil, evil that attracts and seduces man. The serpent signifies that man does not begin evil. He finds it. For him, to begin is to continue. Beyond the projection of our own covetousness, the serpent stands for the tradition of an evil more ancient than man himself. The serpent is the Other of human evil.[[280]](#footnote-280)

This personification of evil plays out the paradox of human responsibility for evil, on the one hand, and our existence in a world in which evil is always previous to us, on the other. Ephesians too plays out this paradox – those experiencing spiritual death deserve the wrath of God which comes upon the disobedient (5.6), and yet are tossed to and fro and deceived by forces beyond their control (4.14), the forces of supernatural evil that control the world they are born into (2.1-3). As Macdonald notes, the clear identification of evil with “the course of this world” (2.2), which it dominates, means that we do not have to distinguish between the forces of evil and their manifestation in the corrupt and broken structures of the world in which we live.[[281]](#footnote-281) Whether or not capitalism is controlled by demonic forces, it is certainly the evil system within which modern humanity has to operate. While there is no question that we are responsible for our individual acts of exploitation within that system, we have not chosen such a system, we were born into it. The powers act as a symbol of the ambiguity of our responsibility for the evil of the world in which we live.

The fundamental message of Ephesians, however, is not an articulation of the paradox of human responsibility for evil in a world dominated by evil forces, both built up over history and influenced by supernatural evil. The fundamental message of Ephesians is that Christ has defeated those forces by the paradox of the cross and resurrection. While we may have been spiritually dead, we can be raised to new life in Christ. And it is only in the context of our participation in Christ’s resurrection that we can see spiritual death clearly for what it is. As Barth says:

The statement that the Ephesians were “dead” is therefore neither rhetorical only, nor a kind of moral post-mortem. It is equivalent to the confession of many a psalmist and the pronouncement of the Prodigal son’s father: as it is being proclaimed only after the salvation of the dead and lost man, it must be called a *post-resurrectionem*. Only in the light of the reality of God’s resuscitating power can the reality of man’s former death be recognised.[[282]](#footnote-282)

This sense in Ephesians that we only see the reality of the spiritual death in which we once lived through our resurrection into Christ is reminiscent of Ricoeur’s concepts of “the Fault” and “The Myth of Transcendence”. “The Fault” is a key concept for Ricoeur.[[283]](#footnote-283) It is a geological term to describe the chasm between the life to which we have been called – and indeed the life to which we have been destined – and life as we actually live it.[[284]](#footnote-284) His three volumes on the Philosophy of the Will – *Freedom and Nature, Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* – all try in different ways to come to grips with the passage from the fundamental possibilities of man, which are potentially good, to the flawed existence in which we live. Key to the recognition of the “Fault” are the myths of transcendence, or the eschatological visions of innocence.[[285]](#footnote-285) These myths exist in reciprocity with the Fault. It is only through a vision of innocence, of the world as it was destined to be, that we can see how fundamentally distorted our existence is. Without such a vision we would have nothing against which to measure our experience of reality. In this way, the vision of a new life in Christ presented in Ephesians sheds light on the evil of life outside Christ, expressed in the corrupt institutions of the world, the forces of evil which control them, and individual moral culpability for actions which we are impotent to correct outside of Christ and the narrative of his death and resurrection.

***3.2d: Growing into childhood***

Despite the clear sense in Ephesians that spiritual death is behind us, spiritual life is a pretty complex and paradoxical business. As we have recognised before, despite Christ being far above “all rule, authority and power and dominion” (1.21), we must still stand against the wiles of the devil and struggle against enemies that are not flesh and blood (6.11-12). Despite our new life in Christ, we still need to be exhorted to pretty basic standards of morality (4.25-32). The new life in Christ is something that needs to be grown into. This exhortation to Christian maturity seems to run directly counter to Ricoeur’s summary of the Christian life I quoted earlier:

The process of becoming conscious is ultimately the process of seeing one’s childhood in front of oneself and one’s death behind oneself: “before, you were dead…”; “unless you become as little children …”[[286]](#footnote-286)

In one thread running through Ephesians, childhood is something to be grown out of. Lincoln notes the popular exposition of the progression of Ephesians through three verbs: sit, walk and stand.[[287]](#footnote-287) In the first section we are encouraged to realise our place, in Christ, seated in the heavenly places (1.20, 2.6, καθίσας, συνεκάθισεν). In the paraenetical section we are exhorted to walk (περιπατῆσαι) in the life we have been called to. Finally, in chapter 6, we are called to stand against the wiles of the devil, to withstand on the evil day, and having put on the armour of Christ, to stand firm (6.11, 13, 14, στῆναι). This progression from sitting to standing firm seems an illustration of the progression to Christian maturity. While we may be seated already in the heavenly places from the moment of our salvation, like growing children we still need to learn to walk and to stand on our own two feet.

Walking is a sustained metaphor for the moral life throughout Ephesians (2.2, 2.10, 4.1, 4.17, 5.2, 5.8, 5.15). It is a common metaphor for ethical behaviour in the New Testament – Hoehner cites 32 instances in the Pauline corpus[[288]](#footnote-288) – and it is used both positively, to encourage good conduct, and negatively, in Ephesians to mark the contrast between the old life and the new. Περιπατέω is often translated as live, but as both Macdonald and Lincoln argue, a literal translation, walk, better catches the active sense of the word which leads to visible behaviour.[[289]](#footnote-289) Mature reflection and re-evaluation of practice is necessary to live out this walk into Christ.

This narrative of maturity is dealt with explicitly in chapter 4.11-16. The section starts by explaining the gifts Christ gave in terms of roles within the community – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (4.11) –roles that exist for the specific purpose of equipping “the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (4.14). This dynamic process is compared to maturity in 4.13: we are to come into unity, knowledge of the son of God, maturity (ἄνδρα τέλειον) and the measure of the full stature of Christ. In a negative counter-example in the following verse, those who lack maturity are compared to children (νήπιοι) who are “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming” (4.14). This vision of immaturity serves as a neat contrast to the vision of the adult soldier in 6.13-17, who having put on the whole armour of God, is not tossed to and fro like a child, but stands firm against “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (6.16).

This negative image of childhood contrasts with the privileged place afforded to children in the Gospels, as Caroline Osiek and Margaret Macdonald note.[[290]](#footnote-290) In the Gospel of Mark, for example, “children seem to emulate qualities or have knowledge that adults in traditional positions of authority lack”.[[291]](#footnote-291) This is in the context of Mark 9:33-37, where the disciples are arguing over who should be the greatest. In an intertextual reading of Ephesians, this scriptural witness has to stand in dialogue with any exhortation to Christian maturity.

Despite the expectation of a dynamic growth into maturity in Ephesians, there is another view of childhood in the text. In 1.5 we learn our destiny of adoption as sons of God (υἱοθεσίαν). It is true that adoption is not restricted to children; in the Roman Empire adults could also be adopted.[[292]](#footnote-292) Nevertheless, as a metaphor, our adoption as sons of God has resonance not simply in terms of the inheritance due to the adopted heir, but also in terms of the newly acquired parent-child relationship. Inheritance itself is an interesting metaphor, because a Christian inheritance is not a promise of financial independence from the Father at some point in the future. We will never grow to be independent of the Father, rather our inheritance is to be beloved children of the Father, to be sons who never cease to have the status of sons.

This is picked up again in 5.1, where, as imitators of God, we are to be “as beloved children”. We are to imitate God by learning from God, as children imitate their parents. The contrast to children of disobedience in 5.6 is not to grow up, but to live as children of light (5.8). The model for the mature Christian is a Son, Jesus, his full stature lies in sonship. Growing into Christianity is growing into a relationship, a relationship ultimately defined as the relationship between a loving father and his beloved children.

It is worth noting that childhood is used in the text, both positively and negatively, as a metaphor: positively as a relational metaphor that tells us something of the love and tenderness and dependence inherent in our relationship with God; negatively as a metaphor for immaturity that must be grown out of if we are to stand firm against the deception of other human beings and the evil forces who work against God. According to Ricoeur, metaphor brings together two unrelated concepts to bring about new meaning, which lies in the tension between them. When we say that Christians must be as beloved children, we are both saying that they are beloved children and that they are not. This tension between the “is” and “is not” of metaphor is especially acute when two seemingly contradictory metaphors are employed to describe Christian life. Growing into being a Christian is both to become more like a child and to become more like a mature adult.

With a metaphorical field as rich as childhood, with connotations of both innocence and immaturity, of kinship and belonging, of social position and formation,[[293]](#footnote-293) there are bound to be differences and even conflicts in its metaphorical use. Within Ephesians childhood and sonship are used to denote the eschatological state of the human being: as a son of disobedience (τῆς ἀπειθείας 2.2, 5.6), as a child of wrath (τέκνα ὀργῆς 2.3), as children of light (τέκνα φωτὸς 5.8) and as beloved children of God (τέκνα ἀγαπητά, 5.1). It is used to denote immaturity in 4.14 (νήπιοι) and to refer to actual children in 6.1 and 6.4 (τέκνα). This direct address to children says something about their status in the community: they are important enough to be talked to directly rather than ignored or simply talked about. τέκνον and υἱὸς are neutral terms in Ephesians. As terms they denote positive or negative exemplars depending on who one is a child or son of: to be a child or son of God or of the light is a good thing, to be a child of wrath a bad one. νήπιος, on the other hand, is a negative term for childishness.

This negative use of νήπιος, in the sense of a very small or immature child, is borne out by its use in the rest of the New Testament.[[294]](#footnote-294) One potential exception is 1 Thessalonians 2:7, which contains probably the most ambiguous use of νήπιος in the New Testament. This is partly because of a textual dispute as to whether the text should read “we were gentle among you” ήπιοι or “babies” νήπιοι.[[295]](#footnote-295) According to Best, the manuscript evidence favours νήπιοι but the context favours ήπιοι.[[296]](#footnote-296) As Aasgard points out, this does not make much difference to the metaphor itself, but to the role allocation of the relationship.[[297]](#footnote-297) Is Paul the nurse and the Thessalonians the small children or is Paul himself the baby in the mother’s arms? If νήπιος is the original usage, it is a hyperbolic exaggeration of Paul’s helplessness, which again emphasises the generally negative connotation of the term. In general terms, the use of νήπιος contrasts with other more positive metaphorical uses of childhood that emphasise a loving relationship and use the terms τέκνον or υἱος.

The most common rhetorical contrast to νήπιος is τέλειός. τέλειός can have the sense of being perfect[[298]](#footnote-298) or mature.[[299]](#footnote-299) The exact connotation, as with all instances of polysemy, is at times ambiguous. For example, Macdonald understands Colossians 1.28 as referring to perfection,[[300]](#footnote-300) while Hoehner and Lincoln take it as referring to maturity.[[301]](#footnote-301) Contrary to most other commentators, Barth translates Ephesians 4.13 as the perfect man,[[302]](#footnote-302) although, as Bradley Matthews points out, the proximity to childhood and statements about edification and growth suggest mature as the more appropriate translation.[[303]](#footnote-303) It is interesting that in Matthew 19.21, the rich man is told that if he wishes to be perfect, he must sell all his possessions and give them to the poor. This is hardly a mature or responsible act. The literal meaning of the adjective τέλειός is “having reached its end”.[[304]](#footnote-304) A Christian end is determined by the folly of the cross, which in 5.1-2 we are called to imitate in love as beloved children. Christian maturity is going to present a different model to the autonomous, self-sufficient adult individuals held up as examples in our liberal, capitalist societies.

Bradley Matthews, in his study of maturity in Ephesians and Colossians in dialogue with his reconstructions of ancient and modern concepts of maturity,[[305]](#footnote-305) traces the modern identification of maturity with autonomy to Immanuel Kant. Kant, he argues, elevates autonomy to the goal of human existence.[[306]](#footnote-306) He notes the direct Kantian influence in the work of the feminist theologian Dorothy Hampson and her concept of maturity:

To be autonomous is to overcome heteronomy. Heteronomy, the law of another ruling one, is the situation of the child. To be an adult is to have come into one’s own. “Enlightenment”, said Kant … is the “exit of humanity from its self-incurred minority”. And he continues, “*sapere aude!* (dare to know)”; have courage to use *your own* understanding.[[307]](#footnote-307)

Whether such a summary of post-enlightenment attitudes to maturity and its relationship to autonomy is either representative of modernity or adequately comprehensive is beyond the scope of this study and clearly open to debate. It is simply worth noting the difference between such a view of maturity, caricature or otherwise, and the clear sense of interdependence present within Ephesians and its concept of the mature man. As Matthews comments, “[t]he somatic nature of the Church provides a corrective to the modern discourse, namely that maturity is not exclusively individualistic. To be sure, there is an individual aspect of Christian maturity, but this aspect is circumscribed by an interdependency between individual believers and by the corporate aspect of Christian existence”.[[308]](#footnote-308) Union with Christ presupposes union with one another as part of the body of Christ, to which we all belong. Submission to Christ means mutual submission to one another.

It is worth, in passing, exploring whether Ricoeur conforms to Matthew’s critique of a modernist equation of maturity with autonomy. As a self-proclaimed “post-Hegelian Kantian”,[[309]](#footnote-309) it is not surprising that Ricoeur’s starting point is with the individual, the subject. But Ricoeur is not happy with a simple dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy. For Ricoeur autonomy must submit to the reciprocity of justice.[[310]](#footnote-310) He contrasts the heteronomy of the master to the slave with that of the master of justice to the disciple.[[311]](#footnote-311) While the slave must gain autonomy from the master to gain maturity, according to Ricoeur, the disciple must incorporate the heteronomy of justice into autonomy. In fact he defines this submission to the tutelage or heteronomy of the master of justice as a reinforcement of Kant’s *sapere aude*.[[312]](#footnote-312)Autonomy needs to learn from the reciprocal and interdependent demands of justice. Such is the outworking of a life lived with and for others, according to Ricoeur’s definition of the good life.[[313]](#footnote-313) This, perhaps, falls short of the somatic unity of the body of Christ, but it goes beyond a simple identifciation of maturity with individualism.

In Ephesians 4.13 the ἄνδρα τέλειον is not an individual at all. This is in direct contrast to the wayward children who are many. Te-Li Lau suggests that this opposition between the singular ἄνδρα τέλειον and the plural νήπιοι equates individualism with childishness and unity with maturity.[[314]](#footnote-314) This contrasts to Colossians 1.28, where every individual is presented as mature or perfect in Christ. As Hoehner points out, the plural form would have been possible,[[315]](#footnote-315) but the singular is used instead. The mature person is, therefore, as Macdonald puts it, a “corporate entity”.[[316]](#footnote-316) This resonates with 2.15 and 2.16, where one new humanity is created in one body out of the old divisions between Jew and Gentile. The path to maturity in Ephesians is not about individual maturity or autonomy, but about interdependence under the headship of Christ. The metaphor used is that of the body, joined and knitted together, which, when each part works properly, can build itself up in love (4.16). The body depends upon each part to work properly.[[317]](#footnote-317) This sense of corporate maturity means that Christian maturity is not about each individual gaining individual maturity, but about a group of people building each other up to attain a collective maturity. This does not take away responsibility from the individual; the body of Christ depends upon people fulfilling their specific roles (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) and upon mutuality – we are members of one another (4.25), we share what we have (4.28), we speak good words to one another (4.29). The exhortation in 4.31 could be read as a loving parent asking his children to stop quarrelling and be nice. The ethics expressed are not those of independent agents, but of people who have to live together as a family.

What Bradley Matthews omits to do in his interesting thesis is to relate this sense of interdependent somatic maturity to the paradoxical use of the positive metaphor of childhood within the text.[[318]](#footnote-318) Must the two visions simply stand in tension, or is a return to childhood, perhaps something akin to Ricoeur’s second childhood, part of the maturity encouraged by the text? It is in this growing towards interdependence and commonality that the Christian journey towards maturity can be said to be one of growing towards childhood. Interdependence and commonality is typical of family life. Children are dependent ultimately on their parents, but also to some extent on each other. The maturity presented in the text is a familial rather than an individual maturity, in which people have different roles, but are ultimately in the position of a child towards God.

***3.2e: The Father: The hermeneutics of suspicion***

In the end, the status of sonship, into which the readers enter through adoption, depends upon the status of fatherhood, and fatherhood depends on sonship. In Ephesians, God becomes our father specifically through adoption as a result of the ministry of Jesus and our incorporation into him.[[319]](#footnote-319) For the reader, the familial relationship with God as Father comes as a result of faith in the Son. Nevertheless, fatherhood is an important symbol of God for Ephesians. Father is used to describe God eight times, more than any of the other letters in the Pauline corpus and twice as often as its nearest rivals.[[320]](#footnote-320)

The centrality of fatherhood as an image of God is a prime target for the application of the hermeneutics of suspicion. For Freud, one of Ricoeur’s three masters of suspicion, along with Marx and Nietzsche, the image of fatherhood is at the heart of all that is wrong with the worship of gods in general and Christianity in particular. The psychological purpose of religion, for Freud, is threefold: to exorcise the terrors of nature; to help reconcile us to the cruelty of life, and most particularly of death; and to compensate us for the sufferings and privations which civilisation imposes upon us.[[321]](#footnote-321) In the face of our helplessness against nature and the social order in which we find ourselves, we revert to the feeling of helplessness we felt as children. In childhood, according to Freud, our primary protector was our father. Projecting a father figure into the sky is a means of returning to the safety and comfort we felt as children, protected by our fathers.[[322]](#footnote-322) Stepping into a fully mature adulthood, for Freud, is learning to live without the comforting feeling of being looked after by a supernatural father. Describing the position of newly-converted atheists, he says:

Granted, such a person will then be in a difficult position, he will have to admit that he is completely helpless, insignificant amid the world’s bustle, no longer the mid-point of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a benign providence. He will be in the same situation as the child who has left the home where it had felt so warm and cosy. But surely infantilism is something that is meant to be overcome? A person cannot remain a child forever; eventually the child must go out into what has been called “hostile life”. The process might be termed “*education for reality*”. Do you still need me to make plain to you that the sole object of my essay is to draw attention to the necessity for this step forward? [[323]](#footnote-323)

Despite the resonance between Freud’s exhortation to go out into “hostile life” and the exhortation in Ephesians to stand firm against the hostile forces of evil, the point of Ephesians is that the victory against the powers has been won by Christ. Whatever dangers we may face in the world-view of Ephesians, we still rely on the protection of a loving father in the heavenly places.

The power of the father figure goes somewhat further for Freud than simply a childish wish for security and order against the random forces of nature and the oppressive power of human societies. It is also bound up in a sense of inherited guilt over the primeval killing of a father figure. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud postulates a “violent, jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away the growing sons”.[[324]](#footnote-324) The sons of this father conspire together to kill and eat him. Yet liberated from their oppressor, feelings of guilt and remorse emerge. The memory of the dead father aroused complex feelings:

They hated the father who stood so powerfully in the way of their sexual demands and their desire for power, but they also loved and admired him. After they had satisfied their hate by his removal and had carried out their wish for identification with him, the suppressed tender impulses had to assert themselves.[[325]](#footnote-325)

The outlet for their feelings of love and admiration, as well as their guilt at the murder, became the replacement of the father with a totem, a totem who took on father-like supernatural qualities. Devotion towards this totem became the foundation of a new communal morality, a way of assuaging a collective, primeval guilt, and a fulfilment of the wish for protection. As each new generation practises its devotion to the father figure, their complex and neurotic feelings towards God will be bound up in their own complex and neurotic relationships with their father, a father who, in Ricoeur’s words, “would retain the privileges which the son must seize if he is to be himself”.[[326]](#footnote-326) Religion is therefore for Freud, “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity”,[[327]](#footnote-327) a neurosis which can be countered by maturity and psychoanalysis. A text, such as Ephesians, which makes explicit the link between the phantasm of fatherhood and God, is a text to be treated with suspicion.

Ricoeur counters this association of belief in God with the Oedipus Complex through biblical exegesis.[[328]](#footnote-328) He traces the use of the term through the Bible. In the Old Testament the designation of God as father is relatively insignificant: Hoehner, for example, cites 15 instances.[[329]](#footnote-329) Ricoeur makes a broad division in the Old Testament between narrative, prophecy and wisdom, and hymnic literature. In the narratives Yahweh is not a father. Rather,

The whole theology of traditions consists in articulating the ultimate agent, Yahweh, the principal and collective agent, Israel, taken as a unique historical personage, and various individual agents, with Moses in the top rank, in a dialectic which is never reflected upon but is simply narrated.[[330]](#footnote-330)

Just as in the revelation of the divine name, God simply is, without further appellation, so in the narratives.

For Ricoeur, the revelation of the divine name to Moses at the burning bush is a key point. It is the naming of a name – “I am who I am” – which is unnameable,[[331]](#footnote-331) and as such, a revelation which conceals as much as it reveals.[[332]](#footnote-332) Because God is “infinitely above human thoughts and speech”,[[333]](#footnote-333) we cannot hold God “at the mercy of our language”.[[334]](#footnote-334) Thus all linguistic attempts to describe God fail. Ricoeur is clear that father is an epithet or a description rather than a name.[[335]](#footnote-335) We are left with the mystery of the name which has been revealed to us, “a connotation without denotation, not even that of the father”.[[336]](#footnote-336) Against the mystery of the name, all attempts to anthropomorphise God, or confine God to human categories or relations that we understand, dissolve.[[337]](#footnote-337) The worship of anything other than the great “I am” becomes an idol. The check against idolatry is the mystery of the name. Fatherhood, when it is used to connote God rather than simply as a given symbol to describe or address God, is as in danger of becoming an idol as any symbol which becomes fossilised and ceases to point to something beyond itself. A symbol that does not point beyond itself to the unknowable “I am” has become an idol.

For Ricoeur there is an interconnected relationship between idolatry, childhood neuroses and religious symbols.[[338]](#footnote-338) What gives religious symbolism its power is its connection to the events of early life and the inherited fantasies of the collective subconscious. It is no surprise that there is usually something either elemental (water, fire) or archetypal (father, warrior) about religious symbols. Yet such symbols are not bound by their origin in the traumas of early life or the inherited trauma of primeval events. We can move beyond that. For example, oppressive political systems spawn their fair share of powerful symbols, such as God as King or Christ as slave. But God’s kingship, as a symbol, can arguably transfigure the tyrannical realities of human monarchy and point to a just rule which is beyond human grasp. As we shall see, for Ricoeur, fatherhood is about far more than a childish wish for security or oedipal guilt. But the fact that symbols have their origins in potentially traumatic situations and relationships mean that they are always in danger of being a “return of the repressed”.[[339]](#footnote-339) Without the critical faculties of the hermeneutics of suspicion there is a real risk that such symbols become idols or totems that we worship in place of the unknowable God. Only by destroying the idol can we appreciate the full value of the symbol. As Ricoeur says,

“Symbols give rise to thought”, but they are also the birth of idols. That is why the critique of idols remains the condition of the conquest of symbols.[[340]](#footnote-340)

The symbol of fatherhood is a case in point because its meaning is so variable. There are as many interpretations of the symbol as there are actual and potential fathers. Its use ranges from “the phantasm of the father as castrator, who must be killed, to the symbol of the father who dies of compassion”.[[341]](#footnote-341) Even our relationships with our own fathers are to some extent in suspense, as we do not know what will happen next or the full truth about our relationship with them as children. Our childish delight at their love and protection, assuming we were lucky enough to have loving fathers, can soon turn into a teenage sense of being oppressed and an adult sense of incomprehension. Conversely, a childhood distance can be redeemed by an adult closeness. What went before cannot help but be coloured by what comes after, and indeed by what is still to come.

Ricoeur points out that the creation narratives contain no trace of God as father. We are created not begot, the world is founded not birthed. Ricoeur argues that the verb used for creation, *bara*, eliminates any trace of begetting.[[342]](#footnote-342) We are created in God’s image, but our similitude to God is not associated with sonship at this stage. When fatherhood is used, it is used of Israel. It springs from election. This again separates the idea of fatherhood from begetting and connects it more closely to adoption. God is the father not of the whole world, but of Israel, because he has chosen them: election is an act of will separate from that of creation.[[343]](#footnote-343)

The images of God as father in the Old Testament come most frequently in the prophetic books. For Ricoeur this is significant because prophecy looks not to the past but to the future, it is a foreseeing of what is to come: prophecy looks forward to the eschatological banquet.[[344]](#footnote-344) The use of fatherhood as an image in the Old Testament prophecies is highly mixed. Ricoeur is especially interested in what he calls “mutual contamination”[[345]](#footnote-345) of the symbol of father and the symbol of spouse in Jeremiah 3:19-20:

And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel.

The juxtaposition of these two seemingly mutually exclusive symbols, Father and Spouse, breaks the “shell of literality” and thus liberates the meaning, in much the same way that the tension inherent in the “category mistake” of metaphor points to a meaning that cannot be wholly accessed by purely descriptive language.[[346]](#footnote-346) As Soskice puts it, “images of God as bridegroom and father jostle against one another in a way that would make an overly literalistic reading noxious”.[[347]](#footnote-347) The symbol of fatherhood is thus transformed by its transgressive encounter with the symbol of spouse:

A father who is a spouse is no longer a progenitor, nor is he any more an enemy to his sons; love, solicitude, and pity carry him beyond domination and severity.[[348]](#footnote-348)

Janet Soskice finds in Deuteronomy 32:6 another example of a shocking juxtaposition that liberates the reader from any temptation to literalism. God is named father but the text goes on to apply images of motherhood in the extraordinary image of a rock giving birth (32:18).[[349]](#footnote-349) With such a quick progression from fatherhood, to motherhood, to rockhood, we cannot help but see the language as anything other than metaphorical, and the truth conveyed as lying somewhere beyond the images employed.

The time that the prophetic declaration of God as Father looks forward to is the time of the Son. It is Jesus as Son of God who addresses God as Father, *abba*, and invites us to do the same. The fatherhood of God is a concomitant to the sonship of Jesus – as Soskice says, “Without the Son, ‘the Father’ is not God, but an idol”[[350]](#footnote-350) – and it is Jesus, in an invocation that according to Ricoeur is without parallel in the literature of Jewish prayer, who dares to address God as a child to a father. This is a shocking moment, the first time in the Bible that God is addressed as Father in prayer. It is, in Christian terms at least, the symbol of a radically new and more intimate relationship with God. This new relationship

does not look backward toward a great ancestor, but forward, in the direction of a new intimacy on the model of the knowledge of the son … Far therefore from the religion of the father being that of a distant and hostile transcendence, there is fatherhood because there is sonship, and there is sonship because there is community of spirit.[[351]](#footnote-351)

The apotheosis of this new intimacy with God is God’s absolute identification with human suffering on the cross. This neatly relates the archaic symbol with which we started, the son who murders the father, with the redemptive symbol which is the culmination of the Bible, the self-sacrifice of the son on the cross.[[352]](#footnote-352) And the Son is identified with the Father, “the Father and I are one” (John 10:30), says Jesus. On the cross, in a very real sense, the Father gives his life. So the biblical symbol of the Father is not, in this reading at least, a patriarchal idol, but a prophetic symbol of intimacy between God and humanity through and in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, which is here and which is to come.

Having explored this reading of the biblical symbol of fatherhood, it remains to be seen to what extent Ephesians can sustain such a reading. Like Ricoeur, we shall use exegesis as our method of testing his interpretation of fatherhood by analysing its instances in the text. In the initial greeting the centrality of Jesus, the son, is clear.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Ephesians 1.1-3)

Jesus Christ is the common feature of each interaction. Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus – the son. The saints to whom he is writing are faithful, in Christ Jesus, the son. Paul, as apostle, is a medium of Grace and peace from the Father and the Son. Jesus links Paul to the will of God, the saints to each other and to Paul, and the Father to Paul and the saints. This bridge role of Jesus is made explicit in 3.11-12.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Our access to God is in Christ Jesus, and our participation in his sonship. The word boldness, παρρησία, was first used to refer to the free speech a citizen enjoyed in Athens.[[353]](#footnote-353) In the Bible,[[354]](#footnote-354) according to Hoehner, it conveys, “openness, speaking freely, concealing nothing, boldness or candor, and confidence”.[[355]](#footnote-355) Macdonald adds a sense of valued openness between friends to the list of possible connotations.[[356]](#footnote-356) Fowl sums this up succinctly: “the Greek here conveys the impression of freedom and unrestricted access, of the confidence that one will be received and welcomed”.[[357]](#footnote-357) The freedom of speech and access to God the Father granted to the believer through the Son is central to David Ford’s theological reflections on Ephesians in *Self and Salvation*:

The explicit statements of Ephesians describe and encourage an explosion of fresh communication, of *parrhesia* in relation to God, towards the whole world and within the community, a dynamic which is meant to pervade ordinary living, thinking, feeling and action. The most fundamental purpose of the community is fulfilled and enjoyed through this constantly new improvisation of *parrhesia*.[[358]](#footnote-358)

This nicely sums up the new intimacy that is achieved with the Father through the Son, and the consequences that intimacy has for our interpersonal relationships with each other as Christians. Although παρρησία has its origins in political discourse, in citizens speaking freely to one another, when put in the familial context of Ephesians we can picture something of the freedom a child might have to ask anything of a loving father. A rendering of the confidence the reader can have in accessing God, and a familial context for this confidence, can be found in Matthew 7.8-11.[[359]](#footnote-359) The key to this new-found and perhaps audacious intimacy is the Son. There is fatherhood because there is sonship, and in the Son, we are adopted as beloved children with confident access to the Father, a state that has implications for the way we treat each other.

Another reference to our “access” (προσαγωγή) to the Father through Christ is in 2.19. Here the interpersonal dimensions of free access to God, and their potential political implications, are made clear. Two groups who were distinct, Jews and Gentiles, now have common access to God. The dividing wall (2.14) has been broken down and there is one new humanity and peace between them (2.15). The political implications of the access are made clear by the word συμπολῖται, fellow citizens. But it is interesting that this is swiftly followed by a familial image, οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, members of the household of God. Access leads to membership of the family, and the bold speech of a citizen can become the secure appeal of a child, confident of his or her father’s love and welcoming response. The creation of one new humanity requires the sense of equality to be respected between fellow citizens who can speak boldly to one another, but it also requires something altogether warmer, the love and mutual respect which members of the same family share.

Although God is “our” father in the opening greeting, “we” are a limited group of people, comprised of the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus and Paul. God’s fatherhood for the saints is by adoption rather than by straightforward generation. The primacy of the relationship between the Father and the Son is made clear in verse 3. God is primarily the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ; it is in our participation in that relationship that God becomes our father also. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (1.4), but only “predestined” (προορίσας) for adoption as children at some point in the future, the moment of faith in Christ. While, for the readers of the text, this adoption has already happened, we still wait for the fullness of time (1.10). This accords with Ricoeur’s sense that proclamation of the fatherhood of God in the Old Testament is a prophetic vision of the future intimacy of our relationship with God in Christ.

The idea that our status as children of God is a prophetic vision of what is to come is picked up in Romans 8.19-24.[[360]](#footnote-360) But there is a tension here between present reality and eschatological fulfilment. Both Romans 8 and Galatians 4 emphasise the present reality of adoption, and yet we wait for it. As Bartlett points out, the link between the present reality and the future hope of adoption is the Spirit.[[361]](#footnote-361) It is the Spirit who helps us to cry “Abba”, and it is through the Spirit that we enjoy the present reality of our end as children of God (Romans 8.15-16; Galatians 4.6).

Of course fatherhood attracts suspicion as a metaphor of God not simply from Freudians, but also from feminists.[[362]](#footnote-362) Francis Watson asks whether the use of male terms to represent this new-found intimacy between God and humanity is a deliberate exclusion of the feminine and therefore “the apotheosis of patriarchy”.[[363]](#footnote-363) Some feminists would certainly agree with this conclusion. For example, Mary Daly, in her book *Beyond God the Father*, argues:

The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the nature of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society should be male-dominated.[[364]](#footnote-364)

There is no question that the Father and Son metaphor needs to be subjected to the hermeneutics of suspicion supplied by feminist criticism. If we accept patriarchal language uncritically we risk idolatry. The nature of the problem from a feminist Christian perspective is explored by Janet Soskice in her book *The Kindness of God*.[[365]](#footnote-365) The dilemma, as Soskice couches it, is that “the language of fatherhood is too deeply rooted in the Christian texts and the religion itself”. Therefore, rather than “tinkering” with the models of God with a bit of gender-inclusive language here, and an emphasis on biblical images of God as mother there, the feminist who cannot accept the language of “divine fatherhood” may need to “abandon Christianity”.[[366]](#footnote-366) However, as she goes on to argue, accepting the language of divine fatherhood is not the same as accepting “the male idol of patriarchal religion”.[[367]](#footnote-367)

Francis Watson argues that the absence of a feminine other in the Trinity, for example a mother or a daughter, is a sign of the absence of male gender rather than its dominance. Just as fatherhood depends upon sonship and sonship upon fatherhood (a son makes a father as a father makes a son), so gender exists in relation to its opposite. In the absence of the feminine there is no masculine and vice versa:

While the terms “father” and “son” normally denote male humans in a peculiarly sharply defined and irreversible relationship to one another, they lose certain of their normal concomitants – temporal separation, bodiliness, maleness – when metaphorically applied to the first and second persons of the divine Trinity. This is no more an all-male relationship than it is a temporal or bodily relationship.[[368]](#footnote-368)

The metaphorical nature of the appellations saves us from patriarchal literalism.

Patriarchy is in that sense an idol, a crystallisation of the symbol into something which it is not. The symbol is not one of patriarchal authority but one of relationality. Earthly gender does not affect human participation in this relationship. Women (who are directly addressed, and thus differentiated from men, only later in the text and who therefore must be assumed to be considered addressees in exactly the same way as men) are sons of God as much as men are. The sole use of male terms to describe divine relationality and human participation in that relationality may have come to seem exclusive – and there is no question that this is problematic for some modern readers of the text – but in the world of the text they are not. The key point is the relationality entailed rather than the gender. Parent, as a word divorced from gender, does not have the same power, or evoke the same affective response, because it is too generic. It is not grounded in the specificity of a real human relationship – with all the oppression and the love which that may evoke. We relate to a mother or father, rather than to a parent. Janet Soskice finds an answer not in the displacement of one gendered term with another but in “excess”, giving the example of Julian of Norwich, who complements the “gendered scriptural terms of Fatherhood and Sonship with maternal and functional imagery”[[369]](#footnote-369) - “As truly as God is Our Father, so truly is God our mother”.[[370]](#footnote-370) It is clear that Ephesians fails to provide this excess of gender terms, and this is a significant failing, but nevertheless the maleness of the terms is not intrinsic to the relationship expressed, or to our participation within it.

There is, however, another potential vision of fatherhood in Ephesians, a vision where, as Lincoln puts it, God is not simply father through redemption but also through creation.[[371]](#footnote-371) The two passages that would suggest this are Ephesians 3.14 – “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name” – and Ephesians 4.6 – “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all”. If we are to read these passages as pointing towards some kind of cosmic fatherhood, then there is a contradiction inherent in the text. The symbol of God as father of all from creation would be in stark contrast to our status as sons of God being entirely dependent on our adoption. If this is an affirmation of God’s universal fatherhood, it is unique in the Pauline corpus. Elsewhere in the text, those outside the family are described as children of wrath (2.3) and children of disobedience (5.6) – children not of God, but members of a different family. The mutual contradiction of the images – children of wrath, but in some universal sense children of God – must point beyond a straightforward designation of God as universal father in Ephesians.

Interestingly enough there is a textual variant to 3.14. Some manuscripts read “the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ”, while others read simply “Father”. According to Fowl, the reading “Father” has earlier attestation, while the alternative has a wider geographical distribution.[[372]](#footnote-372) This leads Hoehner to prefer the longer reading.[[373]](#footnote-373) Best, Lincoln and Macdonald, on the other hand, see no reason for the exclusion of the words and thus prefer the shorter reading, accounting for the addition as an attempt to harmonise the formula with the earlier one in the text.[[374]](#footnote-374) Best even suggests that the inclusion of “Our Lord Jesus Christ” may be a deliberate attempt to exclude any idea of a universal Fatherhood of God by a later scribe.[[375]](#footnote-375) Muddiman is equivocal, but the lack of the use of Father without qualification elsewhere in Paul leads him to prefer the longer reading if we judge the material to be Pauline.[[376]](#footnote-376) The longer reading would certainly be more convenient for our purposes, but even if the shorter reading is the original, God as Father of all can still be part of a prophetic vision of what is to come through the ministry of Jesus Christ. As we learn in 1.10, the plan for the fullness of time is to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in an echo of the language of 3.15. A polyphonic reading of the text must take into account the tensions between the universal cosmic vision of the text and its particular concentration on the adopted family of God.[[377]](#footnote-377)

Best sums up the tensions between these two visions in his discussion on the powers.[[378]](#footnote-378) Commenting on 3.10 and the surprising assertion that it is through the church that the wisdom of God may be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places, he questions the eschatological status of the powers: “none of this makes clear whether, when the powers come to know the wisdom of God, this means they have been or will be saved”.[[379]](#footnote-379) It is clear in 6.12 that the powers are still hostile, and yet they have been defeated and placed under Christ’s feet in 1.22. This inconsistency goes to the heart of the tension between the “now” and “not yet” of Pauline theology, or as Best would put it, it parallels “the idea of the Kingdom of God as both realised and yet to come”.[[380]](#footnote-380) The “powers” have both been defeated and are yet to be finally defeated. More importantly for our exploration of the universal fatherhood of God, Ephesians leaves open the question of whether God overcomes cosmic evil by its destruction or “winning it to himself in love”,[[381]](#footnote-381) as might be suggested by Colossians 1.20 or Ephesians 1.10. “All things” must include the hostile forces of supernatural evil. How do they fit into the peace created on the cross? The question is not only relevant to the “powers” but also to ordinary human beings, given the negative depictions of those outside the adopted family of God in the text (2.2-3; 4.17-20) and the chilling warning in 5.5 that “no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of God”. To what extent is God “Father” of fornicators, impure people and idolaters?

Edward Schillebeeckxtries to resolve the tension between universal fatherhood through creation and fatherhood through adoption in Christ Jesus by equating salvation with a completion of creation: “we are God’s work (2.10) the new creation in salvation”.[[382]](#footnote-382) The position of people before Christ as “children of wrath” is akin to the chaos before creation. The salvific move from death to life and from darkness to light (5.8-14) are creative acts of God which take place in Christ,[[383]](#footnote-383) historically in the crucifixion and resurrection.[[384]](#footnote-384) If creation is completed in salvation, then God’s universal fatherhood can be seen as a prophetic vision of the future for all things. In this case, the specific group of people who have been adopted as children of God – the church – is, as Roitto puts it, not an end in itself, but an instrument for bringing God’s creation to completion,[[385]](#footnote-385) a finished creation where all things will recognise the fatherhood of God. Adoption, therefore, is no cause for the complacency of a remnant, but rather “a call to help everyone share in the election”.[[386]](#footnote-386) It is impossible to separate entirely, therefore, the fatherhood of creation from the fatherhood of salvation, since salvation is the proper end of creation.

Some commentators, such as Robinson, take 3.15 as meaning that fatherhood is intrinsic to the Godhead, arguing that the fatherhood of God is archetypal, and all other fatherhood is derived from God’s.[[387]](#footnote-387) This goes beyond the text. πατριὰ stands for a group derived from a single ancestor, used in the LXX to denote a family, one’s father’s house, a clan, a tribe, a nation. It is not, in its biblical use, an abstract word for fatherhood,[[388]](#footnote-388) as Robinson translates it.[[389]](#footnote-389) For Best, even family is too narrow a meaning given the breadth of the term. He prefers “social grouping”.[[390]](#footnote-390) This takes away much of the affective resonance, so important to symbolism, and of course the wordplay of πατέρα / πατριὰ, but nevertheless works against Robinson’s dangerous identification of patriarchal authority with the authority of God. If we take πατριὰ to be a type of relationality, a family or a nation, rather than a symbol of masculine authority, the fact that the Father – who is only Father because of and through his relationship with the Son – gives his name to all other forms of relating is a metaphorical way of saying that all forms of relatedness are an outpouring of the inter-relatedness of the trinity, and specifically the relationship between the Father and the Son. Sarah Coakley, following on from Thomas Aquinas, makes this point rather well. Starting from the premise that Father is used appropriately of inter-trinitarian relations and therefore inappropriately, that is to say, metaphorically, in other contexts, she argues that “the *true* meaning of ‘Father’ is to be found in the Trinity, not dredged up from the scummy realm of human patriarchal fatherhood”.[[391]](#footnote-391)

Our relationships with each other, insofar as they are positive, reflect the mutual love and freedom of speech, παρρησία, operating in God’s family. As beloved adopted children of God, we must imitate God in our relationships with each other, most fundamentally by imitating the love Christ showed by giving himself up for us as a fragrant offering to God (5.1-2). Self-sacrifice is at the heart of the symbol of the relationship between Father and Son, rather than the violent retention or wresting of power as conceived by Freud. The fact we are all adopted children presupposes a fundamental equality between us, as Bartlett says: “No one is more adopted than any other. For Christians the only “elder” member of this community is Christ”.[[392]](#footnote-392) The dividing walls of human distinctions[[393]](#footnote-393) have been broken down in the new humanity created by Jesus on the cross (2.14). Having become members of one family, we must now learn to live together.

**3.3A life together worthy of the calling**

The ethical demands of Ephesians relate primarily to a life lived together. The fundamental importance of unity, and its ethical implications, begins the paraenetical section. The virtues emphasised speak directly to communal living. Humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love (4.2) make no sense as the primary virtues of wholly autonomous individuals; they make sense for people called to live together. Similarly, the emphasis on speaking the truth to our neighbours, not letting the sun go down on our anger, working hard enough to have things to share, avoiding evil talk but saying that which builds up others and gives grace to those who hear, and forgiving each other (4.25-29) makes most sense in the context of a life lived with other people.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Ephesians has influenced Christian literature on communal living. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, in his book *Life Together*, which brings together his reflections on Christian communal living from his experience in the Finkenwalde seminary before it was closed down by the Nazis in 1938, quotes Ephesians 11 times, second only to Romans in the Pauline corpus, and more than the Gospels of Mark or John. This relative prominence is surely due to the relevance of the advice given; both Ephesians and *Life Together* speak to Christian communities who must live together in difficult circumstances and under the threat of persecution. The three specifically ethical quotations Bonhoeffer uses are all highly communal. He quotes 4.2,[[394]](#footnote-394) 4.26[[395]](#footnote-395) – “It is a decisive rule of every Christian community that every division that the day has caused must be healed in the evening”[[396]](#footnote-396) – and 4.29.[[397]](#footnote-397) He also quotes 5.18 and 5.19 twice, respectively,[[398]](#footnote-398) placing primary importance on worshipping together, and most importantly on singing together, as a Christian community: “all singing in the congregation is a spiritual thing. Devotion to the Word, incorporation into the community, great humility and much discipline – these are the prerequisites of all singing together”.[[399]](#footnote-399)

Bonhoeffer is clear that Christian community is properly constituted only in Christ. Quoting Ephesians 2.14 – “He is our peace” – he argues that without Christ there would be strife among human beings, between God and humanity, and between Christians. It is only because “Christ opened up the way to God and one another” that “Christians can live with each other in peace, they can love and serve one another; they can become one”.[[400]](#footnote-400) The ethical and communal dimensions of Ephesians depend upon a life together in Christ, and ethical reflection on life together must start from this Christological premise, in both the mechanics of living together in community and the wider political questions about living together as a society.

While Ephesians does not directly address those who hold political power, it has political implications despite itself.[[401]](#footnote-401) Once Christians came to exercise governmental authority, the rules for life together among what were originally fairly marginal communities began to have an influence beyond those communities. This is one very clear sense in which authorial intent cannot be said to have the final word on meaning. If a text is to be applied to a situation that the author cannot have envisaged, such as the conduct of a democratically-elected Christian politician in a post-Christian society, then the text is not limited by the author’s intention; whatever lessons such a person may draw from the text, the author cannot have intended them. In this way, the text has become a transcultural and transhistorical document, applicable to an infinite variety of situations.

The theologian Edward Schillebeeckx argues that “[i]f any book lays the foundations for a political theology in the New Testament it is Ephesians, though the author himself does not see through its historical consequences or implications”.[[402]](#footnote-402) The use of words is important here: Ephesians lays the foundations for a political theology; it is not one in itself. However, in exploring the implications of the saving acts of Jesus Christ in the lives of Christians as they seek to work out their lives together, certain values and tendencies can be extrapolated into the wider context of society as a whole. Key to Schillebeeckx’ argument about the political implications of Ephesians is the cosmic importance of the Church as the “*pleroma* of Christ … the sphere into which the love of Christ flows”.[[403]](#footnote-403) It is through the church that the wisdom of God is made known to the powers (3.10). The love of believers is key to the exercise of God’s saving power in the world (5.25). This, as Schillebeeckx makes clear, is a bold claim for such a marginal community:

At a time when Christian communities were invisible cells in the world of their time, minority groups in the great cities of the ancient word, without any prospect of influencing the wider world or the society in which they were set, a *quantité négligeable,* the author of Ephesians dared to call the “community of God” the great universal instrument of peace in this world – a community which takes up the fight against what he calls the “rulers of this world” and the powers which cause unrest. This Christian community had no fear of these great powers, against which it put up a defence.[[404]](#footnote-404)

The ethical implications of Ephesians span, therefore, from the smallest unit of society, the family, which is dealt explicitly with in the household codes, to the managing of life together as a Christian family within local Christian communities, to the cosmic implications and task of breaking down the dividing walls between human beings and growing into one new humanity in Christ. The context of our ethical reflections on the text is a narrative – the narrative of God’s loving purposes before the beginning of time, manifested in the saving acts of Jesus Christ in the great drama of his descent/ascent spanning the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This cosmic drama relates existentially to the lives of individual Christians and their identities, bound up in this narrative, and fixed on the ultimate destination of the believers, awaiting the fulfilment of their eschatological hope proclaimed in the text. [[405]](#footnote-405)

***3.3a Reading Ephesians through the narrative ethics of Ricoeur.***

We have already explored Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity, of an *ipse* identity of self-constancy which is continually re-evaluated. In the following discussion of the ethical implications of this narrative identity, and how they are played out in Ephesians, I shall use the ethics of Paul Ricoeur as a prism. He explored the concept of narrative identity in his three-volume work *Time and Narrative*. He took it up again and explored its ethical implications more fully in the ten studies of *Oneself as Another*, which shall form the basis of this discussion, especially the seventh study, *The Self and the Ethical Aim.[[406]](#footnote-406)*

For Ricoeur, narrative is indispensable to ethical reflection. He asks the question,

How indeed could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole, if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?[[407]](#footnote-407)

This gathering together of a life forms the basis of ethical reflection for the individual. Life cannot be analysed as a series of utterly disconnected actions devoid of a subject who exists in narrative relation to other actions committed in the past. This is not to say that there is a straightforward concordance of identity and character between one action of a subject and another. Narrative is essentially a dialectic between the concordance of “the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others”,[[408]](#footnote-408) and the discordance of the disruption to that life “of unforeseeable events that punctuate it (encounters, accidents, etc.)”.[[409]](#footnote-409)

The ethical value of narrative is not limited, for Ricoeur, to the gathering together of a life as the basis for reflection. The imagined narratives of literature are “an immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations”.[[410]](#footnote-410) It is through literature that we can enter into ethical situations outside our experience, and use these experiments to reflect on the way we behave in our lives.

As we have said before, Ephesians too exists in this narrative dialectic of concordance and discordance: such is the now and not yet of the theology of Ephesians and the wider Pauline corpus. The origins of the life of the reader lie in her predestination to adoption before the beginning of time: her ultimate destiny is in being gathered up in Christ at the end of time. The certainty of this destiny is made clear by the passage of the reader from spiritual death to life as a result of faith in Christ, through the peace made on the cross and the raising up together with Christ through the resurrection – so far, so concordant. However, this life is full of setbacks and false turns. Paul, himself, is imprisoned. The readers must be exhorted to the most basic moral standards: they are even reminded to refrain from stealing and adultery. They must still stand firm against the forces of supernatural evil which assail them. Their exalted spiritual state with Christ in the heavenly places is yet to systematically filter down into their lives as they live them. Ephesians functions both existentially as a gathering together of the Christian life led by all Christians everywhere, and as an ethical thought experiment for testing the implications of that life against a number of potential situations.

At the heart of Ricoeur’s reflections on narrative ethics is his distinction between ethics and morality. Highlighting a dialectical tension between the teleological ethics of Aristotle and the deontological morality of Kant, he defines ethics as the aim of a good life and morality as an attempt to articulate this aim in universal moral norms that constrain the agent.[[411]](#footnote-411) For Ricoeur, ethics, thus defined, has primacy over morality.[[412]](#footnote-412) This is not to say that moral norms have no place; they function as a sieve which it is necessary for the aims of the ethical life to pass through. Because we harbour illusions about ourselves and the meaning of our inclinations, which often hide the aim of the good life, we need moral norms as a test of our true intentions;[[413]](#footnote-413) otherwise, we would be cast “defenceless into the realm of the arbitrary”.[[414]](#footnote-414) Moral norms have a specific function for Ricoeur in guarding against evil: “to all the figures of evil responds the no of morality”.[[415]](#footnote-415) The “no” of morality stands in stark contrast to the affirmative quality of the mutual exchange of self-esteems at the heart of the ethical aim. But this “no” springs from the ethical affirmation of solicitude: our affirmation of others makes us reject the indignities inflicted upon our fellows through evil.[[416]](#footnote-416) Moral norms are a necessary part of realising ethical aims. Nevertheless, Ricoeur is clear that there are practical situations where moral norms are an inadequate response: the conflicts of duties lead to impasses. In these situations moral reflection must have recourse to the aim of ethics.[[417]](#footnote-417)

The mediating function of moral norms is made clear in Ricoeur’s maxim on practical wisdom, *phronesis*, which “consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by solicitude, by betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible”.[[418]](#footnote-418) This crystallises both the importance of the moral norm as something only to be diverged from in the interests of the other, and yet the primacy of the needs of the other, which require a certain flexibility in extraordinary circumstances. This flexibility, however, is not absolute. The moral norm is still to be respected as much as possible. Nevertheless, Ricoeur distrusts obedience to duty as the bedrock of morality, rather he posits a “benevolent spontaneity”,[[419]](#footnote-419) a kind of improvisation of behaviour based on a firm grounding in the aims of an ethical life sifted through the universalising tendency of the moral norm, but open to constant re-evaluation in the face of changing circumstances and need.

While Ricoeur does not explicitly make this connection, there is a clear resonance between Ricoeur’s assertion of the primacy of the ethical aim over the moral norm and the abolition of the law declared in Ephesians 2.15. Historical-critical commentators will endlessly debate the relationship of the New Testament, the Pauline corpus, and what one might call the deutero-Pauline epistles with Judaism and the Torah. There is no doubt that the research of scholars from the “New Perspective on Paul” means that, in historical terms at least, we must present a more nuanced relationship between Pauline Christianity and the Law than a simple opposition. An intertextual and polyphonic reading of the New Testament must certainly note that there is an irreconcilable tension between Matthew 5.17-19 – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law” – and Ephesians 2.15 – “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances”. Meaning lies in this tension rather than in any facile attempt to harmonise it. Ricoeur reflects this tension rather well in his setting out a dialectical relationship between ethics and moral norms. James Dunn argues that “both the outward norm and the inward motivation were essential for ethical living”, without prioritising one over the other. He gives a clear account of the dangers of dismissing either, but gives no account of how to proceed when the two come into conflict.[[420]](#footnote-420)

One example of this more nuanced approach to the relationship between the law and Pauline Christianity as expressed in Ephesians is the work of Tet-Lim Yee, who argues that Paul’s criticism of the law is not focussed on the Torah *per se* but on the use of the law as an instrument of division which promoted enmity between Jews and Gentiles.[[421]](#footnote-421) The abolition of the law is not a rejection of Israelite heritage so much as a sign of the new peace, where both Jews and Gentiles can be adopted as sons of God. “The Law … which therefore occasioned ethnic enmity, is now abolished through the death of Christ”.[[422]](#footnote-422) This would accord with Dunn, who argues that only the dividing function of the Law is annulled.[[423]](#footnote-423) There is some evidence for this in the text, for example the citation of the commandment in Exodus 20:12 to honour your father and mother in 6.2. In contrast, Shkul argues that “[i]t would seem rather pointless to pronounce the abolition of the law while maintaining its ongoing praxis”.[[424]](#footnote-424) As Shkul points out, the meaning of the abolition of the law depends a great deal on the reader.[[425]](#footnote-425) Israel is one of the most significant gaps in the text, and within the space which the text leaves, it is possible either to assume a sympathetic attitude to the Law, or one that is more critical.[[426]](#footnote-426) Of course, what you do with the space also depends on the question you are asking. A reading that seeks to elucidate what the text says to the reader today will be less interested in what the text is saying to first-century Gentile Christians about Torah observance, which has arguably become irrelevant, and more interested in what the ethical implications of the “abolition of the law” mean to us now.

Despite making no specific link between the priority of the ethical aim over the moral norm and the abolition of the law, Ricoeur’s interpretation of St Paul’s approach to the law is key to his ethical reflections elsewhere in his work. His characterisation of the “law” should in no way be taken to be a historical reflection of how the Torah might have been lived out by first-century Jews, but rather a kind of existential account of the problems of legalism. He characterises obedience to the law as “scrupulosity”:

The scrupulous consciousness never stops adding new commandments. This atomisation of the law into a multitude of commandments entails an endless “juridisation” of action and a quasi-obsessional ritualization of daily life. The scrupulous person never arrives at satisfying all the commandments or even any one. At the same time, even the notion of obedience is perverted; obedience to a commandment because it is commanded, becomes more important than love of neighbour and even love of God; this exactitude in observance is what we call legalism.[[427]](#footnote-427)

It is a key point that when the moral norm becomes an end in itself, it ends up subverting the ethical aim, characterised by Ricoeur as love. This subversion brings to light “a new quality of evil” which is not the transgression of a commandment as such, but the will to save oneself by satisfying the law rather than love.[[428]](#footnote-428) With this legalistic approach, we enter into what Ricoeur calls “a hell of guilt”,[[429]](#footnote-429) in which the law itself invites sin by giving us the desire to transgress it.

The commandment, says Saint Paul, “has given life to sin” and thus “hands me over to death” (Rom. 7). Law and sin give birth to each other mutually in a terrible vicious circle, which becomes a mortal circle.[[430]](#footnote-430)

The text of Ephesians itself is pretty clear in its declaration of the primacy of the good life over any particular moral norms. The exhortation at the beginning of the paraenetical section is to lead a life worthy of the calling to which the reader has been called (4.1), to a kind of life rather than obedience to specific ethical injunctions. This opening statement is vague[[431]](#footnote-431) and open to interpretation and indeed reinterpretation in the light of new events, understanding and circumstances. Some of the commandments that follow are neither vague nor generalised, but specific, seemingly legalistic instructions. Nevertheless there is a piecemeal quality to the instructions given. They give a flavour of what leading an ethical life in the light of the text might mean doing or not doing. While lying (4.25), stealing (4.28) and evil talk (4.29) are all expressly forbidden, one gets the sense that these are by no means the only things that might distract from life together. Refraining only from these actions, and doing what you like with regard to anything else, is hardly the message of Ephesians. The text does not, and one senses could not, distil what it means to lead “a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called” into a comprehensive set of prescriptive rules.[[432]](#footnote-432) We need to work this out for ourselves by living in Christ together. Benevolent spontaneity can be paralleled with the primacy of living in love by imitating God (5.1-2). This has important implications for the outworking of a life in response to the text. The ethical aims of the text have primacy over any specific moral injunctions. The day-to-day search to live out the ethical aims of the text requires constant re-evaluation and reinterpretation. It is important to highlight that this in no way diminishes the specific “norms” of the text, they are not to be easily dismissed, but merely to assert the primacy of the ethical aims of the text over them.

Ricoeur defines ethical intention as “aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions”.[[433]](#footnote-433) The “good life” is a deliberately imprecise term, a “nebulus of ideals and dreams of achievements”, which make life more or less fulfilled.[[434]](#footnote-434) There is a certain interpretative problem in relating the aims of individual actions with the broader aim of the good life. Ricoeur likens the unending task of interpreting the relationship between particular choices and the narrative of our life as a whole to the hermeneutical task of understanding a text both in terms of its whole and its parts. There is a never-ending hermeneutical circle between understanding the parts of a text in the context of the whole text and the whole as the sum of its parts. The same is true of a life.[[435]](#footnote-435) The search for what Ricoeur calls adequation between our “life ideals” and our decisions cannot be verified scientifically, only by a judgement which might, at best, appear plausible to others.[[436]](#footnote-436) Ultimately we must arrive at our own conviction that “judging well and acting well” is “a momentary and provisional approximation of living well”.[[437]](#footnote-437)

There are clear parallels between “the good life” and “a life worthy of the calling” (4.1). It is worth noting a potential distinction, however. A good life remains, at this stage, very much a matter of self-definition. A life worthy of the calling, on the other hand, is a response, a response to a call from God, mediated through the revelation of Jesus Christ. The response worthy of the calling is to live out the narrative of that revelation, to be raised with Christ.

The second part of Ricoeur’s definition of the ethical aim is similarly in sympathy with the ethical aims of Ephesians. Ricoeur’s good life is with and for other people, just as the life of the reader of Ephesians is lived together with and for other Christians in Christ. Ricoeur gives a life lived for and with others “the beautiful name of solicitude”.[[438]](#footnote-438) Fundamental to Ricoeur’s concept of living for and with others is his concept of self-esteem. In a footnote in the introduction to the book he quotes Bernanos’ *Journal d’un curé de campagne*:

It is easier than one thinks to hate oneself. Grace means forgetting oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the grace of graces would be to love oneself humbly, as one would any of the suffering members of Jesus Christ.[[439]](#footnote-439)

That is to say, the grace of graces would be to love oneself as another.[[440]](#footnote-440) Christians love in themselves what they love in others. That is the root of the commandment “Love thy neighbour as thyself”. For Ricoeur, others are a fundamental mediating function of self-esteem. Without others there is a danger “of turning in upon oneself, of closing up, and moving in the opposite direction from openness, from the horizon of the good life”.[[441]](#footnote-441) There is a fundamental equivalence between self-esteem and solicitude, what Ricoeur calls the equivalence between “you too” and “as myself”.[[442]](#footnote-442) At the heart of both is a recognition in the other and oneself of the potential to act ethically and to esteem oneself and others for this capacity. Because we and others are capable of acting well, we have worth. In watching others act well, we realise our own capacity to do the same. In esteeming the other as oneself, a person learns to esteem oneself as another. Conversely, an esteem of the other despite their weaknesses is fundamental to self-esteem despite our own weaknesses.[[443]](#footnote-443) We must love the other, too, as we love ourselves.

In a footnote, Ricoeur makes the connection between solicitude and the commandment “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, and Rosenweig’s contention that the address of the lover, “love me”, to the loved one in the Song of Songs is superior to all laws.[[444]](#footnote-444) This is at the heart of Ricoeur’s assertion that the ethical aim has primacy over the moral norm, that benevolent spontaneity has a more fundamental status than obedience to duty. He outlines the potential problems with the opposite approach in a critique of philosophies of natural law or human rights that “presuppose a subject, complete and already fully endowed with rights before entering society”.[[445]](#footnote-445) The participation of such an individual in the common quest of living together is contingent and capable of being revoked. Such an individual expects protection and rights without any reciprocal obligation to share the burdens of society or work together with others for its good.

As has already been mentioned, living with and for others is at the heart of Ephesians. The ethical injunctions made are primarily to do with interacting with other people. At the heart of everything that is said is the responsibility of every individual to make “every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (4.1). The ethics of communication are paramount, speaking the truth in love (4.15, 4.25), avoiding evil talk (4.29) or obscene, silly or vulgar talk (5.4), but saying only what is useful for building up, so that our words may give grace to those who hear (4.29). Unhealthy forms of communication are forbidden, especially lying (4.25) and arguing (4.31). Being kind to one another (4.32) is another way of expressing benevolent spontaneity. We have already noted the communal and communicative value of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another (5.19). As Darko notices, πλεονεξία is a unique vice in Ephesians in that it is repeated three times (4.19, 5.3, 5.5).[[446]](#footnote-446) It is so serious that it should not even be mentioned (5.3). Greed, aside from its idolatry (5.5), is a fundamentally antisocial vice.[[447]](#footnote-447)

There is an interesting comment on the value of solicitude and its relationship to self-esteem in the section of the household code devoted to marriage. Husbands are told that “he who loves his wife loves himself” (5.28). There is not an exact correlation – loving one’s own body is treated as a given by the text, “for no one ever hates his own body” (5.29) – but the relationship between self-esteem and esteem of the other is clear. This is, of course, in the privileged relational context of marriage, but the identification of a husband’s love for his wife with Christ’s love of the church “because we are all members of his body” (5.30) implies a much wider context for this marital solicitude. As we are members of Christ’s body, we are members of one another (4.25). In loving others, we love ourselves, and the whole body promotes mutual growth and builds itself up in love (4.16). Solicitude is key to Christian life in the world of the text. Again, it is worth noting that solicitude in Ephesians is not a simply a fundamental component of the “good life” but is a response to a call from God, and an imitation of the love of God. We are to “live in love, as Christ has loved us, and gave himself up for us” (5.2). The primacy of the other is a response to the cross, and living for another an imitation of the cross.

Friendship, for Ricoeur, is a key transition between living with and for others and the third part of Ricoeur’s ethical aim, living in just institutions. It is the link between self-esteem, which might be seen as a solitary virtue, and justice, which belongs to the common life of politics, beyond face-to-face encounters.[[448]](#footnote-448) Friendship is vital to self-esteem because there is reciprocity in the mutual esteem that each friend holds for the other. The key to friendship is mutuality and reciprocity. For Ricoeur, this presupposes equality, an equality that can exist between friends but is yet to be attained in the body politic.[[449]](#footnote-449) It is this encounter with equality and justice in friendship that provides the link between solicitude and just institutions for Ricoeur: “equality … places friendship on the path of justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way to the distribution of shares in a plurality on the scale of a historical, political community”.[[450]](#footnote-450)

There is a parallel here between the way the equality inherent in friendship leads to wider reflections on political equality and the way the demands of mutual love in marriage overflow the boundaries of relationships between spouses into making married love a type of the church in Ephesians, which we explored earlier. The question is whether equality is indeed a corollary of reciprocity as Ricoeur suggests.[[451]](#footnote-451) Darko argues, for example, that “mutuality is not akin to equality in a patriarchal social context”. He asserts that Ephesians is clearly a patriarchal text, and like other patriarchal texts of its time, enjoins husbands to love their wives.[[452]](#footnote-452) For Darko there is no inherent contradiction between inequality and mutuality. Watson, on the other hand, asserts that there is a flat contradiction between the mutual submission of 5.21 and the unilateral submission that wives are expected to make to their husbands in verse 22. Such a contradiction is a sign of a “deconstructive process in operation”.[[453]](#footnote-453) We will return to the question of how to read the household codes in the light of Ricoeur’s narrative ethics later in this chapter. That there are texts that encourage mutuality and reciprocity within the context of unequal relationships, whose inequality they uphold, is not in question. Whether mutuality deconstructs inequality in such texts is ultimately a question for the reader, as the world of text collides with her own understanding of the world in the process of *mimesis₃.* For *this* reader, although there is no question that mutuality and reciprocity can be present in unequal relationships, the inequality of the relationship fundamentally limits them. In the ultimately unequal relationship between God and human beings, for example, the self-giving love of God is a free gift; it can never be reciprocated, even though we aspire to a degree of mutual love. In this ultimate lack of reciprocity with God, we Christians are all equal, one with another, allowing for full mutuality between us in the spirit.

The transition from solicitude to justice is required because, as Ricoeur says, “[t]he other is also other than the “you”.[[454]](#footnote-454) Living well, therefore, cannot be limited to solicitude in relationships with people we encounter. Through our love of others whom we meet, we must extend the justice that exists between friends to a concern for the anonymous, which is part of the “fullest aim of the true life”.[[455]](#footnote-455) A concern for the anonymous requires an attention to the justice of the structures of the institutions in which we live, structures that will affect people we never meet. The basis for this justice is the search for equality, which we encounter in friendship.

This third leap, to the ethical aim of just institutions, is one that Ephesians does not explicitly make. This is partly because of its negative vision of the powers of this world. The spiritual death that pervades the lives of those outside of Christ cannot be made just without Christ. The institutions of this world are under the power of the ruler of this world. There is, to the frustration of many readers, no attempt to combat, or indeed acknowledge, the injustice of institutions such as slavery or patriarchal marriage. Before we move on to exploring how we can read the household codes in light of their problematic passages from the point of view of equality, it is worth noting one passage that hints at an eschatological equality. 6.9 warns masters to stop threatening their slaves by reminding them that earthly masters and slaves have the same master in heaven, who shows no partiality. Another hint of mutuality can be found in the same verse: masters are told to treat their slaves “in the same way”. Hoehner points out that one early commentator, Chrysostom, interpreted this at face value and thought that masters were called to serve slaves as slaves serve masters.[[456]](#footnote-456) Whether or not this was the intention of the author, it is certainly a valid reading of the text. This sets the codes into the context of an eschatological equality, an eschatological equality on which we shall be judged, which surely applies beyond the specific master-slave relationship.

The major textual challenge to any leap from solicitude to a concern for the faceless other is the highly negative stereotyping of the “others” – specifically τὰ ἔθνη, the nations or the Gentiles.[[457]](#footnote-457) This negative portrayal of the other pervades the text, but can be summarised by 4.17-19.[[458]](#footnote-458) For Shkul, the categorical identification of non-Israelite identity and behaviour with deviance demonstrates that the text still “thinks through” ethnic categories, despite the suggestion of ethnic harmony in 2.19-22.[[459]](#footnote-459) Far from reconciling ethnic conflict, which is still very much at play in the use of ethnic designations to denote deviance, the text simply legitimises non-Israelite Christians, it does not in any sense affirm their cultural background.[[460]](#footnote-460) This amounts to “performative racism”.[[461]](#footnote-461) As Shkul points out, to the modern reader of the text, Gentile stereotypes have become “little more than meaningless”.[[462]](#footnote-462) Yet the apparent lack of concern for the other in Ephesians is still a challenge to any ethical framework, such as Ricoeur’s, in which the other is such an important philosophical foundation. The negative portrayal of the other is especially acute when set against the background of the wider scriptural language of otherness, which describes their impurity, pollution, uncleanness, abomination and infection.[[463]](#footnote-463) One of the textual consequences of this othering for various unfortunate nations in the Old Testament is genocide.[[464]](#footnote-464) There is a clear justification for the application of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

There is a scholarly debate over the extent to which the text espouses complete separation from the other. This is based around 5.7: “therefore do not be associated with them”. Some scholars take συμμέτοχος – co-sharer – to refer not to non-believers but to deviant believers. The only other occurrence of the word is in 3.6, where it is used to describe both Jews and Gentiles as fellow-sharers of the promise. On this basis, Best and Muddiman argue that members of the Christian community who persist in sin are intended here.[[465]](#footnote-465) In that case it would be akin to the warning not to eat with sinful Christians in 1 Corinthians 5.11. Interestingly enough, 1 Corinthians 10 explicitly rejects complete separation from sinners in the world, since life in the world would be impossible without such associations. Instead it limits estrangement to anyone who, *bearing the name of brother or sister*, is “sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber”. Muddiman and Hoehner cite this passage, arguing that since Paul has explicitly rejected complete disassociation from the sinful world in 1 Corinthians, he could hardly be advocating it in Ephesians.[[466]](#footnote-466)

Other scholars argue that Gentile sinners are intended, as opposed to immoral Christians.[[467]](#footnote-467) Fowl, for example, sees “no obvious reason why the use of “participant” in 3:6 should count as evidence that the people in 5:7 are members of the church in Ephesus”.[[468]](#footnote-468) While the preceding verses, which warn that sinners have no place in the kingdom of heaven, might suggest that the text is referring to deviant Christians, the following exhortation to no longer live in darkness but as children of light suggests a wider dichotomy between believers and unbelievers. The exact reference is ambiguous and open to interpretation, but clearly implies a need for disassociation from other sinners, be they Christian or otherwise.

The nature of this disassociation is also under debate. Muddiman notes the use of the noun without its prefix in Luke 5.7, where it describes James and John sharing their fishing business with Peter and Andrew. He uses this as evidence to suggest that the force of Ephesians 5.7 amounts to a rejection of every kind of social or commercial dealing with sinners, and not simply a prohibition of sharing similar views or intimate involvement.[[469]](#footnote-469) Other commentators argue that the disassociation is not with unbelievers *per se*, but with their sinful lifestyle and disobedience.[[470]](#footnote-470) The context of the household codes, where obedience to husbands, parents and slaves is enjoined without any qualification that might limit obedience to Christian husbands, parents and slave owners, suggests that no complete withdrawal from society is called for, but rather, as Lincoln puts it, responsible living in the ordinary structures of human life.[[471]](#footnote-471)

The rhetorical characterisation of the Gentile other remains problematic, however. Whether or not complete withdrawal from society is advocated by the text, there is certainly an implied threat to the community from those outside it, who are characterised in an utterly negative fashion, “portrayed as being far from God, stubborn at heart and corrupted by the evil they are keen to commit”.[[472]](#footnote-472) There is no doubt that suspicious readings of the text, which highlight the problematic qualities of such stereotyping, are valid. Nevertheless, the very fact that the text is addressed to Gentile converts who have been saved should make us pause.

The text celebrates the triumph of Christ in the lives of individuals who have turned from darkness into light. This experience of darkness, and its transformation into light, is common to all believers, not simply Gentile converts, as 2.3 makes clear. The basis for the value of each person, irrespective of her present status as a believer or non-believer, is her potential to be transformed by Christ. This ties in with Ricoeur’s emphasis on the potential to act ethically as the basis for both self-esteem and solicitude. What is more, such potential, in the world of Ephesians, is recognised by God before the creation of the world (1.4.) Just as for a time this potential lay dormant in each individual believer, so it may be lying dormant still in any person in the world. As Roitto points out, the battle in Ephesians is not against sinful Gentiles who have not yet come to believe, however dangerous their sinful lifestyles may be, it is not against flesh and blood at all, but against the forces of supernatural evil.[[473]](#footnote-473) In fighting against supernatural evil, human beings can be liberated from it. As Lincoln puts it, “The light, which has the risen Christ as its source, is able to transform the darkness around it”.[[474]](#footnote-474) It is this potential light in everybody which allows us, on the basis of the text, to make the leap that the text does not itself make, from friendship to justice, from loving our fellow Christians to loving our neighbours as ourselves.

***3.3b. Reading the household codes***

The household codes are the most controversial part of Ephesians and they have had a serious impact on Christian morality, not always to the good. Ephesians 6.5 was a key text used to justify the continuance of slavery. Similarly, 5.22-23 is used to justify inequality in marriage. Virginia Mollenkott gives a chilling account of the high stakes facing interpreters of the household codes:

[A]bused women from conservative Christian churches have been given to understand on the basis of Ephesians 5.21-33 that they must submit to their husbands’ abuse; that it is their wifely duty to have sex when and however their husband decrees; that the wife should not interfere when her husband beats their children; and that because the husband heads the household, wives dare not intervene even if they think the male is sexually abusing the children.[[475]](#footnote-475)

No doubt, the vast majority of conservative readers would deplore such readings. Nevertheless, the problem for many readers of the text is not the worst excesses of patriarchy, or indeed slavery, but patriarchy and slavery *per se.* The text condemns neither and, on first reading, seems to actively support patriarchal marriage.

An important context for any remarks on the household codes is the nature of the address. All six groups – wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves and masters – are directly addressed. Before this point in the letter, everything which has been said can be taken as referring to all the groups. Slaves and women are “citizens with the saints” (2.19) and enjoy the free speech inherent in παρρησία, as much as anybody else. A slave is as much a “son” of God and inheritor of the promise as a free person. The very fact all these groups of people are addressed as independent moral agents says something about their status and dignity within the community. Wives, children and slaves are held in enough respect to need to be exhorted to obedience; their complicity is not assumed – it is voluntary. This acknowledgement that the loving functioning of Christian interpersonal relationships relies on the free decisions of all the people involved, be they children or slave-owners, is part of the maturity encouraged by the text. The respect with which all are treated by the text does not justify the nature of what is asked, but does provide an important context for interpreting it. Addressing both sides of each pair in the same text, in a mode of communication where their mutual responsibility is clearly set out, assumes a certain equality between them. Both sides have clear responsibilities to the other, for which they are accountable to one other in light of the Epistle before the community, and ultimately before God, as 6.8-9 make explicit.

In Ricoeur’s interpretative framework, in the case of conflict, the moral norm is subject to the ethical aim. The ethical aim is a life worthy of the calling. This is grounded in 5.21: “submit to each other out of reverence to Christ”. Many commentators have argued that the household code in Ephesians is governed by 5.21.[[476]](#footnote-476) There is some critical debate as to whether 5.21 should be aligned primarily with the household code or with the preceding passage. Sarah Tanzer argues that the household code is a later insertion to the text and should be read separately from 5.21.[[477]](#footnote-477) She argues this because of a continuation of themes between 5.21 and 6.10, which becomes apparent when 5.22-6.9 are excluded, and because of the seemingly clumsy insertion of the household code into the rest of the text. Of course, in one sense, the diachronic history of the text is not important to our reading. Ricoeur is clear that we interpret the final text of the Bible. Hoehner argues that 5.21 should be read separately from the household codes, which form their own section: “This verse is not the beginning of a new section but a fitting conclusion to the broader context of wisdom beginning in 5:17”.[[478]](#footnote-478) The verse is problematic because while it completes the series of participles that precede it – singing to one another, singing to the Lord, giving thanks to the Lord always, submitting to one another – it also supplies the verb for the first exhortation in the household code, 5.22.[[479]](#footnote-479)

According to Watson, any attempt to detach the household codes from their context in the whole epistle, and most importantly the exhortation to mutual submission, does “violence” to the text:

It is not a new chapter or paragraph, opening with the exhortation: “Wives, be subject to your husbands …” There is no dividing-line or interval between this passage and that which precedes it, no conclusion followed by a new start. The address to women or wives arises from the preceding exhortations with hardly a pause for breath.[[480]](#footnote-480)

Whether 5.21 governs the household code, forms a transition or finishes the preceding section is a debatable question of interpretation. The evidence works both ways, and it seems clear that in the text as we now have it, the verse functions transitionally. It both concludes the explanation of what it means to be filled with the spirit and provides an important context for the verses on individual submission, since one directly follows the other. If we agree that mutual submission can be set up as a governing principle for the household codes, we will read them as an attempt to apply this principle rather than as a set of principles in themselves. What effect might this have on our own application of the text?

There is no question that mutuality regardless of gender, age or status as a slave or otherwise is key to 5.21. Up to this point in the text no such distinctions have been made. Everybody has been addressed together and, as Watson points out,[[481]](#footnote-481) there could not have been any separate addresses to different groups for “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (4.4-6). As Best comments, ἀλλήλοις cannot be deprived of the “sense of equality in mutuality” that it holds in the vast majority of its occurrences in the New Testament.[[482]](#footnote-482) To some extent, the juxtaposition of subordination with one another is in itself the beginning of the deconstructive process. Subordination is by its very nature hierarchical,[[483]](#footnote-483) it does not allow reciprocity. One person can submit to another: mutual submission deconstructs the whole concept of submission. If we detect no obvious break between 5.21 and 5.22, as the use of a common verb would suggest, then there is something jarring about the jump from mutual submission to the submission of one category of people to another, especially in the context of a long history of patriarchal oppression of women, or the evil of slavery.

Needless to say, commentators dispute whether there is, in fact, any dissonance between the two verses. For Hoehner, there is no contradiction. In the context of mutual submission, “specific roles of submission are related to certain lines of authority”.[[484]](#footnote-484) For Talbert they are complementary: mutual submission refers to “Christian equality in the worshipping community”, while submission to husbands, parents and masters refers to “the organisation of labour in a Christian family business”.[[485]](#footnote-485) For Watson, as we have seen, “the text is in contradiction to itself, and the question is how far it is capable of addressing and overcoming its own contradictions”.[[486]](#footnote-486) Mouton argues that “the patriarchal language that expresses and constitutes the christologically reinterpreted notion of mutual submission in the domestic code (5.21) creates tension and a sense of inconsistency and distance”.[[487]](#footnote-487) Best probably sums up the issue most satisfactorily from a historical point of view: “Early Christianity contains an unresolved tension between authority and mutuality or … between mutual subordination and the authority of some”.[[488]](#footnote-488) He relates this to the position of Paul himself who, after writing that Christians should care for one another in 1 Thessalonians 5.11, moves directly to urge respect for leaders in verse 12.[[489]](#footnote-489)

There are two separate questions here. First, we can ask whether the author of the text, or its first readers, would detect such a contradiction and, secondly, whether there is a contradiction inherent in the text itself, regardless of whether it would have been intended or noticed when it was written. The first question is for historians and not especially relevant to this study. With regard to the second question, *this* reader, at least, sees a great contradiction between the general principle of human relationships which the text sets up, mutual submission, and its expression within the text in the unjust institutions of patriarchal marriage and slavery. The question for interpreters seeking to submit themselves to the text and reconfigure their world accordingly is how do we resolve this tension?

Mollenkott seeks to reinterpret the patriarchal form of marriage, highlighting several “emancipative elements” in the text.[[490]](#footnote-490) The first emancipative element is the context of mutual submission.[[491]](#footnote-491) This is christologically focussed, as such submission is in imitation of Christ, who gave himself up for us (5.2). This imperative to imitate Christ’s radical and kenotic self-offering on the cross is addressed to all Christians regardless of gender. It governs husbands’ relationships to their wives and masters’ relationships to their slaves as much as the other way around. Mollenkott emphasises the voluntary nature of this submission, in line with the voluntary submission to Christ entailed in church membership.[[492]](#footnote-492) “Just as the church is subject to Christ”, which is to say, as a voluntary act of will, “so wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (5.24).

The second emancipative element for Mollenkott is the analogy between the love of the husband and the love of Christ: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5.25). The love of Christ is not about hanging on to power and privilege, but about giving up everything for the sake of the beloved. For Jesus this meant death on a cross. As Mollenkott notes,

What shockingly difficult news for a patriarchal male accustomed to being waited on and getting his own way at all times! That he is expected to yield up his patriarchal advantages and humbly serve his wife’s best interests just as Christ gave up everything in order to bring the church into being – no wonder this passage has rarely been fully implemented, and then only by a few of Christ’s most dedicated disciples![[493]](#footnote-493)

It is, of course, vital to remember that the “like” of a simile also implies an “unlike”. Just as the role of the husband is to love wives “like” Christ loved the church, the love will also be “unlike” Christ’s love for the Church. Given the distinction we would all want to make between the average husband and Jesus Christ, the expectation of similitude seems somewhat unfair. As Watson comments, “[t]he unlikeness between Christ and the husband is so obvious that one wonders if the husband has here been promoted beyond his abilities”.[[494]](#footnote-494) It is worth noting the subversive potential of Christ as a type of any human relationship or institution. Taken seriously, it can be used to break open whatever oppressive structures it was originally employed to bolster. Mouton uses the work of Sallie McFague on metaphorical theology to make this point: “As such Jesus’ life and especially his death and resurrection have to be viewed as radical and iconoclastic, continuously calling into question the comfortable and secure homes that our interpretations of God have built for us”.[[495]](#footnote-495) In that sense the metaphor of Christ has a role similar to the revelation of the Divine Name in the Old Testament for Ricoeur. Just as we cannot hold “I am who I am” “at the mercy of our language”,[[496]](#footnote-496) nor can we invite Christ to represent our institutions without breaking them open to the transformative love of God. Of course, Christians throughout history have failed to put this into practice, but accepting the consequences of Christ as metaphor for hermeneutics is an important starting point.

The Christological basis for wifely obedience to husbands, and the husbands’ love for their wives, would seem to exclude violence and coercion from the relationships, even though, as Mollenkott pointed out, the texts have been used to justify violence and instil coercion.[[497]](#footnote-497) However, there is nevertheless an inherent inequality in the relationship. Only husbands are specifically called to this impressive display of self-giving love. As Carolyn Osiek puts it, “[s]acrifice seems to be a guy thing”.[[498]](#footnote-498) We are some way from the mutual submission of 5.21. As Schüssler-Fiorenza argues, the text “reinforces the cultural-patriarchal pattern of subordination, insofar as the relationship between Christ and the church clearly is not a relationship between equals, since the church-bride is totally dependent and subject to her head or bridegroom”. [[499]](#footnote-499) Wives, vis-à-vis husbands, are in the same position as children and slaves. They are passive recipients of their husbands’ love rather than equal partners in a mutual relationship. 5.22, therefore, does not live up to the demands of 5.21. The marked inequality of the roles assigned – wives are called only to be subject to their husbands and respect them, husbands to the radical love of Christ – posits, sacralises and reinforces inequality in marriage.

Any application of 5.21 needs to take an important step, a step that the text itself fails to take, of importing the principles of justice and equality into marriage, to make it into a “just institution” based on equality and reciprocity. Only then will husbands truly be able to love their wives as their own bodies (5.28). This is part of the constant process of re-evaluating moral norms according to the ethical aim of a life worthy of the calling, which is part of the process of growing into Christ. This would surely involve submission of each partner to the other, in the manner of the Church to Christ, and the mutual love of both partners even unto death, as Christ loves the Church. As with patriarchal language, where the answer is not in the displacement of one gendered term with another, but an excess of terms which includes both,[[500]](#footnote-500) so too with the roles set out within marriage: the answer does not lie in giving up the powerful Christological and ecclesial metaphors for our behaviour towards our partners, but rather in the “excess” of each partner attempting both simultaneously.

While in some ways this goes beyond the text, there is clear textual justification for such a move. Women, undifferentiated from men, have already been called to the radical self-offering of Christ in 5.1. The suggestion of this thesis is simply that women operate under the metaphor of Christ in marriage, as men are explicitly called to do. Similarly men are called to be part of the church, a role characterised by the “feminine” simile of the analogy of the church as bride of Christ in 5.25-33. If part of submitting to Christ is submitting to one another, then again, husbands submitting to their wives as to Christ is simply an outworking of the demands placed upon them in all other areas of their life outside marriage.

Paul uses both the strikingly masculine metaphor of “the mature man” and the strikingly feminine metaphor of the “bride of Christ” for all Christians. Bradley Matthews argues that, as such, the gendered body becomes a symbol of eschatological reality, but one that is veiled in the mystery of what is to come when Christ sums up all things within himself: “Thus the Church was not to become a mature *male* any more than it was to become a purified *female*… The operation of these gendered bodies as symbols for the undisclosed mystery means that neither in itself can fully depict what lies waiting at the *eschaton*”.[[501]](#footnote-501) This partial disclosing of eschatological realities within the “gender semiotics” of a particular culture does not, according to Matthews, restrict believers to the semiotic norms of that culture, but rather encourages a creative adaptation of eschatological realities into the roles and practices of the cultural context of the believer, a creative adaption that must be lived out and determined not individually, but together.[[502]](#footnote-502) In other words, the gendered metaphors of Ephesians do not set in stone the patriarchal context from which they are derived; rather, they point beyond that context to an eschatological truth which needs to be reappropriated from within the cultural norms of our own time, not primarily in order to affirm those norms, but to transform them so that they reach towards a life in Christ.

Slavery functions somewhat differently from marriage in the text: first, as we have already noted, because there is a degree of mutuality inherent in the relationship as it is expressed in the text – “masters do the same to them” (6.9) – and a clear sense of eschatological equality (6.8-9); and secondly because, in light of this, the exhortation can be read as pragmatic. It is possible to read into the analogy between men/Christ – women/church a kind of platonic superiority of the masculine over the feminine;[[503]](#footnote-503) we are in no such danger between slaves and masters. Nevertheless, even as a pragmatic response, as opposed to one that posits an inherent distinction between the worth and status of slaves and master, it has been a damaging one. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this passage have been disastrous, convincing many sincere Christians to support the institution of slavery as a result of its biblical sanction. Despite a tantalising glimpse of what the kingdom of heaven might be like, earthly inequality is nevertheless perpetuated and, despite the sense of mutuality, slaves are called to be obedient to their masters, apparently regardless of how they are treated.

One of the problems of approaching slavery in Ephesians is similar to the problem of extrapolating political conclusions from the text: the text simply does not speak to a situation where Christians had any earthly political influence to change anything. This truism, however, does not excuse us from the task of living in a world where Christians do possess power and influence and need to interpret scripture in order to work out how to exercise it. Now that we know that a political campaign involving Christians managed to achieve the abolition of slavery (albeit not always and everywhere, slavery still exists in the world today), the apparent political quietism of Pauline Christianity on the issue seems woefully inadequate.[[504]](#footnote-504) A re-evaluation of the mutuality and eschatological equality in the text should lead us to call masters to liberate their slaves.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of factoring in justice to our ethical aims as Christians, unjust political structures in a system under the power of the ruler of this world may be faced by any Christian. This does not mean that as Christians we should not try to change them, but in the meantime we have to learn to live with them. Ricoeur provides one way of approaching this in his early work on the relationship between the voluntary and the involuntary, *Freedom and Nature*. The involuntary, in terms of character, the unconscious and life itself, is experienced as necessity, and necessity and freedom negate each other reciprocally:[[505]](#footnote-505) if something is necessary there is no freedom in doing it, if something is done freely then it cannot be necessary. In attempting to bridge this divide, Ricoeur uses the concept of consent, consent which becomes his ultimate response to life. If we consent to a necessary situation, then despite its necessity we are subsuming that necessity into our freedom.

This concept of consent in the face of necessity depends on the prior concept of negation – that we can always say no, even in the most coercive of circumstances:

[N]egation is the response of freedom and freedom’s own declaration to necessity: *no!* *…* Freedom is the possibility of not accepting myself … Will is the capacity for saying *no.[[506]](#footnote-506)*

The very fact that slaves need to be exhorted to obey their masters shows that this possibility of negation is a real concern for the text – their consent is in fact required, at least by the text. One of the ultimate proofs of this ability to say no to our circumstances is suicide, which is one of the highest possibilities of negation. As Ricoeur points out, it is one of the only total acts of which we are capable: although we do not create ourselves, we can suppress what we have not created.[[507]](#footnote-507) Because we can refuse our life so utterly, we retain a sense of freedom in the face of necessity (even if we are physically unable to end our lives we can seek to do so, which would be a free act of the will just as profound as the actual act, if a frustrated act of the will). We did not choose for food to be a necessity, for example, but we can choose not to eat – and some people have. So if we can refuse the necessity of our circumstances, then conversely we can also freely accept them; we can consent to them. By consenting to them we do more than simply acknowledge their necessity, but we say, “yes, let it be”. “Fiat”. “I will thus”.[[508]](#footnote-508) Thus we adopt the necessity into our own freedom. In consenting to our circumstances we become free.

Slaves (and by implication masters, who are told to “do the same to” their slaves) are advised to consent to their situation, rendering service with enthusiasm, not in order to please their masters but in service to God. By freely appropriating the work that they do as a service to God, we can see that slaves do gain a kind of existential freedom from the bondage of their situation. They turn an action they are coerced into carrying out into a freely chosen Christian vocation. As George Herbert would have it,

A servant with this clause

Makes drudgery divine;

Who sweeps a room as for thy laws

Makes that and the action fine.[[509]](#footnote-509)

However, as Ricoeur would admit, consent to an evil like slavery remains problematic because by saying yes to something, we are necessarily making a judgement upon it:

How can we justify the *yes* of consent without passing a value judgement on the totality of the universe, without evaluating its ultimate suitability for freedom?[[510]](#footnote-510)

A universe benighted by an evil like the institution of slavery, by any account a violent limit placed upon freedom, may well seem somewhat unsuitable as a locus of freedom. This is where an eschatological perspective is helpful, and the eschatological dimension is certainly the justification used by the Epistle for consent to slavery. But even living in eschatological hope, evil makes consent difficult.

Who can say *yes* to the end, without reservations? Suffering and evil… lie in our way as the impossibility of saying an unreserved *yes* … Perhaps no one can follow consent to the end. Evil is the scandal which always separates consent from inhuman necessity.[[511]](#footnote-511)

Ricoeur distinguishes between two kinds of consent, a consent based on admiration for the world, an admiration which sees possibilities for freedom perhaps even in the midst of slavery, and a consent based on eschatological hope for the world to come:

Admiration is possible because the world is an analogy of Transcendence; hope is necessary because the world is quite other than Transcendence. Admiration sings of the day, reaches the visible miracle, hope transcends in the night. Admiration says, the world is good, it is the *possible* home of freedom; I can consent. Hope says: the world is not the *final* home of freedom; I can consent as much as possible, but hope to be delivered of the terrible and at the end of time to enjoy a new body and a new nature granted to freedom.[[512]](#footnote-512)

And our consent to the gift of life must ultimately rest on this hope, or else life is impossibly tragic and evil. On an individual level an act of consent may well be useful advice for the oppressed as a road to a measure of freedom and self-determination. And if all slaves and all masters were to follow the advice given in Ephesians, in the context of a profound mutual submission, then in some sense slavery would have already finished.

In this section I have read the ethics of Ephesians in dialogue with Ricoeur’s narrative ethics and detected a congruence between Ricoeur’s concept of the primacy of the ethical aim over the moral norm with the suggestive ethical programme of Ephesians, which summarises the ethical life as “as life worthy of the calling”(4.1) in “imitation of God” (5.1) and Christ, who “gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5.2). The specific ethical commandments are subjected to these principles. The guiding principles for interpersonal relationships are therefore love (4.2, 5.1), unity (4.3), forbearance (4.2) and mutual submission (4.21). The specific ethical commands in the household codes, especially those concerning slavery and patriarchal marriage, do not live up to these aims of the good life and need to be reinterpreted according to them. In response to the text, we must go beyond the text in order to live up to the text.

**Chapter 4. Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to read Ephesians in dialogue with Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, specifically with his concept of narrative identity. The argument of this thesis is that narrative identity, with its recognition of the concordance and discordance of a life gathered together, is in sympathy with the concordance of a life chosen for salvation before the beginning of time and reaching towards that salvation in the final summing up of everything in Christ, *and* also the discordance of spiritual death, already redeemed but not finally transformed into a new life in Christ. In the introduction I set out the rationale for this narrative analysis of the text: the thesis did not aim to uncover the narrative substructure behind the Epistle – the narrative of the historical Paul, those who wrote and first read the Epistle and the narrative of the historical Jesus – rather the intention was to open up the narrative possibilities of a life lived in light of the text, of a life transformed and liberated by being “in Christ” according to the promises proclaimed by the text. Such a life requires a dynamic revaluation of our lives as we seek to realise, ever more fully, our corporate status as the body of Christ.

Chapter 3.1 outlined the position of Paul in this process, not the historical Paul, but the reconfiguration of Paul presented in the text. Paul proclaims the possibilities of the new life in Christ through his testimony and his insight into the revelation he has received. At the same time he is a paradigmatic example of how the reader’s life might be transformed in Christ and the narrative of his life is important insofar as it is representative of the potential of life in Christ. Like Paul, the reader can be a messenger of the mystery and must be prepared to suffer on its account. Paul’s appropriation of the cross and the resurrection can be the reader’s also. The mystery Paul reveals, while clear in its proclamation that all can be involved in salvation, regardless of ethnic or religious background, remains mysterious, and will do so until the end of time when all is summed up in Christ.

Chapter 3.2 explored the narrative of the life of the reader proclaimed by the text. It affirmed what Ricoeur called the existential interpretation of the New Testament: that the reader is invited to participate in the cross and the resurrection and that these are not simply time-bound historical events but present realities. Ricoeur’s thesis that the Christian life involves an interchange of birth and death was tested against the text. The condition of spiritual death was compared to original sin, the evil we are born into and do not choose. The powers were analysed as a symbol of this other face of evil, which precedes any evil choice we might make. The freedom from this evil proclaimed by the text allows us to enter into new life in Christ. On the other hand, the metaphorical status of childhood in the text was found to be in tension. Childhood serves as both a positive metaphor of a loving and trusting relationship with God, and as a negative example of wayward individualism. While Christian maturity is encouraged by the text, this is a corporate maturity that requires the trust and love of a child towards God and each other, especially as the ultimate end of Christian maturity is not independence from the parent, as might typically be the aim of maturity, but a state of eternal dependence, and interdependence, through incorporation into the son. This father-child relationship was subjected to both a Freudian and feminist hermeneutic of suspicion. The Father, as long as it does not crystallise into an idol, is a prophetic symbol of creation completed into one loving family in heaven, as we participate in the inter-relatedness of the Trinity, which ultimately transcends any way we might chose to describe it. This vision is never fully realised this side of the *eschaton*, but in the meantime we must learn to live together as a family, in the now and not yet of the salvation declared in the text.

Chapter 3.3 explored the ethics of Ephesians in dialogue with Ricoeur’s narrative ethics as set out in *Oneself as Another.* The ethical programme was found to be not so much a comprehensive set of prescriptive rules, although there are certainly very specific injunctions, but rather a struggling to fully realise the implications of this new life in Christ. With regard to slavery and the institution of patriarchal marriage, in the so-called household codes, the instructions as they stood were found to fall short of the principle of mutual submission in 5.21. This principle needed a fuller outworking, not in order to dismiss the masculine and feminine metaphors present in the text, but in order to enable their full appropriation by both men and women, as is, in fact, implicit in the text given that men are members of the bride of Christ and women part of the mature man. While the text does not go far enough over slavery, nevertheless Ricoeur’s way of consent was explored as a means of finding some liberating potential, in Christ, to oppressive circumstances even if such consent must be in conjunction with a recognition of their oppressive nature.

The second aim of this thesis, as with all of Ricoeur’s biblical exegesis, was to go beyond the desert of criticism to a place where the text could call me again. This is a somewhat daunting exercise, but in the last few paragraphs I wish to offer a few reflections about what I have learnt along the way. The appropriation of freedom at the heart of Ricoeur’s way of consent is also at the heart of Ephesians and its ethical framework. The Epistle proclaims the cross and resurrection, which is freedom: freedom from death; freedom from sin; freedom from the influence of the powers and principalities and the freedom to stand firm against them; freedom from the Law. This freedom is not only a negative freedom *from*; - what Ricoeur calls a freedom, “in spite of”[[513]](#footnote-513) – it is fundamentally an affirmative freedom *to*: a freedom to say yes to God and to each other; a freedom to live as sons, and indeed daughters, of God and as heirs to the promise; the freedom to access God and the freedom to speak boldly before him as our loving father; a freedom to work out the consequences of living together as a community “in Christ”; a freedom to live lives with and for other people in just institutions; a freedom to mutually submit to one another in loving service. This is what Ricoeur calls the “how much more” of the Gospel, following St Paul in affirming that “the gift far outweighed the fall” (Rom 5.12).[[514]](#footnote-514) This “how much more” is the *pleroma,* the fullness, that Ephesians promises. As Ricoeur says, it is fullness and a freedom “which we must decipher in daily life, in work, in leisure, in politics and in universal history”.[[515]](#footnote-515)

The consequences of this freedom bring a grave obligation of mutual responsibility, responsibility that needs to be continually re-evaluated in the face of the needs of others and the call of God, responsibility that needs to be tested against the text, and indeed the entire scriptural witness. As well as having practical, ethical and existential consequences, this freedom has profound hermeneutical consequences. Just as the text proclaims a liberation from the law, so too must we be liberated from any legalistic attempt to set the text in stone. The text is an invitation to the process of working out our freedom together in Christ, not the final word. The text is an exhortation to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. If that means that in response to this call, in the light of the text, we must go beyond the text, then that is part of the liberation the text inspires rather than any kind of betrayal.

Elna Mouton and Bradley Matthews both in different ways bring out this sense that in the face of a salvation whose full meaning remains hidden, known only to God, we have an ethical responsibility to continue to experiment and improvise as we reach towards a Christian maturity which is akin to a childlike trust in God. Mouton talks of “a continual recycling” of “life and worldview – an ongoing reinterpretation of traditions, language and behaviour in terms of Jesus Christ”. [[516]](#footnote-516) Matthews argues that because the end of Christian maturity is “partially veiled in divine mystery … the attainment of it involves a temporal process of creative, personal, and interpersonal interpretation”. [[517]](#footnote-517) This fits well with Ricoeur’s sense that identity is always an open question. In the following passage he articulates the struggle between the autonomous call of conscience and the faith demands of conforming to the image of Christ:

The Christian is someone who discerns conformity to the image of Christ in the call of conscience. This discernment is an interpretation. And this interpretation is the outcome of a struggle for veracity and intellectual honesty. A “synthesis” is not given and never attained between the verdict of conscience and the Christomorphism of faith. Any synthesis remains a risk, a “lovely risk”. To the extent that the Christian reading of the phenomenon of conscience moves from being a wager to being a destiny, Christians can say with the apostle Paul that it is in “Good” conscience that they stake their lives on this risk (2 Cor 1:12).[[518]](#footnote-518)

But as well as showing the sympathy between Ricoeur and Ephesians, this quotation also reveals some of Ricoeur’s limitations. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics is not just a theory of interpreting texts; rather it is a philosophical approach to self-understanding. He stands within the Cartesian tradition, through Kant and Husserl, where the proper object of philosophical enquiry is the self. He calls this tradition reflexive philosophy.[[519]](#footnote-519) But if Ephesians is about anything, it is about going beyond the self into a progressive incorporation into the body of Christ. By appropriating the story of Ephesians, we give up on a story over which we have autonomy– or, better, we give up on the project of realising autonomy – however relative and conditioned that autonomy may be, and give ourselves over to life in Christ, which is a life dependent upon others. Ricoeur certainly articulates the truth that “I am” is always a self in relation to others.[[520]](#footnote-520) But his summary of the Christian journey is overly individualistic in focus. It presents more of a lonely struggle than a common exercise.[[521]](#footnote-521)

This sense that Christian interpretation is corporate has profound hermeneutical implications. We cannot conduct our ethical experiments and textual reinterpretations in isolation. Rather their proper context is the Church, with full respect and value given to whatever opposing perspectives exist within the church. Progress towards corporate ecclesial maturity has always been, and always will be, a messy process, conducted in the conditioned freedom of interdependence, reciprocity, mutual submission, forbearance, unity and love.

The primary means of conducting ecclesial reflection has to be in prayer. So at the end of our investigation, we return to the beginning, Paul’s prayer that

according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3.16-19)

It is the promise of Ephesians that in spite of the evil of the world in which we live, the spiritual death we were born into, and in spite of the setbacks and false turns of the Christian journey, we can have faith that we too will be filled with all the fullness of God. For Jesus Christ “is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (3.20).

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1. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me by the working of God’s power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the fathomless riches of Christ (3.7-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard Coles, *Fathomless Riches, or How I went from Pop to Pulpit,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Coles, *Fathomless Riches,* p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Ricoeur, Denis Savage (trans.), *Freud and Philosophy*: *An* *Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Paul Ricoeur, Emerson Buchanan (trans.), *The Symbolism of Evil,* (Harper Collins, 1967), p. 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer (trans.), Mark I. Wallace (ed.), *Figuring the Sacred*: *Religion, Narrative and the Imagination,* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ricoeur *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Paul Ricoeur, John B. Thompson (trans.), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin (trans.), David Pellauer (trans.), *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Vol. I, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Andre LaCoque and Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer (trans.), *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 266-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. LaCoque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. LaCoque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. LaCoque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stiver makes this distinction in his engagement with the critiques of Ricoeur by James Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 2n. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For a brief account of the arguments against Ephesians being a letter, see John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London; Continuum: 2001), pp. 6-7, who nevertheless argues that the “epistolatory form belongs to the basic substructure which the author’s liturgical additions and other expansions have blurred” Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 7. For arguments in favour of regarding Ephesians as a letter, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary,*(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 74-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For example, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 61-62; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; Elna Mouton, ‘(Re)describing reality? The Transformative Potential of Ephesians Across Times and Cultures’ in A.-J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles.* (Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings; London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), pp. 59-87, pp. 63-66; Rikard Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behaviour Norms in Ephesians* (Volume 46 of Coniectanea biblica: New Testament series; Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), p. 158; J. Paul Sampley, *‘And the Two Shall Become One Flesh’ A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5: 21-33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971),* pp. 6-15; see also Roy R. Jeal*, Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication*, (Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter: Mellen, 2000), pp. 6-10, for a discussion of the separation between the two halves and its uniqueness in the Pauline Corpus. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ester Petrenko (*Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works: the Integration of Soteriology and Ethics in Ephesians* [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011]) attempts to provide such a nuanced account of the relationship between theology and ethics, arguing that the unity between the two is based in soteriology. She frames the question thus, “Is the paraenesis merely an addition to the letter with no clear significance for the understanding of the ‘theological’ section? Or is the paraenesis logically dependent upon the theology of the earlier part of the letter?” (Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 3). She provides a useful summary of scholarly opinion on the topic (Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, pp. 4-26), which she summarises later in the book (Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 146). She detects four major trends: First, those who see the paraenesis as an appendix to the letter with no implication for its theology [e.g. Martin Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (London: Nicholas and Watson, 1936), p. 185; CH Dodd, ‘Ephesians’ in F.C. Eiseten, E. Lewis and D.G. Downey (eds.), *The Abingdon Bible Commentary,* (London: Epworth, 1929), p. 1234.] Secondly, those who find a connection in their reconstructions of the problems faced by the Christian community addressed [Ralph P. Martin, ‘An Epistle in search of a Life-setting’, ExpTimes 79, pp. 167-680, p. 298 and Michael D. Goulder, ‘The Visionaries of Laodicea’, JSNT 43 (1991), pp.15 – 39, p. 17]. Thirdly, those who see a common reference to baptism in both sections [Nils Alstrup Dahl, ‘The Concept of Baptism in Ephesians’ in David Hellholm, Vemund Blomkvist and Tord Fornberg (eds.) *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text - &Edition – Critical issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes (WUNT 131) (Tubingen: Mohr, 2000, pp. 413-33 esp p. 415; J.C.* Kirby, *Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost. An inquiry into the Sturcture and Purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London*: SPCK, 1968), p. 44*] and, finally, those who see a rhetorical connection in the structure of the letter: The first part indicating the new relationship in Christ and the second the outworking of this relationship in practice. [Lincoln, *Ephesians, pp.* 231-32 and Jeal*, Integrating Theology and Ethics,* p. 72.] Petrenko argues that a distinction between the indicative and the imperative is false, since the indicative already implies the imperative (i.e. moral transformation) (Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 147). She argues that the ethical section flows from its shared soteriology with the theology. I find her approach convincing. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sampley, *One Flesh,* p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Society of Biblical Literature, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* pp. 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Function’ *Semeia 13* (1978), pp. 177-202 (183-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ricoeur, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See segment on mimesis in Section 2.4, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesian* (Downer’s Grove IL: Intervarsity Press*,* 2010), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Douglas A. Campbell, ‘The Story of Jesus in Romans and Galatians’ in Bruce W. Longenecker (ed.) *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: a critical assessment* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 97-125, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Campbell, ‘The Story of Jesus,’ p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. John M.G. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story: Theology as Testimony’ in Bruce W. Longenecker (ed.) *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: a critical assessment* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 133-157, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story’, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story’, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. As Barclay puts it: “Paul’s new narrative is not, therefore, the same human story that has merely undergone certain vicissitudes due to the intervention of God. The change Paul experiences is an epistemological revolution that transforms his understanding of himself from before birth onward. A typical human narrative is here bent into a wholly peculiar shape, not just by strange events but by a historiography that breaks the patterns of human tellings”. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story,’ p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story’, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story’, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Francis Watson ‘Is There a Story in These Texts?’ in Bruce W. Longenecker (ed.) *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: a critical assessment* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 231-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Watson, ‘Is There a Story in These Texts?’ p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Watson, ‘Is There a Story in These Texts?’ p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ephesians 2.2, 2.3, 2.11, 2.13, 3.5, 3.10, 5.8. The distinction is especially clear in 5.8. See Lincoln, *Ephesians,* pp. 86-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. There are three textual variants. Ernest Best sets out the different options in his two essays on Ephesians 1.1. (Ernest Best, *Essays on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1997), pp. 1-24.

The three variants are:

P τοῖς ἁγίοις οὖσιν καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ:

B τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ:

A τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ: [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Tertullian, ‘The Five Books Against Marcion’, pp. 269 – 477, Rev. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleaveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol III* (Nework: Cosimo Inc, 2007), p. 465. Cited from the original Latin text in Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The textual variants in the opening greeting (see note 43) perhaps allow for this approach. It is possible to conjecture, as Best does, that the title of letter and the inclusion of “Ephesus” in the opening greeting are later additions. He says, “At a later stage, in some unknown Christian community and for some unknown reason it was felt that the letter ought to have a geographical destination. For a reason again which is not clear to us and for which we do not now need to seek an answer ‘Ephesus’ was chosen as the appropriate identification” (Best, *Essays on Ephesians,* p. 23). Such a conclusion is not, however, necessary to my thesis. The very fact that we are reading the text shows that it has transcended the perspectives of its original addressees. By its very inclusion in the canon, the Church decided that the Epistle was not relevant simply to the Ephesians, the Laodocieans or the Churches in Asia, but to all Christians who seek guidance and counsel from the letter. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Both Badiou and Žižek use the starting point of Paul’s cycle of law and transgression to reflect on contemporary society. For Badiou, Paul’s proclamation of the resurrection proposes a “universal” subject – a new life which is true for all people everywhere. This cuts through the meaninglessness of capitalism and identity politics where everything is equivalent and without ultimate or universal value. Badiou is also an important reader of Paul, for, as Valérie Nicolet-Anderson puts it, “Badiou’s interest in Paul and willingness to see him as a classic functions as a reminder that Paul’s letters need to be read not only as historical documents dependent upon contingent circumstances but as writings that contain sufficient intellectual reflection to spark philosophical interest in them”. See Valérie Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self: Thinking with Paul and Michel Foucault* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), p. 39.

For Žižek the appropriation of life after the death (and resurrection) of Christ makes Paul the first theologian of the “death of God” and thus highly relevant to the modern condition. Alain Badiou, ‘St Paul, Founder of the Universal Subject’ in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (eds.), *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*(Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2009),pp. 27-39; Slavoj Žižek, ‘From Job to Christ: a Paulinian Reading of Chesterton’ in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (eds.), *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*,pp. 39-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy,* p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. It is important to note that Ricoeur is not proposing an “authorless” text: “The objectification of discourse in a structured work does not abolish the first and fundamental feature of discourse, namely that it is constituted by a series of sentences whereby someone says something to someone about something” (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 138.) Ricoeur is quite explicit: “Not that we can conceive of a text without an author”. The relationship between the speaker and discourse is not “abolished” by textuality, but “distended and complicated” (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 134). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (trans.), *Time and Narrative* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Vol . 1, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Philip Esler argues that Ricoeur’s characterisation of reading as a solitary activity is limited to literate societies in the aftermath of the invention of printing (Philip Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* [Augsburg Fortress, 2005], pp. 114-5), which means that Ricoeur’s arguments about the autonomy of the text are not relevant for biblical texts, which were written to be read out in communal situations rather than digested alone in a study. Ricoeur touches on the question of the relationship between individual and corporate reading when he comments on the debate between Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss over whether reading is primarily an individual or a corporate act. He argues that readers generally read individually and yet they participate in a reading culture that affects them and whose expectations, sedimented throughout cultural history, they share to a greater or lesser extent (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, p. 167). It is worth noting that one of the most common ways of encountering scripture today remains the public reading of scripture in a communal context, which is the liturgy. In such situations, there is certainly an interplay between common and individual understanding of scripture, and the individual appropriation of scripture will depend upon communal understandings of passages, mediated by both the people who have an interpretative role within that community, the preachers, and by the theology and traditions of scriptural interpretation in their communities. In that sense, we are not so far away from the Christians who only encountered the epistles read out communally. However, even in this situation, the way in which a listener appropriates the scripture she hears will ultimately be determined by the text itself, albeit mediated through the interpretation of the reader and the hearing and memory of the listener, and her own response to it, which will depend upon her own experiences and world. Listeners have no more access to the psychological intentions of the author than readers, they have the spoken text, each other and themselves. The communal context and the less objective quality of aural reception no doubt deeply affect their appropriation of the text, but make no difference to their level of access to the intentions of the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Wolterstorff makes a convincing criticism of Ricoeur by demonstrating that some instances of writing are dialogical, for example written notes passed between people in a meeting (Nicholas Wolterstorff*, Divine Discourse*: *Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1995, p. 144]), and some oral discourse is not dialogical, for example radio broadcasts (Wolterstorff*, Divine Disocurse*, p. 143). However, this does not in itself challenge Ricoeur’s basic proposition if we take Wolterstorff’s clarification of it: “the contrasts to which [Ricoeur] points are not grounded in the difference between writing and utterance as such, but in the media of discourse which do not leave their originating situation, and media which do leave it, by temporally enduring, or spatially reaching, beyond it” (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 144). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Francis Watson, *Text Church and World*: *Biblical* *Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1994), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. “that in some sort [scripture] grows with the person reading”. Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job,* (Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West, Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: F.and.J. Rivington, 1845) Vol. 2, 20.1.1., p. 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Arnold reads Ephesians in the light of his research into contemporary understandings of magic and supernatural power (Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic, The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of its Historical Setting* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)], Shkul in the light of social entrepreneurship (Minna Shkul, *Reading Ephesians: Exploring Social Entrepreneurship in the Text* [London, New York: T&T Clark International 2009].) and Roitto (Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ* *Believer*) in the light of cognitive psychology. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ricoeur quotes the Phaedrus on this point (275e): “When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls everything about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father’s support; alone it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support” (Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer (trans.), *Memory, History, Forgetting* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004], pp. 168-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Analysing God’s “appropriation” of scripture, Wolterstorff himself gives a good example of how texts can be read for entirely different reasons than the intentions of the author. Commenting on St Anthony’s interpretation of scripture, which inspired him to give up all his money and sell his possessions, he says “We must be careful, though, not to exclude the possibility that God would speak to us not only by way of authoring the text of Scripture but also by way of our interpreting it, be our interpretation within a tradition, or original to the point of bizarre. Anthony made no attempt to arrive at an accurate interpretation of what God had said by way of the text of Matthew; no consultation of commentaries. An interpretation just came into his head. If God spoke to him on that occasion, it was by way of that” (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* p. 182). If we are to hold that God can use scripture in ways other than the intention of the author writing it, as part of some divine plan which is ultimately mysterious to us, then Esler’s assertion that “other readers and other interpretations are just accidental by-products of the fact of inscription, not integral to their meaning” ceases to be a valid for scriptural interpretation (Esler, *Communion and Community,* p. 114). God may have had manifold intentions in inspiring people to write scripture, we cannot pin them down, but we must remain open to the possibility that they go beyond the intentions of the author in writing them. St Augustine makes this point in *De Doctrina Christiana:* “assuredly the Holy Spirit, foresaw that this interpretation would occur to the reader, nay, made provision that it should occur to him, seeing that it too is founded on truth. For what more liberal and fruitful provision could God have made in regard to the Sacred Scriptures than that the same words might be understood in several senses, all of which are sanctioned by the concurring testimony of other passages equally divine?” 3:27. J.J. Shaw (trans.), *On Christian Teaching (On Christian Doctrine)* (Digireads publishing, 2010), p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Woltersorff, *Divine Discourse,* pp. 171 – 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Woltersorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Woltersorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Woltersorff, *Divine Discourse,* p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Woltersorff, *Divine Discourse,* p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Esler, *Communion and Community,* pp. 107-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Esler, *Communion and Community,* p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Esler, *Communion and Community,* p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. This point is made by WH Auden in his poem ‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’*.* Auden describes Yeats’ death:

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,

An afternoon of nurses and rumours;

The provinces of his body revolted,

The squares of his mind were empty,

Silence invaded the suburbs,

The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities

And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,

To find his happiness in another kind of wood

And be punished under a foreign code of conscience

The words of a dead man

Are modified in the guts of the living.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Esler, *Communion and Community*, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur,* p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Confronted with Ricoeur’s profound sense that the text changes the reader, and that the act of reading is one of submission to the text, Esler’s criticism that “Ricoeur is running a theory of reading as colonisation”, seems pretty wide of the mark (Esler, *Communion and Community,* p. 108). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ricoeur sets up the long route to self-understanding in opposition to what he characterises as Heidegger’s short route to self-understanding through consciousness which is treated as a given rather than as a task, as Ricoeur would have it. He summarises this long road in *Interpretation Theory*: “We understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works.” *Interpretation Theory*: *Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas Christian University Press: 1976), p. 87. (see also, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* [Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007], p.264-265.) Interpretation of the self for Ricoeur, depends upon the exegesis and interpretation of human culture throughout history, because we cannot approach self-understanding directly, simply through consciousness. This is a never-ending quest. Like ontology, self-understanding is, “the promised land for a philosophy that begins with language and with reflection; but, like Moses, the speaking and reflecting subject can only glimpse the promised land before dying.” *The Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. John Van den Hengel, ‘Jesus between History and Fiction”, in David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (eds.) *Meaning in Texts and Actions, Questioning Paul Ricoeur* (Studies in Religion and Culture, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 133 – 55. (137). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A study in hermeneutics and theology,* p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ricoeur, *Memory History Forgetting*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ricoeur, *Memory History Forgetting*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, pp. 143-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. For the record, I’m perfectly happy to believe that the raising of Lazarus refers to an event in history, albeit one not susceptible to empirical verification. My point is simply that the story is recounted not for its historical truth, many other “true events” happened to Jesus that the Gospel of John chooses not to recount, and that our faith does not stand or fall on it. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative,* p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. James Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology,* pp. 333-334. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Michael W. DeLashmutt, ‘Paul Ricoeur at the Foot of the Cross: Narrative Identity and the Resurrection of the Body’ in Modern Theology25:4 (October 2009), pp. 589-616, (590). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ricoeur questioned a personal resurrection in *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with Francois Azouni and Mark de Launay*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 152-61. He understands the resurrection as being a resurrection of Jesus into the Christian community rather than a physical resurrection (p. 152). See also in Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer (trans.), *Living Up to Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp.41-53, for an account of how the finality of death accords with the care of God. He specifically rejects “the make-believe” of survival after death (p. 41). Ricoeur is, however, careful to distinguish his personal religious beliefs from his philosophical work. I am in broad agreement with Stiver that “his broad hermeneutical and incarnational philosophy represents a framework that can be appropriated in several ways” (Dan. R. Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology* [London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012]). My own appropriation of Ricoeur is one that holds the orthodox Christian claims of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and a personal resurrection from the dead. Whatever Ricoeur’s own religious reflections may have been, I see no contradiction between his general philosophical framework and Christian orthodoxy on this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Paul Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope,’ in Paul Ricoeur, Lewis Seymour Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Fortress Press, 1980), p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope’, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope’, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. DeLashmutt, ‘Paul Ricoeur at the Foot of the Cross’, p. 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*: p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory,* p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. If we understand metaphor to be at the level of utterance rather than confined to the sentence, we can avoid Janet Soskice’s critique of Ricoeur as simply replacing “the hegemony of the word with an hegemony of the sentence” (Janet Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], p. 210). [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory,* p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Janet Soskice argues against what she calls “Ricoeur’s ‘is and is not’ thesis” on the grounds that it “eliminates the possibility that a metaphor may be genuinely, even ontologically novel” (Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 90). Whether or not her criticisms are valid in terms of the technical workings of the theory of metaphor, the thrust of Ricoeur’s arguments about metaphor is without question that metaphor can “disclose a truth for the first time” (Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language,* p. 89) and are against the ornamentalist theory of metaphor that she attacks. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. See *Time and Narrative,* Vol 1, p. 80 – 81, “Poetry resdescribes the world and therefore makes it new, narrative resignifies action in its temporal dimension and therefore makes it new.” [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 1, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 3, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 3, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 3, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 3, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Vol. 3, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, p. 246; see also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 15. For a brief and useful reading of Ricoeur’s reading of Nietzsche and his challenge to the Cartesian cogito, see Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self*, pp. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. T.S. Eliot, ‘The Dry Salvages’ in T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. For a brief account of the distinction between *Idem* and *Ipse* identity see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. “It is not the sameness of my body that constitutes its selfhood but its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body is”. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. DeLashmutt, ‘Paul Ricoeur at the Foot of the Cross’, p. 606. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope’, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope’, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. T.S. Eliot, ‘Burnt Norton’ in T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Paul Ricoeur, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics’, *Semeia 4* (1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. T.F. Dailey, O.S.F.S., *The Repentant Job: A Ricoeurian Icon for Biblical Theology,* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Theo L Hettema, *Reading For Good*: *Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the perspective of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. John L. Meech, *Paul in Israel’s Story: Self and Community at the Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self.* [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self,* p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self*, pp. 133-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Elna Mouton, ‘(Re)describing reality?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Elna Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically* (Leiden: the Society of Biblical Literature; 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Bradley J. Matthews *Mature in Christ: The Contribution of Ephesians and Colossians to Constructing Christian Maturity in Modernity* unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. A.T. Lincoln, A.J.M Wedderburn; *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters,* (New Testament Theology ed. J.D.G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Ford, *Self and Salvation,* p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. See Ford, *Self and Salvation,* p. 82n. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Gombis, The Drama of Ephesians, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Gombis, The Drama of Ephesians, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. For a list of scholars’ positions on Pauline authorship from 1519-2001, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 9-18. Hoehner mounts a vigorous defence of Pauline authorship (see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 3-61.). He makes a good case for regarding the presumption of authentic authorship as a test of canonicity for the early church; indeed some commentators who argue against Pauline authorship assume it was received as genuine. For example, see Best, *Ephesians*, p. 14: “it should not be assumed that those who used Ephesians prior to Irenaeus did not believe it was by Paul”.

Those who dispute that Paul is the author argue that Ephesians contains material that is stylistically and lexically unique, and theological positions and assumptions that differ radically from the Pauline corpus (see Margaret Y. Macdonald, *Colossians Ephesians* [Collegeville, Minnesota: Order of St Benedict; 2000], pp. 15-16; Lincoln, *Ephesians,* pp. lx-lxxiii; E. Best, *Ephesians* [London and New York: T & T Clark International, 1998], pp. 35-36; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary* [Edinburgh: T &T Clark ltd, 1991], pp. 24-29; Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ Believer*, p. 150; and see also pp. 205-13 for an account of differences between Paul and the author of Ephesians relating to the household codes}, and yet it is clear that Ephesians also contains material that undoubtedly mirrors the language and thought of Paul. As John Muddiman puts it, “there are phrases and sentences in Ephesians which … Paul cannot have written. Equally there are phrases and sentences which he could easily have written … and even some passages which … he could not but have written” (Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians,* p. 3.). Muddiman tries to solve this apparent problem by arguing that Ephesians is a pseudepigraphical expansion of a genuine Pauline letter (Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians,* pp. 20-24). On the other hand, Macdonald argues in favour of a positive position on pseudepigraphy, characterising the letter as “the first interpretation of a guide to Pauline tradition in light of the disappearance of Paul” (*Colossians Ephesians,* p. 16). While she argues that Colossians is the earliest pseudepigraphical letter, she maintains that it does not represent “the same sustained effort to summarise Paul’s teaching as we find in Ephesians” (*Colossians Ephesians,* p. 16). The letter, for Macdonald, therefore, represents an honest attempt at appropriating the teaching of Paul in order to pass it on to the next generation of believers. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. The case for Ephesians’ reception as a Pauline text by the early church is very clear. Hoehner argues that it has the earliest attestation of any New Testament book. He finds references in the letters of Clement of Rome in the late first century or early second century (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 2), although this is disputed by Lincoln, who argues that such a claim cannot be substantiated (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. lxxii). Both agree Ignatius of Antioch (35-107/8) shows some knowledge of Ephesians (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 3; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. lxxiii). Polycarp (69 -35) quotes from Psalm 4:5 and Ephesians 4:26 and refers to them as scripture (Polycarp, *Ad Philippenses* 12.1 [*Patrologiae cursus completes … Series Graeca*, edited by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: Excudebat Migne, 1844-64) 5:1020] cited in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 3). Irenaeus (130-200) makes his belief in Pauline authorship explicit when he says, “as blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.2.3 [Patrologiae cursus completes … Series Graeca, edited by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: Excudebat Migne, 1844-64) 7:1126] cited in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 3). For a list of other early attestations of Ephesians, see Hoehner, *Ephesians,* pp. 2 – 6. Perhaps the most interesting early attestation is Marcion (d.160), who gave Ephesians the title Laodiceans. John Muddiman uses this to support his thesis that Ephesians is a pseudepigraphical expansion of a genuine Pauline epistle to the Laodiceans (see Muddiman, *Ephesians*, pp. 27 – 29). Nevertheless, it is one of the seven letters regarded by Marcion as authentically Pauline. It seems that before the formation of the canon in the fourth century, Ephesians was widely accepted as a Pauline Epistle. As Larry Kreitzer, who disputes Pauline authorship, puts it, “There is little indication in the early Church of a debate about Pauline authorship of Ephesians. The letter began to be quoted by other Christian writers at the turn of the first century and they appear always to assume that Paul the Apostle was writer” (Larry J. Kreitzer, *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians* [London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2007], p. 1). It is universally included on the canonical lists of the fourth century, including the Muratorian Fragment, which most scholars argue dates from the late second century. (For the fourth-century canonical lists, see Lee Martin Macdonald, *Formation of the Bible: The Story of the Church’s Canon* [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2012], pp. 153-6; for the Muratorian Fragment see p. 156) [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. Lx. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Ephesians 3.2-3: “for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words”.

εἴ γε can mean different things, depending on the context. As Lincoln says, it can imply either doubt or confident assertion (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 173). Lincoln, Hoehner (*Ephesians*, p. 421), Best (*Ephesians,* p. 297), Macdonald (*Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 261) and Charles H. Talbert (*Ephesians and Colossians* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], p. 97) argue for confident assertion. Muddiman assumes that the “doubt” is ironic (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 149) and asserts that the use of irony is an argument against pseudonymity (p. 152) *contra* Lincoln (p. 173), since it assumes knowledge that the canonical reader cannot have possessed. The general point, that the reader is assumed to have knowledge of Paul from sources other than the Epistle, is sustained.

There is an interesting discussion about the reference of 3.3, “as I wrote above in a few words”. Hoehner defines the question, “The problem is to determine when, beforehand, Paul wrote about the mystery” (*Ephesians*, p. 427). There are several options. It could refer to a previous letter written to the Ephesians on the mystery which has now been lost, or it could refer to another letter, or section of a letter, in the Pauline corpus. A whole letter would hardly fulfil the criterion of brevity, but Llynfi Davies suggests it refers to Romans 16.25-27 (Llynfi Davies, “‘I wrote afore in a few words ‘[Eph. iii.3]” [*Expository Times 46* (September 1935), p. 568]). Best (Ephesians, p. 302), Barth (*Ephesians* Vol. 1, p. 329), Hoehner (*Ephesians,* p. 428), Macdonald (*Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 262) and Lincoln (*Ephesians,* p. 175) argue that it refers back to earlier summaries of the mystery in the Epistle, especially 2.11-22. Muddiman argues that this would make a nonsense out of the next sentence: “when you read” (present tense of read) could hardly refer to something the readers had already read. (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 152). He contends that the most reasonable explanation is that the writer is referring to another letter, which the correspondents will be able to read in the future (p. 152). The exact reference is not clear and becomes a gap in the text, but if there is more to read outside the letter, then this neatly describes our own canonical situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Macdonald, *Colossians Ephesians*, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Macdonald, *Colossians Ephesians,* p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically,* p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. See Daniel Darko, “Adopted Siblings in the Household of God: Kinship Lexemes in the Social Identity Construction of Ephesians” in J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (eds.), *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London, New York: Bloomsbury; 2014), pp. 333-346. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Philip Esler, ‘Memorialisation of Paul’s Imprisonment’ in Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Risto Uro (eds*.*), *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science* (Leiden: Brill; 2007), pp. 231-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Robert A. Wild, S.J., ‘The Warrior and The Prisoner, in *CBQ* 46 (1984), pp. 284-298 (289), and Philip Esler note the use of the definite article, ὁ δέσμιος, arguing that “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the anonymous author wants to present Paul as the paradigmatic prisoner for Christ”. Philip Esler, ‘Memorialisation of Paul’s Imprisonment,’ p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Paul Ricoeur, ‘Hermeneutics of Testimony’, David Stewart and Charles E. Regan (trans.) in Lewis S. Mudge (ed.) *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, (London: SPCK, 1980), pp. 119-54, (129). [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Ricoeur, ‘Hermeneutics of Testimony,’ p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. John D. Caputo, ‘Postcards from Paul’ in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (eds.), *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*(Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp.1-27 (9). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ricoeur, ‘Hermeneutics of Testimony’, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically,* p. 154; see also A. Sherwood: “although Paul’s authority and understanding are important issues within this pericope, they are not precisely at issue but presupposed for the sake of granting rhetorical credibility to the argument” in A. Sherwood, ‘Discourse Analysis of Ephesians 3.1-13’ IBR Vol. 22, No. 1, 2012 p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. I have taken the phrase “baker’s dozen” from Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. See Best, *Essays on Ephesians, p. 27* [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Hoehner, *Ephesians, p.* 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. “διάκονος … is not a word which would stress either [Paul’s] importance or personal renown … how much the flavour of humble service clung to it is difficult to answer, but Gentiles coming freshly to it would hear it with such overtones”. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Wild, ‘The Warrior and the Prisoner,’ p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. See Best, *Ephesians*, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Ricoeur, ‘Hermeneutics of Testimony’, p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. The relationship between Ephesians and Colossians is disputed. Some commentators, for example Macdonald, *Colossians Ephesians* (pp. 4-6), and Lincoln, *Ephesians* (pp. xlvii-lviii), see Ephesians as dependent upon Colossians. The diachronic history of the text is not the focus of this study. Rather the rationale for highlighting tensions between similar passages within the canon is part of the polycentric and intertextual reading of the Bible in line with Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as outlined in the introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. M. Jeff Brannon, *The Heavenlies in Ephesians: A Lexical, Exegetical, and Conceptual Analysis* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Hoehner agrees with Muddiman on this point: “It is not something that is mysterious but rather a revealed secret to be understood by all believing people and not just a few elite”; Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 426. See also Fowl, *Ephesians*, p. 46: “once Christ has been revealed and believers have received ‘all wisdom and prudence,’ this mystery becomes both evident and compelling. Moreover it is a mystery that can be openly proclaimed. It is not a secret to be kept”. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Hohener, *Ephesians,* p. 461. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer (trans.), ‘Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’, in Lewis S. Mudge (ed.) *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Matthews, ‘Maturity in Ephesians’, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Matthews ‘Maturity in Ephesians’, p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Paul Ricoeur and Charles A. Kelbley (trans.), *History and Truth* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Ricoeur, *History and Truth,* p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Esler ‘Memorialisation of Paul’s Imprisonment’, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Esler, ‘Memorialisation of Paul’s Imprisonment’, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality?’ p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. As Lincoln says, “humanity is to be viewed from the vantage point of what has happened to Christ. Because God has exalted Christ to heaven, believers can enjoy all the benefits of being related to their heavenly Lord”. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. As Lincoln notes, “the writer’s main interest is in Christ’s resurrection and exaltation”. ‘Theology of Ephesians’, p. 130. Barth, *Ephesians,* p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Barth, *Ephesians,* p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. This is a reference to Moses ascending Mount Sinai in Psalm 68:18. As Moses ascended to hear the law, Christ in Ephesians descends, ultimately, to the cross, where, as Ephesians would have it, the law is abolished (2.15). [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. There are three views of what is referred to by Christ’s descent. The first view is that it refers to Christ’s death. The lower parts of the earth are taken as a reference either to the grave or to the tradition of Christ’s descent into Hades after the crucifixion (Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic,* pp. 57-58; J.A. Robinson, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* [London: Macmillan and Co, 1914], p. 180; Kreitzer, *Hierapolis,* pp. 44-53). Others take “the lower parts of the earth” as an appositional genitive: the earth illustrates “the lower parts” to give the meaning “Christ descended into the lower parts, i.e. the earth” (See Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 290). This implies that the descent refers to the incarnation (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 533; Best, *Ephesians*, 386; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], pp. 180-81; Petrenko, *Created in Chris Jesus,* p. 154.). A third view is that it refers to the descent of Christ in the spirit at Pentecost and the giving of Spiritual gifts (See G.B. Caird, ‘The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:7-11’ SE 2 [TU 87] [Berlin: Akademie Verlag], pp. 535 -45; Lincoln, *Ephesians,* pp. 246-247). [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 195; see also Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 176. There is a tension here between Ricoeur’s defence of the existential interpretation of the New Testament in *Figuring the Sacred* and his wish to assert an eschatological interpretation of the resurrection in *Freedom in the Light of Hope*. Like any contradiction, it should not be too easily resolved, but allowed to stand. It is nevertheless worth remarking that the existential implications of incorporation into the life of Christ, while real and present, have yet to be fully realised. By participating in the narrative, the reader is made aware of the future dimension of their incorporation into Christ. See 2.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Rioceur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Barth, *Ephesians,* p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Paul Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope’, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. The following passage from *Theology of the New Testament,* describing the “salvation-occurrence viz. Christ’s death and resurrection”, illustrates Bultmann’s individualism: “It is an occurrence purely by God’s initiative; for man, pure gift; by accepting it he is released from his perverse striving to achieve life or self-hood by his own efforts – in which he does the very opposite – only to be given it as a gift in the righteousness of God” (Rudolf Bultmann, Kendrick Grobel [trans.], *Theology of the New Testament* [London: SCM Press, 1959], p. 294). The world-changing effects of the Resurrection risk being reduced to a passage in the search for authenticity and self-hood by and for the individual in such a reading. The ethical consequences of this salvation occurrence are similarly individualistic: “Out of Christian ‘freedom’ flows ‘authorisation’ …, which is expressed in ‘all things are lawful for me’ … This authorisation is the Christian’s independence from all worldly claims, among which are the ritual and cultic rules of the Torah. It is the authorisation, or the right, to find one’s self, by that independent “proving”, what the “good” is – and hence, is also independence from the judgement of any other person’s conscience” (*Theology of the New Testament,* p. 342). Nicolet-Anderson provides a brief but compelling critique of Bultmann’s individualism, from a philosophical point of view not unsympathetic to Ricoeur, in her book *Constructing the Self.* She argues that Bultmann describes “a generic human being, boiled down to her essence” in contrast to Paul’s “real individuals in real communities” (Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self,* p. 21). Meech makes a similar critique, rejecting Bultmann’s construal of community as a temptation away from authenticity, in typical existentialist fashion (*Paul in Israel’s Story,* p. 55) and criticising Bultmann’s tendency to speak of the human “in general” without embedding the individual in the communities of which they are part (p. 64). We shall explore the communitarianism of both Ephesians and Ricoeur in section 3.3, “A life together worthy of the calling”. Ricoeur brings something of this critique to his ‘Preface to Bultmann’: “The witnesses gathered in the New Testament are not only individual witnesses – free witnesses, one might say; they are already situated in a believing community … To decipher Scripture is to decipher the witness of the apostolic community”. Ricoeur, ‘Preface to Bultmann’ in Lewis S. Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1981), pp. 49-72 (56). [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Paul Ricoeur, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation,* p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy,* p. 542. An interesting parallel here is with the work of Victor Turner on Transitional Rites. He argues that “[t]he biological order of birth and death is reversed in rites of passage – there one dies to ‘become a little child.’” Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York: Cornell University Press; 1974), p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. This is not to deny the article of Christian faith that death, as C.S. Lewis would have it in *The Last Battle*, is not so much the end of the story as the beginning: “But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before” (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, [New York: Macmillan, 1956], pp. 173-74). The ontological status of death is not my concern here so much as the phenomenological experience of others dying, which is all we have to go on. When somebody dies, they can no longer carry on telling the story to us. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. “All interpretation places the interpreter *in medias res* and never at the beginning or the end. We suddenly arrive, as it were, in the middle of a conversation which has already begun and in which we try to orientate ourselves in order to be able to contribute to it” Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. For Heidegger’s introduction to his concept of being-in-the-world see Martin Heidegger, Joan Stambaugh (trans.), *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 49 – 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. lxxxix-xc; Macdonald, *Colossians Ephesians,* p. 238; Kreitzer, *Hierapolis*, p. 3. Best prefers the term “realised soteriology”; Best, *Ephesians*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 336; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. “So great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage”. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd; 1960), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. “[B]etwixt and between” to describe liminality was used by Mark K. Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* pp. 1-13, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Victor Turner writes of transitional rites: “Such rites characteristically begin with ritual metaphors of killing and death”, which can be seen in the spiritual death the reader faced before their new life in Christ. Such rites mark “the separation of the subject from ordinary secular relationships”. If “secular” is replaced with “gentile”, a clear parallel can be seen with the importance placed on separation in the Epistle. The one part of Turner’s description that fits rather less happily with the narrative of Ephesians is the last, where he argues that such rites “conclude with a symbolic rebirth or reincorporation into society as shaped by the law or the moral code”. The destiny of the Christian reader of Ephesians is incorporation into Christ and freedom in the spirit rather than a society governed by the law. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society,* p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality,’ p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality,’ p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. See Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 62; p. 69; p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. See section 2.5, “Narrative Identity”. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Even if the person decides to change their name, we can still project the name back to their birth. When I imagine the childhood of my teacher Fr Nicolas, I imagine the childhood of Nicolas, despite the fact that he was known as Michael before entering religious life. For those who know him as Michael, that remains a constant even though he has changed his name. Presumably at his funeral, those who still know him as Michael will attend Michael’s funeral, whatever the service sheet might say. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* pp. 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. See Lincoln, *Ephesians,* pp. xci-xcii. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom and the Confucian Four Books,* (Leiden: Brill; 2010), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Nicolet-Anderson, *Constructing the Self*, p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy,* p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. See Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 92; Best, *Ephesians,* p. 200; Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 307; Fowl, *Ephesians,* p. 67: “The main verb is a present participle of the verb ‘to be.’ This translation above renders this in the past tense in English. This is because the context clearly refers to the Ephesians’ state before their conversion, a state they are no longer in”. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Consider yourself then to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. In Psalms 30:3; 31:12; 88:3-6; 143:3; Hos 13:14; and Jonah 2:6 a life without God is compared to death and Sheol, and God’s agency is praised for bringing the writer out of the dead or the pit. It is used as a metaphor in Matthew 8.22 and Luke 9.60: “let the dead bury the dead”; and in the parable of the prodigal son: “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again” (Luke 15:24). In 1 Timothy 5.6, in a potential clash with the assurances of Ephesians, it is used of a member of the Christian community, “but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Tim 5.6). [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Best, ‘Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Eph 2.1)’ JSNT (1981 13), pp.9-25 (16). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus,* p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. For a critique of this characterisation of the other, see chapter “A life worthy of the calling”. For a summary of the roots of this conception in Second Temple Judaism see Petrenko, *Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 105; see also Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians*, pp. 41-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. For a summary of the debate see Lincoln, ‘Liberation from the Powers’, in M. Daniel Carroll R., David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (eds.) *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp.335-355. Lincoln argues that there are three options when we approach the language of powers within the text. First we can read the language as referring to supernatural evil and let this determine our appropriation. Secondly we can read the language as referring to supernatural evil yet seek to make a modern re-appropriation of this language. Finally we can see a double reference in the text to both supernatural and systemic evil and are thus free to focus on systemic evil in our modern appropriation. Lincoln prefers the second option. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. See Ricoeur*, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*: *The Language of Power in the New* Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 5, 39, 83, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic,* p. 49. See also Lincoln, ‘Liberation from the Powers’ (345). Lincoln argues that having rightly established that some of the terms for cosmic powers are also used for earthly powers, Wink is wrong to read both meanings into each individual usage: “From the fact that a word can mean one thing in one context and another thing in another context it concludes that in most of its usages both meanings should be assumed, unless a specific context indicates otherwise. The procedure should, in fact, be quite the reverse” (p. 345). [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic,* p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic,* p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. LaCoque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*: *The Language of Power in the New* Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Wink, *Naming the Powers,* p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Wink, *Naming the Powers,* p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Wink, *Naming the Powers,* p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Barth, *Ephesians,* p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Wink, *Naming the Powers,* p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 225; Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic,* pp. 51, 69; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 1,* p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. For a thoughtful account of the powers by a reader who does bring a belief in personal supernatural evil to the text see J. Ayodeji Adewuya, ‘The Spiritual Powers of Ephesians 6:10-18 in the Light of African Pentecostal Spirituality,’ *Bulletin for Biblical Research 22.2 (2012),* pp. 251-258. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic,* p. 51. Although in his later work, *Powers of Darkness*: *Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Intervarsity Press, 1992), Arnold suggests that if the realm of spirits and angels is a dominant part of a biblical world view, it should also be a dominant part of ours (pp.203-205). [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. I am sympathetic, however, to Lincoln’s judgement that “[t]he real value of Wink’s work … lies not in its basis in exegesis of the Pauline principalities and powers, but in its ability to provide a penetrating and profound phenomenology of present powers of evil in the light of the Gospel and an inspiring vision of the spirituality needed to engage such powers”. Lincoln, ‘Liberation from the Powers’, p. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Having said that, I am not prepared to go as far as Ricoeur in saying, “the conception of a world composed of three stories – heaven, earth, and hell – and peopled with supernatural powers which descend down here from up there is purely and simply eliminated, as out of date, by modern science and modern technology as well as by how man represents ethical and political responsibility. Everything that now partakes of this vision of the world in the fundamental representation of the events of salvation is from now on void”. (‘Preface to Bultmann’, p. 60). I lack Ricoeur’s faith that science and technology have quite so conclusively eliminated the grounds for belief in the supernatural. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Ricoeur*, Freedom and Nature,* p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Ricoeur*, Freedom and Nature,* p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Ricoeur*, Freedom and Nature,* p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 460. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 228; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Osiek and Macdonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Osiek and Macdonald, *A Woman’s Place,* p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. See David L. Bartlett, ‘Adoption in the Bible,’ in Marcia J. Bunge, Terrence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdman’s, 2008), pp. 375-398 (383-384). [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. I have been influenced here by the categories employed by Reidar Aasgaard in his essay ‘Like a Child: Paul’s Rhetorical Uses of Childhood’ in Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, pp. 249-277 (252). [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. In Matthew 11.25, 21.16 and Luke 10:21 it is used ironically to show that the revelation of God comes to the most marginal in society, to infants rather than the wise. In Romans 2:20 it is used in relation to other unambiguously negative descriptions: “a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children”. In 1 Cor 3.1 and Heb 5.13 it is used to emphasise a lack of maturity in the faith. Paul speaks to the Corinthians as children (νήπιοι) because they are not yet ready for the more solid food of adult teaching. An interesting contrast here is the use of τέκνον in 2 Corinthians 6.12-13, where the idea of Paul speaking as to children is a sign not of the immaturity of the Corinthians but of Paul’s great affection for them. In return they are exhorted to open wide their hearts as well. Speaking to τέκνα is clearly a rather more positive experience than speaking to νήπιοι. In 1 Cor 13:11 it is again used to mark the contrast in maturity between adults and children. In 1 Cor 14.20 there is another ironic use of νήπιος, when the Corinthians are exhorted to be infants in evil but adults in thinking. In Galatians 4.1-7 νήπιος stands in explicit contrast to υἱος. To be a minor is to be no better than a slave, and as minors we too were enslaved, but when God sent his son we became not slaves but sons. Metaphorically this passage does not entirely work: the relationship with the Father positively expressed in 4.6 in the crying of “Abba, Father” is as open to minors before the date of inheritance as it is open to sons afterwards. Nevertheless the negative connotations of νήπιος, in contrast to the more positive associations of υἱος, are made clear. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Aasgaard, ‘Like a Child’, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Peabody, MA: Continuum, 2003), p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Aasgaard, ‘Like a Child’, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Matt 5.48, 19.21; Rom 12.2; 1 Cor 13:10; Heb 9.11, 1.17, 1.25, 3.3; 1 Jon 4.18. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. 1 Cor 2.6; 1 Cor 14.20; Eph 4.13; Phil 3.15; Col 1.28, 4.12; Heb 5.14; Jas 1.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Barth, *Ephesians,* pp. 484-496. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Matthews, ‘Mature in Christ,’ p. 118n. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Hohener, *Ephesians,* p. 554; Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Matthews, ‘Mature in Christ’. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Matthews, ‘Mature in Christ’, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. D. Hampson, ‘On Autonomy and Heteronomy’, in *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity,* ed. D. Hampson (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 1-16 (1-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Matthews, ‘Mature in Christ’, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. For example see Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the Light of Hope,’ pp. 166-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace,* p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Petrenko (*Created in Christ Jesus*, p. 127.) sees a link here between the interdependence of the building in 2.21-22, fitted together and built together, and the interdependence of the body. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Matthews, ‘Mature in Christ.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (1.3-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. There are four references in Romans, Galatians, Colossians and 1 Thessalonians; 3 in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians and 2 Thessalonians; 2 in 1 Timothy; and 1 in Philemon and Titus. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Sigmund Freud, J.A. Underwood and Shaun Whiteside (trans.), *Future of an Illusion* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Freud, *Future of an Illusion,* p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Freud, *Future of an Illusion,* p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Sigmund Freud, A.A. Brill (trans), *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between The Psychic Lives Of Savages And Neurotics* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1919) p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Freud, *Totem and Taboo,* p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. For a discussion of the use of the term exegesis and its primacy for Ricoeur over “theology”, see Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 150. There are nine references to God as father of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16, 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 3:19, 31:9; Malachi 1:6, 2:10) and six references to God as father of individual people (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13, 22:10, 28:6; Psalm 68:5, 89:26). The metaphor of fatherhood is implicit in Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 1:31, 8:5, 14:1; Psalm 103:13; Jeremiah 3:22, 31:20; Hosea 11:1-4; Malachi 3:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Ricoeur, ‘Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Ricoeur, ‘Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretation*, p. 485. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretation,* p. 485. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretation,* p. 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretation*, p. 540. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 487. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God*: *Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* p. 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. There are of course other ways of reading the crucifixion – as a model not of intimacy between the Father and Son, but of abandonment. There is certainly scriptural warrant for such a reading in Jesus' plaintive cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). There is a particularly arresting mixed metaphor at work here, with the sacrifice of the son on behalf of the adopted son. This, arguably, adds to the potency of the sacrifice, rather than detracting from it. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. R.A. Wild, in his essay ‘The Warrior and the Prisoner’, articulates the pagan origins of parrhesia: “In the classical period the playwright Euripides observed that the greatest misfortune of exile was not to have parrhësia, for this is the status of a slave. In Paul's own time the philosopher Musonius Rufus referred to this passage in his treatise That Exile is Not an Evil, but argued that because the exile never loses moral freedom, he or she can still exercise ‘free speech.’ This accords well with the Stoic commonplace that tyrants, the ultimate enemies of parrhësia, may perhaps have power over an individual's body but cannot control that person's true inner self”(p. 291). Nevertheless he argues that the reference is fundamentally to Old Testament traditions, quoting Leviticus 26:13 (p. 292) and Wisdom 5.1 (p. 293), and seeing a possible parallel between the amour imagery in Ephesians and Wisdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians,* p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Fowl, *Ephesians,* p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Bartlett, ‘Adoption in the Bible’, pp. 389-394. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Ricoeur’s connection with feminism and women’s studies is not an obvious one. As Pamela Sue Anderson puts it, “Feminist philosophers have rarely turned to the philosophy of Ricoeur and the latter never engaged in any sustained way with the former” (Pamela Sue Anderson, ‘Ricoeur and Women’s Studies: On the Affirmation of Life and a Confidence in the Power to Act’ in Scott Davidson [ed.], *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines* [New York, London: Continuum, 2010], pp. 142-164 [143]). Nevertheless, she herself sees the potential for a feminist appropriation of Ricoeur in his affirmation of life and confidence in human capacity (Anderson, ‘Ricoeur and Women’s Studies,’ p. 158). Ricoeur’s lack of focus on the distinctiveness of male and female experience can be seen as a weakness (Dan R. Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology* [London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012], p. 107, 173n. 17), nevertheless his concepts of the hermeneutics of suspicion and just institutions provide a clear basis for incorporating feminist critique into a Ricoeurian reading.

If the hermeneutics of suspicion, or the critique of ideology, “is a proud gesture of defiance directed against the distortions of human communication” (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 87), then clearly a purely “male” reading of texts is one such distortion which needs the corrective of a feminist critique. As Mark I. Wallace puts it, commenting on Ricoeur’s work *Figuring the Sacred*, “no text is free from ideological distortion, and a romanticist hermeneutic that blunts the uncovering of such bias is dangerously short-sighted. In order for a fusion between text-world and the reader’s world to be efficacious, no critical-explanatory device should be excluded from the interpretation process as long as that device does not in principle deny the ontological potential of the work in question” (Mark I. Wallace, ‘Introduction’ in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 10). Feminist critique is one such critical-explanatory device that should not be excluded.

Ricoeur defines the good life as living with and for others in just institutions (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 170). We cannot escape the claims of injustice levelled against patriarchal marriage by feminist critique. Even those who wished to defend patriarchal marriage would have to concede that the terms of modern discourse mean they have a case to answer – hence conservative apologetics. Here again we see the unavoidable relevance of feminism to a contemporary appropriation of Ricoeur concerned with both the hermeneutics of suspicion and just institutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Francis Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*: *Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press 1985), p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. See chapter 4 “Calling God Father” in Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, pp. 66-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Soskice, *The Kindness of God,* p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender*, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Julian Of Norwich, Barry Windeatt (trans.), *Revelations of Divine Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015),p. 129. Cited in Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Fowl, *Ephesians*, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 337; Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 275; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. For an account of the tensions between universal salvation and salvation exclusive to Christians in the wider Pauline corpus, see E.P. Sanders, ‘Paul between Judaism and Hellenism,’ in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (eds.), *St Paul Among the Philosophers,* pp. 84-88, [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Best, *Ephesians,* pp. 326-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Edward Schillebeeckx and John Bowden (trans.), *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London: SCM-Canterbury Press, 1980), pp. 195-222. Here p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ Believer*, p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Robinson, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians,* p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. “God is not only the universal Father, but the archetypal Father, the Father of whom all other fathers are derivatives or types. So far from regarding the Divine fatherhood as a mode of speech in reference to the Godhead, derived by analogy from our conception of human fatherhood, the apostle maintains that the very idea of fatherhood exists primarily in the Divine nature, and only by derivation in every other form of fatherhood whether earthly or heavenly”. Robinson, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians,* p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press: 2013), p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Bartlett, ‘Adoption in the Bible,’ p. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. To say that the dividing walls of gender have been broken down could be argued to go beyond the text – certainly there is no explicit statement to that effect as in Galatians 3.28. The hierarchical nature of gender relations in the household codes work against such a reading and will be engaged with in the next section. Nevertheless, the inter-relatedness of the children of God does not rely on patriarchal power. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Daniel W. Bloesch, James H. Burtness (trans.), ‘Life Together’ in *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol. 5* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* pp. 53, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* pp. 66-67. This emphasis on singing is also picked up by David Ford: “For a community of worship, this coming together before God in song is the fullest facing of all, explicitly acknowledging the reality of which they are all part, and adding their energies to enhance it. The specific contribution of music to this building up of community in worship includes its encouragement of alertness to others, immediate responsiveness to changes in tone, tune and rhythm, and sharing in the confidence that can come from joint singing. Singing together embodies joint responsibility in which each singer waits on the others, is attentive with the intention of serving the common harmony”. Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 122. Bonhoeffer and Ford disagree about harmony. For Bonhoeffer – along with the western monastic tradition – unison singing is an important sign of Christian unity (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 67). However, they both place primary importance on this aspect of life together highlighted in Ephesians. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. In his study of Ephesians, Te-Li Lau sets out Paul’s use of explicitly political language and puts it into dialogue with language used by classical thinkers; see, especially, chapter 3: “The Political in Ephesians” in *Politics of Peace*, pp. 76-156. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. The sense of Ephesians being a drama comes from the title of Timothy Gombis’ book, *The Drama of Ephesians.* [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* pp. 169-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 170, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 669. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul's Jewish identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 160-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation,* p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* pp. 110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature,* p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. See Matthews, “To walk worthy of one’s calling – establishes the main thrust of the entire paraenesis. This is seen initially in the lack of specificity as to how the comprehensive virtues of humility, gentleness, patience and love are to be manifested in actual practices. Whilst these virtues do not all reappear in the subsequent commands, they are reinforced by the much more specific instructions pertaining to the interaction of believers in the church”. ‘Maturity in Ephesians’, p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. See Charles H. Talbert on this point: “It is not the Pauline way to regulate everything of pastoral concern in the churches by casuistic law. The Pauline way was identity formation: shaping character by Christ, the living law, and giving only enough specifics to illustrate the direction Christian decision-making would take. *Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. This point is picked up by Badiou in an essay on Paul: “The Christian subject has authentic reasons to love himself: he loves in himself the possibility of a way of life. He loves in himself the salvation of humanity”. Badiou, ‘St Paul, Founder of the Universal Subject’, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation And Shared Ethical Values In Ephesians 4:17-6:9* (London: T&T Clark International, 2008), p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. As Te-Li Lau puts it, “[n]ot only does it cause a shift of allegiance form God to oneself, πλεονεξία with its individualistic focus is the greatest social vice, destroying the communal spirit and ultimately bringing civic instability through the gross inequality of material wealth”. *Politics of Peace,* p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Darko, *No Longer Living as Gentiles*, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender*, p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Chrysostom, *Ephesians 6:9* in *Patrologiae cursus completes … Series Graeca*, edited by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: Excudebat Migne, 1844-64) 62:157, quoted in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 813. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Dale Martin highlights the difficulty of translating the Greek word *ethnos*, especially given that “our own notions of race, ethnicity, and identity are in a state of flux”. He argues that “[t]he Greek does refer to what we would call an ethnic group, with its own customs, native language, perhaps religious practice and so on. Scholars generally avoid the term “race“ as hopelessly anachronistic. An additional problem occurs because the English word “gentiles” is the normal biblical translation of ethne, yet that word made sense only in opposition to “the Jews”.… The reader must keep in mind, though, that ethnos could be used to refer to any “ethnic” group or nation but that in the writings of the New Testament it was also used in the sense of “gentiles” (‘Teleology, Epistemology, and Universal Vision in Paul,’ in John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (eds.), *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*, p. 107). The use of the term in Ephesians is particularly complicated because it is not clear to what extent it refers to non-believing Jews; as Darko says, “[t]he fact that *ta ethne* refers to outsiders is quite evident, but we are in the field of conjecture as to whether this includes Jewish unbelievers since nothing is stated to that effect”. Darko, *No Longer Living as Gentiles*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of impurity. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians,* p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. See Numbers 21:2-3; Deuteronomy 20:17; Joshua 6:17, 21; 1 Samuel 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Best, *Ephesians,* p. 486; Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Although, as Muddiman admits, that relies on the assertion that the “Paul” of Corinthians and the “Paul” of Ephesians were the same person. Muddiman, *Ephesians,* p. 237; Hoehner, *Ephesians,* p. 669. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Darko, *No Longer Living as Gentiles*, p. 48; Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 313; Fowl, *Ephesians*, p. 168; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 326; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 668. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Fowl, *Ephesians*, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Darko, *No Longer Living As Gentiles*, p. 48; Best, *Ephesians*, p. 486; Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 326; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 669. As Hoehner puts it, “[i]f there were no association with those in the world, there would be no opportunity to function as lights in the world”. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 669. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. Lincoln, ‘Theology of Ephesians’, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ Believer,* p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. V.R. Mollenkott, “Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33: Why Feminist Scholarship Has (Often) Left Them Unmentioned, and Why They Should Be Emphasized”. in A.J. Levine, with M. Blickenstaff, *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), pp. 37-59 (39). [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, pp. 45-48; Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality?’ p. 69; Lincoln, ‘The Theology of Ephesians,’ pp. 123-24; and Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Sarah J. Tanzer, ‘Ephesians’, in Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures 2. A Feminist Commentary,*(London: SCM Press 1995), pp. 325-47 (340-41). [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 716; see also Best, *Ephesians*, p. 517: “The verse is then in part transitions in completing vv.18-20 and in preparing for the HT. It is however better to associate it with what precedes than what follows”. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. There is a textual issue in 5.22, with four possible alternative readings: the first reading omits the verb ὑποτάσσω in verse 22, making the verse dependent on verse 21 for its verb; the second includes the second person plural passive imperative, “be subject” before τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν; the third includes the same verb after the object; the fourth includes the third person plural present hortatory subjunctive, “let them be subject” (see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 730, for a review of the textual issues; see also Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 222). It is much easier to explain a later scribal inclusion of the verb, for reasons of clarity, than it is to account for its deliberate omission, so the first reading is to be preferred. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 516. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. ὑποτάσσω has its origins in military rank, which leaves no space for mutuality but presumes a clear line of command. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 732. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 153. Talbert’s arguments rest on the assumption that the household codes were “never intended to set forth the order of marriage that God set forth in creation” (p. 153) but speak merely to the practical issues of the family business. Thus, Talbert argues, it is inappropriate to apply the household codes to modern marriage. Given the theological emphases put on the view of marriage in the text, such as the association of the husband with Christ (5.23), the comparison of the bond between husband and wife with the bond between Christ and his church (5.32), and the timeless nature of marriage which is suggested by citing Genesis 2:24 (5.31), I struggle to see how Talbert’s reading could be sustained. The text makes no obvious separation between behaviour in the church and the household and no distinction between pragmatic lines of obedience in the family business and “the order of marriage that God set forth in creation”. For Talbert’s reading see, *Ephesians and Colossians,* pp. 149-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Best, *Ephesians*, p. 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, pp. 45-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, pp. 45-48; see also Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 69. “As a general injunction and motivation … Eph. 5.21 frame[s] the household code by reinterpreting its patriarchal structure from a Christological perspective”. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, p. 48-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 77. For the work of McFague on which Mouton bases her conclusions, see Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 51-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Mollenkott, ‘Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33’, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Carolyn Osiek, ‘The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): A Problematic Wedding’ in *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 2002, 32(1), p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. See p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Matthews, “Maturity in Ephesians”, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. Matthews, “Maturity in Ephesians”, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. See Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender,* p. 234: “How far is there not only a grounding of the male-female relation in the Christ-church relation, but also a corresponding projection of the male-female relation onto the Christ-church relation. The result of this would be that the asymmetry of the male-female relation (in the form of the wife’s subjection to the man as head) would be grounded in a Christ-church relation itself now construed as a male-female relationship. The Christ-church relation would then be the transcendental, original pattern of the human male-female relation; a kind of Platonic form. Corresponding to the headship of Christ over the church there would be a headship of man over woman, derived not from the fall (as Gen.3.16 implies) but from creation itself and from the heavenly archetype that precedes creation. Gender inequality would then be grounded in transcendental ontology. Ephesians 5 is certainly open to a platonising reading along these lines. The question is whether it requires it”. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. As Andrew Lincoln puts it, Paul’s “political quietism” makes “deriving social or political ethics from his writings an unpromising project for all but the most politically conservative”; Lincoln, ‘Liberation from the powers’, p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 444. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 445. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature,* p. 466. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 467. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature,* p. 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 480. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the light of hope’, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the light of hope’, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in the light of hope’, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Mouton, ‘(Re)Describing Reality’, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. Matthews, ‘Christian Maturity’, p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. As John Meech puts it, “[i]t is not that Ricoeur fails to understand the good life in terms of community but that he never takes as an explicit theme the stories that identify communities” (John L. Meech, *Paul in Israel’s Story*, p. 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-521)