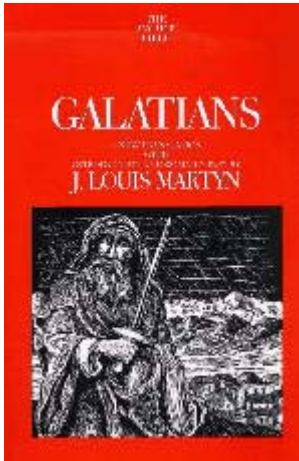


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Martyn, J. Louis

Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

Anchor Bible 33A

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Editor's Introduction

The following discussion of J. Louis Martyn's commentary on Galatians took place at the Pauline Epistles Section of the Society of Biblical Literature in Nashville, TN on November 18, 2000. Four panelists participated in the conversation: John M. G. Barclay, University of Glasgow; L. Ann Jervis, Wycliffe College, Toronto; Beverly R. Gaventa, Princeton Theological Seminary; and Richard B. Hays, Duke Divinity School. Graham Stanton, University of Cambridge, another invited panelist, was unable to be present for the discussion, but his review of the commentary is included here. Prof. Martyn responded to each of the panelists. Charles B. Cousar, Columbia Theological Seminary, introduced and moderated the session.

Two of the panelists had previously reviewed Martyn's commentary in periodicals. Prof. Hays' review appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* [119 (2000): 373-379] and Prof. Stanton's in the *Journal of Theological Studies* [51 (2000): 264-270]. The editor thanks the *Journal of Biblical Literature* and Oxford University Press, publishers of the *Journal of Theological Studies*, for their permission to republish these reviews. In addition, the editor thanks John T. Fitzgerald and Charles Cousar for their efforts in securing these reviews.

Editor's Note: Graham Stanton's review of Martyn's commentary on Galatians appears originally in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 51 (2000) 264-270. RBL has permission

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Martyn's commentary on *Galatians* is a masterpiece of biblical exegesis, historically meticulous and theologically arresting. Like a consummate artist whose attention to his subject is as profound as it is prolonged, Martyn has determined to examine the contours of *Galatians* without distraction from other letters, and to represent its ruggedness without compromise. Rarely since Luther has the radical, polarising, indeed shocking force of Paul's letter been so well appreciated by a reader with a visceral antipathy towards the multiple domestications of Paul. Filtering a lifetime's research, Martyn's commentary is relatively uncluttered by the thousands of minutiae which so often smother the large-scale commentary: he has listened to other scholars with great respect, but woven his dialogue with them into a unitary discourse, which is all the more compelling for its gracious style. The result is, without doubt, one of the classics of twentieth-century New Testament theology, which will instruct, inspire and provoke readers for generations to come.

Martyn's stance towards the letter is explicitly empathetic (p. 42). He reads *Galatians* in the conviction that Paul's urgency is justified: what is at stake here is truth, and not any old truth, but *the truth of the gospel*, that is, God's way of putting the world to right. Committed to Paul's viewpoint, Martyn is disposed to regard the letter as theologically integrated (273): the notorious complications in, for instance, Paul's language about the law indicate the 'remarkable malleability' in his thinking (p. 523), not inconsistency or rhetorical excess. It could have been otherwise. *Galatians* is one of the easiest targets for deconstruction and ideological critique, while in recent years it has attracted many rhetorical and sociological analyses. Martyn's decision to read the text from within, rather than from an alternative, external location, means that some topics in recent debate, concerning the form or function of *Galatians*, are relegated to the margins; but the resulting gain in focus, depth and theological engagement more than compensates for that loss.

Thus Martyn offers a 'strong' reading of *Galatians*: focused, consistent, disambiguating and committed. At times one may feel that the impetus towards consistency strains the exegesis. Does Paul's mention that he went to Jerusalem **κατὰ ἀποκαλυσιν** (2.2) really place his gospel 'under the banner of apocalypse' (p. 151), or is this reference to an inspired decision less theologically weighted (cf. 1 Cor 14.26)? Martyn's reconstruction of the message of the 'Teachers', which plays a crucial role as foil to Paul's theology, also appears sometimes to stray too far into the realm of speculation: did they really, for instance, advocate a 'ladder theology' by which the

Galatians could ascend to the knowledge of God (p. 400)? Here and elsewhere one senses that exegesis and history are being pulled into a certain alignment by the magnetic force of a larger interpretative grid, and it is at this level that I would like to stimulate dialogue with this master of conversation.

The structuring framework of this reading of *Galatians* is a set of mutually reinforcing contrasts: between 'new creation' and 'cosmos', between 'apocalypse' and 'religion', between divine grace and human act. In this last case, Martyn takes the plethora of negatives in 1.1 and 1.11-12, concerning Paul's apostleship and gospel, to indicate a pervasive contrastive pattern: the 'good news' is about the salvific intervention of God, not human choice or deed. It is, of course, of the utmost importance for Paul that the message he conveys concerns the irruption of divine grace: his life-pattern, as well as his theology and ethics, are fundamentally shaped by that truth. But Martyn's sensitivity in this matter seems to me sometimes greater than that of Paul himself, and results in a hyper-Lutheran anxiety in speaking of human acts. 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for rectification', says Paul (Gal 3.6), citing Gen 15.6 (LXX). Martyn's 'translation' becomes an elaborate paraphrase: 'He trusted God, and, as the final act in the drama by which God set Abraham fully right, God recognized Abraham's faithful trust' (p. 294). This seems to me unnecessarily contorted. To be sure, knowing Genesis, Paul knows that Abraham's faith is in response to God's gratuitous promise, but why this anxiety lest trust itself become a 'work'? To gloss this 'trust' as 'faithful' is, I think, misleading: against the common readings of Genesis, Abraham was not, for Paul, 'faithful' (*pace* Martyn's interpretation of *pistewv* in 3.9), but 'believing': there was no prior commitment for him to fulfil in 'faithfulness', simply a promise from God to believe. Similarly, the faith of Christ-believers, the faith 'in' (3.26) or 'into' (2.16) Christ, is not an enterprise in faithfulness, an act that might threaten to be a prerequisite of salvation, simply an acceptance that the son of God loved, and loved me (2.20). This is not perhaps the place to continue the debate about the *πιστις Χριστοῦ* formula (a debate which I consider by no means *closed*), but it concerns me that so much is here invested - and, in my view, unnecessarily - in a particular reading of the formula. Human faith in Christ is here pronounced 'decidedly secondary' to Christ's faith(fulness), in order to preserve the principle that 'it is not by means of something the human being does ... that God has elected to carry out his rectification' (p. 252). I cannot help thinking that if Paul had suffered such anxieties concerning Pelagian theology, he would have expressed himself with greater care. For him, the prior grace of God was not in the least compromised by saying that its purchase on human lives takes effect through human faith in God's Christ-embodied saving power.

Undergirding Martyn's contrast-pattern here is his sense (following de Boer) that there are two apocalyptic schemas at work in the Galatian dispute: cosmological apocalyptic eschatology (where God confronts the evil powers which hold humanity in bondage) and forensic apocalyptic eschatology (where humanity has caused its own plight, and is

offered a 'Two Ways' choice, of obedience or rebellion). The former, Martyn argues, is Paul's doctrine, the latter the Teachers'. I find this contrast over-sharp. In very many Jewish texts of this period the two schemas are intertwined in a wholly unproblematic fashion: one can talk of competing superhuman powers *at the same time* as speaking of responsible human decisions (see, for example, *Jubilees*). And by placing so much emphasis on human submission to powers, Martyn threatens to unbalance the dialectic in Paul's exhortation (*Galatians* 5-6), where believers who are 'led' by the Spirit are still urgently required to 'walk': here (to Martyn's surprise) Paul says that believers have themselves crucified the flesh (5.24; despite 2.19-20), and here, while describing moral characteristics as the fruit of the Spirit, Paul sets before his converts what looks very like a 'Two Ways' choice (6.7-9). Paul's delicate dialectic between divine power and human act (cf. 1 Cor 15.9-10) can be easily misconstrued: I would judge Engberg-Pedersen's *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 2000) to have skewed it heavily in one direction, and Martyn lightly in the another.

The second structural antithesis in Martyn's reading of *Galatians* is that between 'apocalypse' and 'religion'. The first term is arguably present in the text, but the second is certainly not, and one is entitled to ask where it has come from. As the Introduction makes clear (pp. 35-41), the contrast is taken from Käsemann and Bonhoeffer, though its roots lie deeper in Barth and the reactions of neo-Orthodoxy to the late-nineteenth century fascination with *Religion*. I take Martyn's revival of this motif to be equally self-conscious, at a time when the analysis of Paul increasingly conforms to canons set by the study of 'Christianity' and other 'religions'. In Martyn's hands, the 'religion' side of the contrast is associated with (human) tradition, with all distinctions between 'sacred' and 'profane' (whether of people, places or times), and with the ladder of human achievement (pp. 39, 327, 383 etc.). 'Apocalypse' or 'theology', on the other hand, constitutes the *end* of religious distinctions, where God steps onto the scene to call into existence the *new* creation (p. 382). Can *Galatians* really fit into such a mould? Gal 4.10 looks promising, and perhaps 3.28 (though the distinctions there declared obsolete are a mixture of ethnic, social and gender differentiations). But in this letter (not to mention his others) Paul is surely forging the group-identity of a church *in contradistinction from* the 'all' outside 'the household of faith' (6.10). Is it enough to insist that Paul's theology does not allow the church to stand aloof, since God's invasive dynamic impels the church into service of the world (pp. 41, 554)? Could that same claim not be made by other 'religions', who would resist this pejorative depiction of 'sacred times and people'?

My unease here reflects a fear lest this theological stance turn out to be arbitrary, a proof of 'Christian uniqueness' in privately-defined and self-fulfilling vocabulary. I know that such triumphalism would be anathema to Martyn, whose use of this language is designed, I guess, precisely to protest against the church's smug self-satisfaction, against the uncritical acceptance of 'religious experience', and against the hyper-activism which thinks 'church growth' and flourishing 'programs' are themselves proof of value. I fully share what I sense is Martyn's aversion to all such misconceptions of the church's

calling. But the pejorative language about 'religion' still sounds arrogant in our multi-religious environment, and the issue, it seems to me, is not the differentiation of the 'sacred' as such, but what is done with and through this, perhaps necessary, mechanism for representing God's transcendence. If we defined 'religion' in less negative terms, could we not speak of the 'apocalypse' of God's grace as a critical power *within* religion, rather than as its polar opposite?

This question is of fundamental importance in connection with the relationship between Paul and Judaism, an issue which produces an enormous dilemma for Martyn. Rarely has a commentator wrestled so intensely with the question whether *Galatians* is 'anti-Judaic', a question which Martyn insists must be answered in the negative, since the letter is not about Christians and Jews, but concerns two alternative Christian missions: 'tightly focused' on this 'precise setting', it contains no 'theory about Jews' at all (pp. 348, 577 etc.). This is an important observation, which should certainly modify the terms of the debate. Exegetically, it requires insisting that Gal 4.21- 5.1 looks no wider than the Jewish-Christian mission, and the strain in this position is revealed where it necessitates taking 'the present Jerusalem' (4.25) to represent only the church in Jerusalem. But, even if this identification is correct, it must still be noted that Paul here aligns Jerusalem's slavery with Sinai (4.25) and thus surely implies that all those under the Sinaitic law, both Christian and non-Christian Jews, are caught in slavery (as in fact 4.3-5 makes explicit).

The dilemma for Martyn is that his larger schema requires Judaism to fall into the pejorative category 'religion': he even uses the term in his translation of 1.13-14 since Paul 'saw that Judaism was now revealed to be a *religion*, as distinguished from God's apocalyptic and new-creative act in Christ' (164). In what sense does this *not* make Paul 'anti-Judaic'? Perhaps the category 'anti-Judaic' is far too imprecise. Martyn's discussion of this issue on pp.36-37 suggests that because Paul places Judaism in the larger category of 'religion', he is not specifically pitting Christianity against Judaism and thus not 'against the religion of Judaism as such'. But even if one grants this point, it is impossible to deny – and Martyn does not – that Paul's Christology in this letter implies a denial of Israel's understanding of her election (350-51) and undercuts the ethnic basis of Judaism (p. 352). Martyn suggests that if Paul were preaching in a synagogue or a Judean church he would have constructed a sermon 'quite different from the arguments of Galatians 3 and 4' (p. 368): different in form and emphasis, perhaps, but would Paul compromise his apocalyptic gospel, shaped by the crucified Christ? Would it not be more accurate to say that Paul's Christ-focused apocalyptic vision enables him critically to discriminate within (what we call) 'Judaism', discovering promise and faith, as well as slavery and curse? (As this and other letters show, the same discrimination has to be exercised within the church.) In other words, has the construction of this 'apocalypse/religion' antithesis unnecessarily hampered Martyn's proper desire to read *Galatians* in sensitive dialogue with Jews?

Let me provoke our conversation partner with one final point, relating to that third overarching contrast, between 'new creation' and 'cosmos'. I take Martyn's insistence on the 'apocalyptic' dimensions of *Galatians* to represent his concern that we recognise Paul's gospel as encompassing dimensions far wider than the personal self-understanding of the believer: in this his inspiration is clearly derived from Käsemann, whose dispute with Bultmann on this topic has entered a second, and developed, phase in the alternative readings of Paul now offered by Martyn and Engberg-Pedersen. But even if one largely shares Martyn's stance (as I do), one may still wish for greater reflection on the fact that the apocalyptic 'powers' are here depicted in largely this-worldly terms: Sin, Flesh, Law (rather than, for instance, Watchers, demons and Satan). What sort of interpretation does Paul thus give to his apocalyptic inheritance, and why is this partial demythologisation focused so resolutely on the human condition? Although Martyn is right, I think, to resist reductionism at this point, the vagueness with which he employs the term 'cosmos' (in such phrases as 'the cosmos of religion') enables him, like Paul, to retain apocalyptic-sounding language whilst referring to human realities. Would further discussion of metaphor and theology assist us here? If the 'new creation' is characterised by 'faith acting in love' (p. 473; Gal 5.6; 6.15) and is embodied in the church (p. 560), but is *not reducible to either*, what 'more' is it, or can that be expressed only in metaphors? And if Paul's enlistment by Christ entails 'the risen Lord extend[ing] the space of his power by taking up residence' in him (p. 258), what does this actually mean? As Martyn is mostly content to repeat, and extend, Paul's metaphors in this matter, he perhaps regards it as impossible to *translate* this language into terms we can recognise in our current understanding of human existence and action. Although we are now perhaps more aware than ever before that our social and psychic life is subject to influences outside our control, it may be that our contemporary intellectual discourse, with its implicitly closed universe, is unable to accommodate talk of 'powers' like Flesh and (the divine) Spirit. But can we, as Engberg-Pedersen asks, claim to *understand* language we cannot properly translate?

I suspect it is this elusive element in Paul's theology which gives it its enduring fascination. Martyn's commentary on *Galatians*, as one of the greatest readings of Paul, does us the enormous service of keeping such dimensions open and confronting us with a text which retains its power to disturb. Indeed, as I can testify, to read Paul with Martyn is to be challenged at the core of one's being. I doubt that Paul could have hoped to win a more attentive or more faithful interpreter.