



God in Galatians – Tendencies in the study of an important theme

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Abstract

Since Nils Dahl’s famous article on God as the most neglected factor in the study of the New Testament, many studies on God in the various *corpi* of the New Testament have been and are still being published. In this regard, the Pauline Letters have received a fair amount of attention. In this study an overview of studies on God in the Letter to the Galatians is provided. Four such studies are discussed: N.T. Wright’s study, “The Letter to Galatians: Exegesis and theology” (published in 2000), Richard Hays’s “The God of mercy who rescues us from the present evil age” (published in 2002), Jerome Neyrey’s chapter on God in Galatians (in his book, *Rendering to God. New Testament understandings of the divine*, published in 2004) and Christiane Zimmerman’s book *Gott und seine Söhne. Das Gottesbild des Galaterbriefs* (published in 2013). Each of these contributions is discussed in detail, after which the contributions of the four studies are compared, and some suggestions are made as to aspects that still need attention.

Key words

New Testament theology; Pauline theology; Letter to the Galatians; God; Divinity

1. Introduction

Published more than 40 years ago, Nils Dahl’s (1975:5–8) famous article on God as the most neglected factor in the study of New Testament theology gave rise to several studies on this issue, most of them focusing on God in the New Testament (in general), or, in the case of the Pauline corpus, on Paul’s views on God as reflected in the corpus associated with

him as a whole.¹ One occasionally finds treatments of God in the various New Testament writings, but even in such cases the Pauline letters are normally treated together or only one or two of Paul's letters are selected for discussion.² When the theology of the Letter to the Galatians (hereafter "Galatians") itself becomes the focus of interest, it is also interesting to note that the theme of God is often not deemed worthy of separate treatment. In this regard the studies of Dunn (1993), Thielman (2005), and Matera (2007) may be mentioned. Thus, studies specifically focusing on God in Galatians are relatively rare. In fact, I could only identify four such studies. These studies will be the focus of this brief investigation. The aim of this contribution is to offer an overview of such studies, thereby providing an indication of the state of scholarship on this issue. I will discuss these studies in chronological order and then conclude with some evaluative remarks.

2. Wright: God as theme in Galatians and its implications for systematic theology

Wright's essay, titled "The Letter to Galatians: Exegesis and theology" (Wright 2000:205–236) is part of a group of essays in a book titled *Between two horizons: Spanning New Testament studies and systematic theology* (edited by Joel B. Green and Max Turner). The book served as a foundation for a (then) new commentary series on the New Testament planned by Eerdmans (*The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*), aimed at bridging the gap between exegetical studies of the New Testament and systematic theology. The essays were first presented at the 1998 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, and then published in 2000. Wright, who is responsible for the commentary on Galatians in this series (this has not been published yet³) used his essay to show what he intends to do in his commentary on Galatians.

1 For examples of the former, see the studies of Dunn (2009:127–136) and Hurtado (2010:27–48); and for examples of the latter, see Dunn (1998:27–50), Schnelle (2003:441–462) and Poplutz (2016:349–373).

2 For examples in this regard, see the studies of Krentz (1989:75–90) and Carter (2016).

3 According to Eerdmans' website. [Online]. Available: <https://www.eerdmans.com/Products/CategoryCenter.aspx?CategoryId=SEITHNTC> [Accessed 23 February 2018]. The following commentaries in this series have already been published: Philippians (Stephen E. Fowl,

Wright's aim in his contribution is to show what could happen if exegetical and theological questions are deliberately brought into dialogue (Wright 2000:205), and, accordingly, he approaches the issue from both sides. At first, he focuses on the exegetical side, identifying the most important exegetical issues in the letter. In this regard, he begins by briefly referring to introductory issues, namely that Galatians scholars disagree on matters such as what gave rise to the letter, to which Galatia Paul is referring, who Paul's opponents were and the relationship between Galatians 2 and Acts 15 (Wright 2000:208–209). Wright (2000:208–213) then moves on to other important issues, such as why Paul spends so much time in his letter on recounting his visits to Jerusalem, the rhetorical genre to which the letter belongs, how one's understanding of the social context influences one's exegesis of the letter and one's view on its theology, the many exegetical issues raised by Galatians 3:1–5:1, as well as the question on how to approach the "ethical part" of the letter (Gal 5–6).

The other side of the issue, namely which theological issues may be enriched by one's study of the text, is then considered. Wright (2000:213) begins by mentioning issues that might be relevant, such as justification and the relationship between theology and ethics, and then concentrates on two issues in particular, namely God and Christ. For our purposes, his reflection on God is important. He identifies three important aspects (Wright 2000:214–215):

- The God of which Paul speaks in Galatians, is the God of Israel who created the world and whose will he was following.
- This God has a purpose for the world, namely to make the "present evil age" go away and bring about the "age to come" – an apocalyptic belief emphasising the goodness of God's creation. Paul was convinced that, in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Spirit, God has broken into this world, and has already ushered in the "new age".

published in 2005), Colossians and Philemon (Marianne Meyer Thompson, published in 2005), 2 Peter and Jude (Ruth Anne Reese, published in 2007), 1 Peter (Joel B. Green, published in 2007), 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (Robert W. Wall, published in 2012), Revelation (Frank D. Macchia & John Christopher Thomas, published in 2016); and 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Andy Johnson, published in 2016) and Matthew (Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle A. Roberts, 2018).

- This God is known by means of the Scriptures of Israel, and God’s apocalyptic intervention through Christ is the completion and climax of his promises to the patriarchs. The law should also be interpreted in terms of this eschatological framework: It was given by God and had a particular function for a limited time that had come to an end at the coming of Christ.⁴

In a third section, Wright turns to what Galatians may contribute to the debates that Christian theologians find themselves in nowadays. I highlight two aspects that specifically relate to what Wright has pointed out with regard to the way in which God is depicted in Galatians:

- The first one has to do with the foundation of all knowledge: Galatians claims that the knowledge of God is the foundation of all knowledge, but not in an abstract sense of the word. What Paul has in mind, is true knowledge embedded within a relationship with God; this kind of knowledge relativizes all other forms of knowing, but then also reaffirms what is appropriate from this new perspective (Wright 2000:221–223).
- Secondly, the reconciliation brought about by God cannot be embraced without accepting its consequence, namely the exclusion of evil. According to Galatians, the church should symbolise the victory of God over evil powers. In Wright’s own words: “The church must present the world and its rulers with ways of ‘excluding’ that will lead to ‘embrace’” (Wright 2000:225).

3. Richard Hays: God and the story that Paul tells in Galatians

Hays’s contribution on God in Galatians was published in 2002 in a collection of essays in a *Festschrift* for Paul J. Achtemeier, titled *The forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical theology* (edited by A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera). In the essays in this book, the way in which God is depicted in various writings or *corpi* in the Bible is discussed. Hays focuses on Galatians and Romans, and he specifically draws attention to the way in which God is characterised in the story that Paul tells/implies in these letters (Hays 2002:125).

4 Wright (2000:215–221) then moves on to the Christology of Galatians, but as this issue is not important for this study, it is not discussed here.

In the case of Galatians, he begins by drawing attention to the importance of God’s fatherhood in the letter, as signified by the fact that God is called “Father” three times in the opening of the letter. Hays links God’s fatherhood to the fact that God embraces both Jews and Gentiles in his covenant family. In Galatians, God is thus depicted as the One who protects, provides for and gives an inheritance to his family, the One who rescues people from spiritual captivity to the present evil age (Hays 2002:125–126).

Against this background, Hays (2002:126–131) traces the way in which God functions in Paul’s “story” in Galatians in a logical and chronological way, highlighting the following events:

- God made promises to Abraham;
- God gave the Law;
- God sent his Son;
- God raised Jesus from the dead;
- God justifies the Gentiles through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ;
- God calls us into participation in the new covenant community;
- God supplies the Spirit;
- God will judge;
- God is the ultimate recipient of glory.

After a similar analysis of the depiction of God in Romans,⁵ Hays concludes with several reflections on the way in which God is portrayed in the “story” proclaimed by Romans and Galatians. He highlights five aspects: The God depicted in these two letters is the same God whose story is told in the Scriptures of Israel; God embodied his love in Christ; Paul’s understanding of God can be described as “proto-trinitarian”; the emphasis in the Western

5 Hays (2002:132–139) identifies the following events in the “story” underlying Romans: “The one God is the Creator of the world; the world is alienated from God; God made promises to Abraham; God’s saving will is expressed through election; God gave the Law; God sent his Son; God raised Jesus from the dead; God calls and justifies Gentiles; God hardens Israel; God will save Israel in the end; God is at work in the church through the Holy Spirit; God hears prayers; God calls us to obedient service; God wills and works in the church; God will judge in the world; God receives eschatological glory.” Later on, Hays (2002:139) also draws attention to the differences between the story worlds of the two letters. For example, in Romans, Paul also refers to the creation of the world and Adam’s sin and the hardening of Israel and their ultimate salvation – issues that are not discussed in Galatians.

theological tradition on salvation as forensic acquittal reflects only a small part of what Paul says about God since he puts much more emphasis in Galatians on God liberating people from spiritual bondage; and, God is depicted as God whom we may trust (Hays 2002:140–141).

4. Jerome Neyrey: God in Galatians and theologies in conflict

Neyrey's book *Render to God. New Testament understandings of the divine* is a response – albeit many years later – to Nils Dahl's "The neglected factor in New Testament study" that he was privileged to listen to as a student at Yale Divinity School (Neyrey 2004:xv). Neyrey discusses the way in which God is portrayed in several New Testament writings: Mark, Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians; he also discusses the depiction of Jesus as God in the Gospel of John and the Letter to the Hebrews. He approaches the subject from two angles:

First, he identifies several important elements in terms of the Judean and Greco-Roman backgrounds. In terms of the *Judean background*, Neyrey (2004:xvi) lists the following important themes: the four typical rabbinic questions (how the law should be applied; questions focusing on contradictions in Scripture; questions mocking the opponent's views and questions on the theory of law⁶); the contrast between two covenants, i.e. between the covenant of the promise and Moses's covenant; the notion of God's kingdom; mercy and justice as attributes of God; and God's power to create and to execute (linked to the titles "God" and "Lord" respectively). In terms of *Greco-Roman background*, Neyrey (2004:xvi) highlights the following important notions from the way in which such authors have talked about the divine:

- Three important philosophical categories that were deemed important: what can we know about the divine and how do we know it (epistemology)? What is the nature of the god(s) (physics)? And what kind of behaviour should follow from the nature of the god(s) (ethics)?
- The question of whether the god(s) judge people or not;

6 See in this regard Neyrey's (2004:15–16) discussion of Mark 12:13–37 in terms of these four questions raised by David Daube.

- The important role that the providence of the deity played; and
- The chief characteristic associated with the divinity as the notion of eternity: not created/generated and without any end (Neyrey 2004:xvi).

Secondly, he points out the important contribution that the use of social sciences can make to our understanding of the different ways in which the New Testament writings talk about God. In particular, he highlights the following three social-scientific models: (1) That God should be viewed as a divine patron/benefactor⁷; (2) that he should be honoured, praised and glorified; and (3) that he is holy and pure (Neyrey 2004:xvii).

The aspects identified above are then utilised as a lens for interpreting the way in which God is depicted in the New Testament writings that Neyrey discusses in the book. The study on God in Galatians is titled “Theologies in conflict. Paul’s God in Galatians”, and he utilises five of the aspects that have been mentioned above:

First, if the philosophical categories that were deemed important by Greco-Roman authors are used as an interpretative lens, three aspects are important: *Epistemology*: According to Galatians, God is best known when he reveals himself to people, as happened in Paul’s case. *Physics*: In Galatians, God is primarily depicted as a benefactor bestowing benefaction. *Ethics*: Paul’s call for love/altruism corresponds to his emphasis on God as benefactor (Neyrey 2004:193–195).

Neyrey then moves to the first social-scientific model that he mentioned, namely that of God as patron and benefactor. For him (Neyrey 2004:195–196), this notion of God is the prevailing image of God in Galatians, and furthermore, the differences between Paul and his opponents could be viewed as conflicting views on how God’s benefaction functions. In Neyrey’s own words:

If liberation from slavery, sin, and death are gratuitous gifts of divine benefaction, then the proper response to the Benefactor is “faith” and “obedience.” But if benefaction depends in any way on human

⁷ Take note that patronage and benefaction were actually two *distinct* (although related) relationships, and not the same. See Joubert (2000:63–69) for a good discussion of this issue.

observance of dietary, calendar, and other rules, the Benefactor becomes less a generous patron and more a manager of accounts (Neyrey 2004:196).

Thirdly, Neyrey (2004:196–197) identifies all the benefactions that God bestows according to Galatians – eight of them in total: “gift, promise, sonship, heirs, freedom, deliverance/redemption, righteousness/justification, and blessing.” The role that these benefactions play in Paul’s argument is then traced, and Neyrey concludes that, according to this letter, the most important benefaction is the blessing of belonging, described in the letter in terms of the covenant with Abraham (Neyrey 2004:202).

Next, Neyrey (2004:202) moves on to what he calls “God’s map of times”. In this discussion, he takes up one of the elements that he identified as important when he considered the Judean background, namely the two covenants. In the case of Galatians, Paul contrasts the covenant of promise (i.e. of Abraham) with the covenant of the law (i.e. of Moses), with this contrast forming the background of his persuasive strategy (Neyrey 2004:203–207).

Finally, Neyrey (2004:207–208) turns to God’s attributes (an aspect also important in terms of the Judean background). According to Neyrey, the two characteristics that are the most important in the case of Galatians are God’s mercy and his judgement.

5. Christiane Zimmermann: God and his “sons”

Published in 2013, Christiane Zimmermann’s monograph, titled *Gott und seine Söhne. Das Gottesbild des Galaterbriefs*, is the most comprehensive study published so far on the theme that we are investigating. She begins her study by noting that not much has been published yet on God in Galatians. She refers to the study of Hays discussed above, as well as to a monograph by Bruce W. Longenecker (1998). Although the monograph is titled *The triumph of Abraham’s God: The transformation of identity in Galatians*, it is strictly speaking not a study of God in Galatians (Zimmermann 2013:5–6). Apparently, Zimmermann was not aware of the studies done by Wright (2000) and Neyrey (2004). Nevertheless, she is correct in claiming that no detailed study of God in Galatians had been published at the stage that she undertook her study.

In the first chapter, Zimmermann (2013:9–10) provides a very interesting statistical survey which is worth taking note of in our investigation. She does this in order to support her claim that God is indeed a central theme in Galatians. The following is important: The word *theos* occurs 28 to 30⁸ times in the letter, and *pater* four times; twelve different verbs are used to describe God’s actions in the letter;⁹ fourteen *passiva divina* occur;¹⁰ three “actants” of God are mentioned (Paul as apostle [1:1], the Spirit [3:5; 4:6] and God’s Son [4:4]) and thirteen manifestations of power by God¹¹ are mentioned in the letter; Zimmermann 2013:10–11). This, on its own, already proves the significant role played by God in the letter.

Zimmermann then carefully and systematically works through the letter section by section, discussing in detail all the references to God within the textual contexts as they occur. She follows the broad outline of the letter, but not necessarily pericope by pericope as Paul’s argument unfolds; instead she explains the flow of the argument in terms of what is reflected about God and his agents (i.e. Paul, Christ and the Spirit) at a particular stage of the argument. This results in a schematic outline consisting of the following thirteen thematic focal points:

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- 8 Depending on the text-critical decision that one makes in the case of Gal. 1:15 and 3:21. See Zimmermann (2013:10, note 36).
 - 9 These are “raise” (1:1); “call” (1:6, 15; 5:8); “please” (1:15); “set apart” (1:15); “reveal” (1:15); “(not) accept (face)” (2:6); “work” (2:8); “supply (with the Spirit)” (3:5); “justify” (3:8); “given by a promise” (3:18); “to be (one)” (3:20); and “send (his Son/the Spirit of his Son)” (4:4, 6) (Zimmermann 2013:10, note 38). She also adds the following two verbs that probably refer to God: “make alive” (3:21) and “imprison” (3:22).
 - 10 These are “was entrusted with (the gospel)” (2:7); “was given (grace)” (2:9); “was justified” (2:16, 17; 3:11; 3:24); “was found to be” (sinners) (2:17); “was reckoned (to Abraham as righteousness)” (3:6); “was blessed in (Abraham)” (3:8)/“was blessed with (Abraham)” (3:9); “(promises) were uttered” (3:16); “(a covenant) was ratified” (3:17); “(the law) was added” (3:19); “was promised” (3:19); “was given” (3:21, 22); “(faith) was revealed” (3:23); “was known (by God)” (4:9); and “was called” (5:13) (Zimmermann 2013:10, note 39). To these she adds the passive verbal adjective “are under a curse” (3:10, 13).
 - 11 The German expression is “machtvolle Äußerungen” (Zimmermann 2013:11). These are “grace” (1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4); “peace” (1:3; 6:16); “revelation” (1:12; 2:2); “power” (3:5); “blessing” (3:14); “promise” (3:14, 16, 17, 18 [x 2], 21, 22, 29); 4:23, 28; “covenant” (3:17; 4:24); “fullness of time” (4:4); “justification” (2:21; 3:6, 21; 5:5); “judgment” (5:10); “kingdom” (5:21); “new creation” (6:15); and “mercy” (6:16) (Zimmermann 2013:11, note 41). In this note she also points out that, according to the letter, Paul’s gospel comes from God (1:7, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14), and, furthermore, that faith could be regarded as coming from God.

- God as Father and Christ the Saviour in terms of God’s plan (1:1–5)
- Paul’s mission and calling by God and Christ (1:1, 10–24)
- The Galatians’ calling to the gospel by God (1:6–9)
- God’s works: in Paul and the Galatians (2:8, 3:5); the message of freedom from circumcision as divine grace (2:1–14); justification by faith and a life for God (2:15–21); possession of the Spirit (3:1–5); Abraham’s faith and the promise of blessing to Abraham and the gentiles (3:6–9); freedom from the curse of the law through Christ (3:10–14); and the non-reversibility and un-changeability of the promise (3:15–18)
- The law as guide of the underage children (3:19–25)
- God as Father of Christ and the believers (3:26–4:7)
- The worship of “not-gods” and the “elements of the world” as signs of no knowledge of God (4:3, 8–11)
- Paul as mother of the Christians and as angel of God (4:12–20)
- God and the freedom of his “sons” (4:21–5:12)
- The only law of freedom and living in the Spirit as condition for participation in the kingdom of God (5:13–6:6)
- God, the judgement and eternal life (6:7–10)
- The new creation of God (6:11–15)
- God’s mercy towards Israel and the grace of God with brothers in faith (6:16–18) (Zimmermann 2013:15–142)

In the final section, Zimmermann summarises and integrates her findings. On the basis of her detailed study, she identifies four accents¹² in the way in which God is portrayed in Galatians. She begins by highlighting the importance of God’s *sovereignty*: Throughout the letter it is clear that God is Lord of life and death, that things happen according to his will – something that is also clear from the graceful way in which he acts towards

12 Zimmermann (2013:143–164) also discusses several other aspects such as the way in which God’s agents (Christ, the Spirit and Paul) are depicted and how this contributes to the depiction of God; Jewish aspects in Paul’s image of God; a comparison of what one finds in Galatians and the other Pauline letters, Acts 14:14–18 and the Our Father prayer. However, I do not include this in the discussion above as it is not directly relevant for our theme.

his creation and humankind (Zimmermann 2013:148–151). Secondly, God is depicted as *a justifying judge* (“rechtfertigender Richter”): This follows logically from the first aspect, God’s sovereignty, in that the interaction between this sovereign God and humankind is characterised by justice, with justice being manifested by means of justification by faith, which in turn is the condition for a new kind of existence for believers culminating in the final judgement and eternal life (Zimmermann 2013:151–152). Thirdly, Zimmermann believes that, in Galatians, the central quality of God is his *fatherhood*: Although God’s sovereignty is very important in the letter, from a qualitative point of view, God’s sending of his Son and his adoption of humankind as his “sons” are central to the theology of the letter (Zimmermann 2013:152–155). Finally, *communication* is identified as the central activity of God. In this regard, Zimmermann (2013:155–159) points out the importance of the fact that God “calls” and “speaks” in the letter.

6. Evaluation

At the outset, it should be stated clearly that, although we have only four academic studies of God in Galatians, significant work has been done, providing us with many key insights into the way in which God is depicted in the letter. Let us look at the contributions one by one:

The main contribution of *Wright’s* study lies in his attempt to cross the divide between New Testament studies and systematic theology. He should be congratulated for attempting to do so as the dialogue between biblical studies and systematic theology is rarely taken seriously nowadays; in fact, such a dialogue almost never takes place. That he has this dialogue in mind, is probably the reason why his depiction of God is at a rather abstract level as this is necessitated by the nature of the dialogue that one has in this case. To my mind the most important benefit of *Wright’s* approach is that it raises questions that New Testament scholars rarely consider, such as the notion of foundational knowledge. Addressing such questions may help our discipline to break free from the self-imposed confinement we often find ourselves in.

In contrast to *Wright*, *Hays’s* approach is representative of the way in which New Testament writings are normally interpreted in our discipline. As we

have seen, Hays attempts to construct the story that Paul tells/implies in Galatians (and Romans). Compared to that of Wright, the picture that Hays paints of God in Galatians is thus more complex. Furthermore, it is structured in terms of a narrative that is developed chronologically, beginning with God's promises to Abraham and ending with his ultimately receiving glory. Furthermore, Hays was the first scholar to draw attention to the centrality of God's fatherhood (interpreted in terms of the covenant family) in Galatians. In the final part of his contribution, Hays also moves to a more abstract level, but not with systematic theology in mind (as Wright does), as the primary focus is rather Pauline theology in general.

In his study, *Neyrey* responds specifically to the challenge raised by Nils Dahl. The most important difference between his approach and those of Wright and Neyrey is that the approach that he follows is wider, and also explicitly linked to the Judean and Greco-Roman background within which the New Testament writings originated. Furthermore, whereas Hays bases his approach on the notion of narrative, Neyrey utilises insights from the use of social sciences in New Testament studies. Accordingly, the God that he detects in Galatians differs in some ways from the one that Hays finds in the letter. In this regard, the most notable aspect is Neyrey's claim that Paul regards God primarily as a benefactor bestowing benefaction. Almost everything that is said about God in Galatians is then integrated in terms of the notion of God as benefactor and God's "map of time".

Of the four studies, *Zimmermann's* study is the most comprehensive – as is to be expected, since this is the only monograph amongst the four studies that we are considering. However, the approach that she follows seems to be less comprehensive than that of Neyrey, as she opts for what I would call an exegetical approach that is carefully and systematically applied to the letter and that is further guided by the aim of integrating what is said about God in the letter in a thematic way as she systematically works through the letter. Interestingly she also draws attention to the centrality of God's fatherhood in the letter (like Hays), but she puts it in stronger terms: God's fatherhood is the central quality of God in the letter. Furthermore, she tries explicitly to integrate God's fatherhood with other accents in the letter, namely God's sovereignty as the foundation of the way in which he is depicted, justice as characteristic of his interaction with humankind, and communication as God's dominant activity in the letter. This thoughtful

and logical integration of what the letter reveals about God is a very important contribution.

To summarise: We have four significant studies on God in Galatians. There are many overlaps, but there are also clear differences in what is accentuated. One could summarise the distinct emphases – and I realise that I am oversimplifying! – as follows: Wright: a rather abstract description of God aimed at dialogue with systematic theology; Hays: the underlying story of God’s fatherhood; Neyrey: God as benefactor; and Zimmermann: The Father God and his “sons”.

Let us look at some points of criticism that could possibly be raised.

In the case of Wright’s study, New Testament scholars will probably feel that it is too abstract and too imprecise for what they normally have in mind when studying such a theme in the New Testament. However, as I have pointed out above, the reason for this rather abstract approach is that Wright wants to set up a dialogue with systematic theologians. To which extent he achieved this, I cannot determine as I do not know systematic theology that well. Interestingly, though, one of the reviewers of the book, John Topel (2001:183), raised the objection that the problem with the entire book¹³ is that the authors do not know enough of recent developments in systematic theology to enter into dialogue with systematic theologians:

The problem with this book is that its authors seem innocent of any such systematic theology. Although they speak of biblical and practical theology, they rarely articulate more than the reader’s faith experience or creedal assent ... One seeks in vain for guidance from the theological giants of the evangelical tradition, Calvin or Barth, to say nothing of Pannenberg, Moltmann, or Tillich. But the question will not go away. If exegetes want to take the next step in interpretation theory, they must sit down to the hard work of learning enough systematic theology to engage in interdisciplinary theological conversations. Otherwise we are doomed to write books that ask questions we cannot answer.

13 As pointed out above, Wright’s study forms part of a collection of essays, titled “*Between two horizons: Spanning New Testament studies and systematic theology*”, all of which aim to interact with systematic theology.

With regard to Hays’s contribution, I wonder if a narrative approach is the best approach for studying New Testament letters or theological issues in such letters, as there is obviously a difference in genre between letters and narratives (as we have, for instance, in the case of the Gospels). To (re)construct the story/stories underlying in Galatians may yield an integrated underlying narrative that *could* have been Paul’s story, but, in the end, it is our own story that we create on the basis of the letter. Furthermore, in narrative studies, the identification of the underlying story (*histoire*) is only the first step in a narratological analysis in which *histoire* and *recit* are compared in order to determine how the implied author adapts the *histoire* for ideological – in our case, theological – purposes.¹⁴ In the case of Galatians, though, we do not have the *recit* – only the letter by which Paul is trying to convince his listeners that he is correct and his opponents are wrong.¹⁵ To my mind, (re)constructing the underlying story thus might not be the best way to study Paul’s views of God in Galatians. For example, Hays constructs a chronological narrative, consisting of nine “events”¹⁶ (in narratological terms), but in itself this does not really indicate where the emphasis falls in the letter.

With reference to Zimmermann’s study, I wish to point out a possible danger in letting the perspective on God dominate one’s exegesis. Although she generally does a good job, there are occasions where it seems to me as if her attempts to integrate the exegesis of every pericope in terms of a theme focusing on God lead to some distortion in the exegesis. For example, she summarises the theme of Galatians 4:12–20 as “Paul as mother of the believers and as an angel of God”. In the discussion, she interprets the (maternal) metaphor in Galatians 4:19 as referring to Paul’s important role in the creation of the *familia dei*¹⁷ – to my mind, a theological over-

14 See, for example, Tolmie (1999:87–101) for the way in which temporal relations in Biblical narratives could be analysed.

15 The only exception is Galatians 1:11–2:14 where Paul narrates parts of his life, but this is only one part of the letter, and, even in this instance, he is using his (version of his) life as an argument. See Tolmie (2005:45–99) for a detailed discussion of this issue.

16 It should also be pointed out that the last event identified in the narrative underlying Galatians (“God is the ultimate recipient of glory”; Hays 2002:131) is in fact not an event, but could rather be classified as an actant in terms of Greimas’s actantial system.

17 In her own words: „Dass die Galater zum Glauben an das Christus-Geschehen und damit zum richtigen Gottes-Glauben fanden, ist allein Paulus zu verdanken, der damit

interpretation of the metaphor.¹⁸ The prominence that she gives to “angel” in her thematic summary of the pericope also seems to move beyond the role this hyperbolic expression in 4:14 plays in this pericope. A better approach might be to simply describe Paul’s logic as the letter unfolds, noting the way in which reference is made to God, but without trying to integrate everything thematically during this particular phase of the exegesis. This is better left for the final stage.

Finally, the question should be raised as to whether there is still more to be done. To my mind, there is. Firstly, it has become clear that the approach/methodology that one chooses has a decisive influence on one’s results. Would approaches such as the following – to mention only two – not yield new perspectives that have not been uncovered thus far? God as argument in Galatians (i.e. a rhetorical approach)? Or, what if one’s African context is explicitly brought into play, i.e. instead of reading the letter with a typical Western frame of mind, deliberately reading it from an African point of view? Thirdly, it has become clear that conflicting claims have been made in the studies discussed in this study regarding the importance and interpretation of God’s fatherhood in the letter. This needs further investigation. Finally, it seems as if Wright’s attempt to create a dialogue with systematic theology has actually only scratched the surface and a renewed attempt in this regard is necessary.

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the Grundlage für die Geistverleihung durch Gott, d.h. die Annahme an Sohnes statt schuf’ (Zimmermann 2013:103).

18 I could not find any other exegete interpreting the metaphor in this way. See, for example, Mussner (1977:312–313); Betz (1979:233–235); Dunn (1995:239–241); Martyn (1997:426–431); De Boer (2011:426–431); and Moo (2013:426–431).

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