

## ***Paul, Allegory, and the Plain Sense of Scripture: Galatians 4:21–31***

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*Abstract* — This article deals primarily with presuppositions associated with allegory/figural reading and its relationship to what we might call the plain sense of Scripture. Paul's allegorical appeal in Gal 4:21–31 will serve as an illustration of the major themes addressed. This article seeks to place Paul's allegorical appeal squarely within the church's exegetical tradition of figural reading. Drawing on the terminology of Brevard Childs, it will query whether Paul's allegorical reading of the Sarah/Hagar story fits within the "family resemblance" of Christian reading of the OT. Two questions are central to this inquiry: (1) What is the relationship between typology and allegory? (2) What is the relationship between the *sensus literalis* and figural reading? Following from these two central questions is a third: Can Paul's allegorical reading be called a "plain sense" reading of the Genesis narrative?

*Key Words* — *Paul, allegory, typology, figural reading, plain sense, Gal 4:21–31, Genesis, Hans Frei, Brevard Childs*

### I INTRODUCTION

A small cottage industry is being built now on Paul's reading of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> During a postgraduate seminar at the University of St. Andrews, my own doctoral supervisor stated in a jocular aside, "Everyone is doing a dissertation on Paul's reading of Isaiah these days." I laughed uncomfortably as I headed back to my desk to continue my research on Paul's reading of

*Authors' note* A version of this paper was read at the NT meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship in 2004. Thank you to David Wenham who chaired the meeting and to my peers there. Also, thanks to Chris Seitz for reading an earlier version of this paper with his keen eye and to Jonathan Pennington for reading the most recent version and giving helpful comments. As a result of the comments from my peer reviewers, this article is much better.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), Florian Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

Isaiah. One can surmise that this type of renewed interest in the NT's reading of Scripture is in some measure due to the revival of interest in biblical theology and theological exegesis in our day, conjoined with a disappointment in flat-footed historical-critical readings of Scripture. Many scholars want to work beyond their myopic field of research with biblical theological/theological exegetical questions in mind. And Paul's reading of Scripture is a good *entrée* into this field of inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

One of Paul's appeals to the Scriptures of Israel continues to hold its juggernaut status, namely, Paul's allegorical appeal in Gal 4:21–31. Just within the past few years several full-length articles addressing Paul's allegory in Gal 4 have appeared. Scholars have, in the past, often looked to Philo and the allegorical practices of the Stoics for historical help regarding Paul's appeal to allegory. Today, the Hellenistic rhetorical treatises of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. offer a fresh context for understanding Paul's allegory.<sup>3</sup> For example, Quintillian seems to be the first-century rhetorician *de jour* to whom some scholars appeal for clarification of Paul's allegory.<sup>4</sup> Others are helpfully drawing attention to Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:27 as the hermeneutical key unlocking Paul's allegory.<sup>5</sup> Paul is reading the Genesis narrative via the lens of Isa 54:1, as the later *haftara* liturgical readings of the Palestinian rabbinic tradition attest.<sup>6</sup> This truncated taxonomy reveals the heightened sense of interest in Paul's allegory in Gal 4.

As these recent pieces attest, Paul's allegorical appeal in Gal 4:24 betrays an approach to the text that does not sit well with many of our cur-

2 Christopher R. Seitz has made a compelling case against identifying Biblical Theology with the NT's reading of the OT ("The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* [ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 76–84).

3 See most recently, Steven D. Mattei, "Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4:21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics," *NTS* 52 (2006) 105.

4 Anne Davis, "Allegorically Speaking in Galatians 4:21–5:1," *BBR* 14 (2004) 161–74. J. L. Martyn's warning about pigeon-holing Galatians into a particular rhetorical model should be heeded. The logic of Paul's gospel functions within its own rhetorical idiom. "The better part of wisdom lies, then, in the thesis that, although it contains passages that partially support both of the major rhetorical analyses (judicial to some degree are 1:17–24 and 2:17–21, deliberative to some degree is 5:13–6:10), the body of the letter as a whole is a rhetorical genre without true analogy in the ancient rhetorical handbooks of Quintilian and others" (J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997], 23).

5 In their respective ways, Martinus C. De Boer, "Paul's Quotation of Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:27," *NTS* 50 (2004) 370–89; Joel Willits, "Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:24b–27: Reading Genesis in Light of Isaiah," *ZNW* 96 (2005) 188–210; D. Mattei, "Paul's Allegory," 114–18. In his very interesting article, D. Mattei roots Paul's appeal to allegory in the rhetorical tradition of the first century and the Jewish practice of reading passages of the Torah eschatologically via the lens of the prophet.

6 D. Mattei, "Paul's Allegory," 114.

rent approaches to reading the OT in its *literal sense*. The sting is somewhat removed when Paul is allowed full membership into the reading practices of the first century. But outside this context, can Paul's canonical voice witness to faithful reading practices in the life of the church?

Related to the uneasy relationship between the text's *literal sense* (defined by certain historical-critical sensibilities) and Paul's appropriation of the text are several concomitant issues calling for clarification. How does Paul's allegorical appeal square with the "plain sense" of the text, whatever this elusive term means? Does Paul's reading fit within what Brevard Childs has recently called "the family resemblance" of Christian OT interpretation?<sup>7</sup> Childs's appeal to "family resemblance" is his attempt at drawing theologically driven hermeneutical and exegetical parameters from the church's long and variegated history of interpreting the OT Christianly. Or put another way, how does the Christian practice of figural reading shed light on Paul's allegorical appeal in Gal 4? These nagging questions about theological interpretation on this side of modernity's failed quest for detached and objectivist readings will be addressed in this piece.

Attention, therefore, will not be given to an exegesis of Paul's allegory in Gal 4:21–31 per se. Our focus is more modest and limited. In this article we will address the questions raised above via two particular queries: (1) what is the relationship between typology and allegory, and (2) what is the relationship between the literal sense and the figural sense of Scripture? Here we will seek to place Paul's "allegory" in the stream of Christian reading of the OT as a constitutive pre-understanding for Paul's particular reading.

## 2. ALLEGORY AND TYPOLOGY

Richard Hays's *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* states that Paul's use of the word ἀλληγορούμενα (a *hapax legomenon* in the NT) should be classified as typology rather than allegory.<sup>8</sup> Paul is dealing with the correspondence between figures past and present rather than timeless spiritual truths.<sup>9</sup> Hays is correct to emphasize the central role that correspondence

7 Brevard Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xi, 299–323.

8 Hays, *Echoes*, 116, in a footnote, though, Hays refers to typology as a subset of allegory. See Di Mattei, "Paul's Allegory," 103–4.

9 It is possible that a development of thought has taken place for Hays on the issue of figural reading. In a recent article, we find an emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between NT and OT ("Can the Gospels Teach Us to Read the Old Testament?" *Pro Ecclesia* 11 [2002]: 402–18), an emphasis not found in Hays's earlier *Echoes of Scripture*. Hays ("Can the Gospels," 405) states that not only does the NT teach us how to read the OT but the OT teaches us how to read the NT as well. Hays now emphasizes that the NT teaches us to read the OT figuratively and retrospectively as a prefiguring of the truth definitively embodied in

plays for Paul's allegorical reading. Similarly, one recalls the enlightening emphasis on correspondence found in Auerbach's *Mimesis*. However, there is a tradition of thinking within the historical-critical school that typology is a legitimate enterprise because of its safeguarding of history over allegory's destroying of history.<sup>10</sup> So typology is germane, while allegory is an aberration.

This judgment rests on a rather complex theological issue, namely, the historicity of the OT texts or the ability of the OT texts to refer to actual events. Therefore, I am using the term "historicity" in the modern sense of referring to the existence of an event or an event's facticity. Allow it to be stated up front that the historicity of the OT documents in the pre-critical tradition did not carry the weight that it does in the modern period. To work within this framework is an imposition of modern sensibilities onto a pre-modern world, namely, the text's referent is to be identified with its historical reality.

Neil MacDonald has offered a judicious critique of Hans Frei's watershed work, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, by stating that Frei's categories (narrative as meaning and narrative as historical reference) are not necessarily the best with which to work.<sup>11</sup> MacDonald, leaning on Plantinga and Wolterstorff, states that the distinction between the "critical" world and the "pre-critical" world was one of epistemic stance. In the pre-critical world, the historicity of the texts was integral to their basic structure and capacity simply to tell a story or make a point. On this side of the Enlightenment, however, positivism's search for "being-in-itself" morphed the historical task into the reconstruction of events as they actually happened.<sup>12</sup> Imbedded in this post-Enlightenment move is an inherent hermeneutic of

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Jesus "Such retrospective reading neither denies nor invalidates the meaning that the OT text might have had in its original historical reality" ("Can the Gospels," 414) Hays ("Can the Gospels," 415) also appeals to Hans Frei's definition of figural reading where both type and antitype flow reciprocally toward one another enhancing the meaning of both. The true meaning or significance of the OT text is not dismembered when read in light of Jesus Christ but is read in its true light. Text and subject matter are not divorced in the divine economy.

<sup>10</sup> For example, G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology* (SBT 22, London: SCM, 1957); R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Neil MacDonald, "Illocutionary Stance in Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 312–28. A similar critique is given by Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 81–82.

<sup>12</sup> See Mary E. Healy, "Behind, in Front of, or Through the Text? The Christological Analogy and the Lost World of Biblical Truth," in *Behind the Text* (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 4, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182–83.

suspicion or, in Troeltsch's terms, the principle of methodological criticism or doubt.<sup>13</sup>

This epistemic stance differentiates "pre-critical" from "critical" interpreters of the Bible. So, for example, if one were to ask Calvin or Augustine whether the Sarah/Hagar story really happened, they would presumably look at the questioner quizzically and say, "This is a biblical story. Are there any legitimate options to its veracity?" With this stated, MacDonald hastens to add that, although the historicity of the text was a part of their basic belief structure, the text's meaning was not to be identified with its historicity.<sup>14</sup> This conflation was a move made in the modern period.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the historicity of the text was assumed in the pre-modern world and was not the defining feature of figural, typological, or allegorical readings of the text, nor could such a thing be used to differentiate them one from another.<sup>16</sup> Paul's appeal to the correspondence between realities is not to be identified with the historical connection between figures; that is, Isaac is a real person and the church is a real historical figure. Rather, the connection is taking place on a theological line of correspondence within the divine economy. Placing this in the context of Galatians, the divine economy is defined as that eschatological moment in which God's covenant promises to Abraham—"in you all the nations will be blessed" (Gal 3:19)—have been actualized by God's dual sending of his Son (4:4) and his Spirit (4:6), and thus overcoming the apocalyptic stronghold of sin (3:22).<sup>17</sup> The correspondence between Isaac and the church is taking place in this eschatological/apocalyptic realm.<sup>18</sup> They *are* historical realities, but

13 Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville Westminster John Knox, 1993), 119

14 See R Ward Holder's examination of Calvin and his Christological understanding of the *scopus* of Scripture (*John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation Calvin's First Commentaries* [Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 127, Leiden Brill, 2006], 139–80)

15 See Brevard Childs's exposition of the move in the modern period to identify the *sensus literalis* with the *sensus historicus* ("The Sensus Literalis of Scripture An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70 Geburtstag* [ed Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend, Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977], 88–92)

16 See John J O'Keefe and R R Reno, *Sanctified Vision An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 19–21

17 See Bruce W Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1998)

18 This is helpfully explained by Karl Barth's statement, "The atonement is history" Jesus Christ inhabited real space and time At the same time, the atonement is "the very special history of God with man" He continues, "The atonement takes precedence of all other history It proves itself in fully responsible attitudes It cannot be revealed and grasped and known without this proof" Or, "[t]he atonement is, noetically, the history about Jesus Christ, and ontically, Jesus Christ's own history" (*Church Dogmatics* [IV/1, Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1956], 157–58)

their correspondence is not to be identified with or safeguarded by their historical connectedness—or with a typology that supposedly feels more confident with this dimension than with allegory.

The Sarah and Hagar story read allegorically is an eschatological reading that brings the literal sense of the text into a larger network of reading where the subject matter of the text is seen to be Jesus Christ (and all that this entails).<sup>19</sup> Or in Hans Frei's words, a figural or allegorical reading of the text is a literal reading of the story in light of the nexus of revelation as a whole.<sup>20</sup> Again, in the context of Galatians this "larger network of reading" takes into account the centrally defining reality for Paul that all the promises to Abraham and his offspring have been and will be realized in Christ (Gal 3:29–4:7). To turn away from this Christological eschatology is in effect to return to Hagar's chains.

The sharp distinction, therefore, between allegory and typology is not necessarily a good one. Andrew Louth states that typology is what the Fathers simply called allegory.<sup>21</sup> The Latin term associated with what we call typology was *figura* and is associated with figural readings. Typology, therefore, is a figural reading that takes into account correspondences (one notes Paul's use of another *hapax legomenon* here, συστοιχέω) between events or people in an eschatological framework.<sup>22</sup> It is a form of allegorical reading or a subset of allegorical reading and is still a useful term but is not to be opposed to allegory. Typology is allegorical or figural reading.

The kind of allegory that made the Antiochene exegetes (and the Reformers for that matter) uncomfortable, according to Frances Young, is the kind of allegory that destroyed narrative or textual coherence.<sup>23</sup> But all pre-critical interpreters, Antiochenes included, read the text, at times, figurally. They were not opposed to what they called the *theoria* or *anagoge* of the text, the higher reading, and they based their *theoria* on the *historia* of the text (this is observed especially in Diodore). But it should be stated again that this *historia* is not history of the modern sort, namely, an appeal

19 This is my rather clumsy way of expressing the overarching implications of Christology for ecclesiology. Instead of opting for an ecclesiological reading over against a Christocentric one (e.g., Hays) of the OT, this phrase emphasizes the danger of abstracting one of these doctrines from the other. In short, Christology is organically linked to ecclesiology yet it operates dogmatically as an overarching category.

20 Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1–37.

21 Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 96–131; see also, O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 20.

22 "Eschatological framework" refers to the canonical reality of biblical texts as they speak beyond their historical particularity to ultimate eschatological realities in God's redemptive economy.

23 Frances Young, "Exegetical Method and Scriptural Proof: The Bible in Doctrinal Debate," *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989): 303.

to ostensive reference or facticity. It is, rather, an appeal to the coherence of the story and the ability of the story to function on its own right exhortatively. Paul's figural reading of the Sarah/Hagar story is not like a certain type of Alexandrian exegesis that tears apart the narrative coherence of the text. Rather, Paul respects the textual coherence of the story, or the way the words go, while recognizing that it has the potential within the divine economy to function figurally as an eschatological indicator of God's future action in Christ.

### 3. THE LITERAL AND FIGURAL SENSE OF THE TEXT

The natural question that flows from this discussion of typology and allegory is, What then is the relationship between the literal story, in our example Sarah/Hagar, and the allegorical reading of Paul?<sup>24</sup> Put in other terms, is a Christian interpretation of the OT from a Christocentric or trinitarian perspective a germane reading of the text itself or an alien imposition?<sup>25</sup>

Without doubt this quickly takes the reader into the realm of theology and *a posteriori* theological commitments. The quest for an "objectively demonstrated" procedure of the neutral sort that can be claimed by both Christian and non-Christian in the competing sphere of ideas and agreed-upon definitions is beyond the scope of defining the relationship between the figural and literal sense. As Dawson states, "The claim that Christian figural reading is a legitimate or even persuasive extension of the literal sense is a distinctively Christian, theological claim, which non-Christians, preserving to the full their non-Christian identities, might justifiably reject."<sup>26</sup> A Christian reading of Scripture, as pioneered and demonstrated by Paul, assumes an eschatological context in which God's redemptive and saving activities have been concretely defined by God's action in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18–19). The overarching divine economy of God, which includes the OT, culminates and is defined by Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, to read the OT as an eschatological indicator of God's actions in Christ is not

24 For Origen, the literal sense was nothing other than "the brute materiality of the words." See J. P. Leinhard, "Origen and the Crisis of the Old Testament in the Early Church," *Pro Ecclesia* 19 (2000): 363.

25. The term "alien imposition" is adapted from Noble's (*The Canonical Approach*, 326) critique of Childs's Christological interpretation of the OT in his *Biblical Theology*. On this issue, see especially, C. Kavin Rowe, "Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002): 295–312, idem, "Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology," *SJT* 56 (2003): 1–26, Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34–39, Robert Jenson, "The Bible and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002): 329–39.

26 John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 174.

27 Ibid., 164.

an alien imposition onto the text. Rather, it is the only proper reading that takes into account the ultimate subject matter of Scripture where the *signum* and the *res*, or the sign and the subject matter, are conjoined.<sup>28</sup>

What then is the relationship between the figural and literal sense of the text? Hans Frei's *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* addresses this fundamental, distinguishing feature between pre-critical exegesis (especially with the likes of Calvin) and critical exegesis. In pre-critical exegesis, typological or figural readings were not conceived of as an imposition onto the text but were viewed as a "*natural extension*" of the text.<sup>29</sup> The literal sense of the text was not, therefore, in competition with the figural sense or theological sense. Both were viewed as intimately and intricately related in an organic fashion.<sup>30</sup>

For example, in a historical-critical framework of thinking, Paul's allegory in Gal 4 would be anything but a literal sense reading of the text. From this perspective, it is in many respects an embarrassment. But Calvin, himself no fan of fanciful allegory, makes very interesting observations regarding Gal 4:21–31. He recognizes that some on the basis of their reading of Gal 4:22 see Scripture as a fertile ground producing a variety of meanings.<sup>31</sup> Calvin affirms the fertility of Scripture, but states rather emphatically, "Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely."<sup>32</sup> So far so good. Calvin seems to be lining up quite nicely with historical-critical readings of Scripture and its appeal to the *sensus literalis*. Remarkably, Calvin continues his comments with a defense of Paul's allegorical reading of Genesis as fully in line with its "natural and obvious meaning":

But what reply shall we make to Paul's assertion, that these things are *allegorical*. Paul certainly does not have in mind that Moses wrote this history for the purpose of being turned into an allegory, but points

28 See especially Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992)

29 Frei, *Eclipse*, 2. See Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), ch. 4; David Lee, *Luke's Story of Jesus: Theological Reading of Gospel and the Legacy of Hans Frei* (JSNTSup 185, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), ch. 3. Both authors trace the development of Frei's thought from a realistic narrative approach to a cultural-linguistic approach with relation to the *sensus literalis*. On the significance of providence and its relationship to Frei's understanding of *figura*, see Mike Highton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 123–54.

30 See Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (ed. R. Lundin, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 131–65.

31 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 134–35.

32 *Ibid.*, 136.



out in what way the history may be made to answer to the present subject. This is done by observing a *figurative* (emphasis mine) representation of the Church there delineated. And a mystical interpretation of this sort (ἀναγωγὴ) was not inconsistent with the true and literal meaning, when a comparison was drawn between the Church and the family of Abraham.<sup>33</sup>

For Calvin, the Sarah/Hagar story read in light of the church is not a departure from the literal sense of the text but is a faithful reading of its plain sense. Why? Because Abraham and the church, in the divine economy, are organically linked. The one flows from the other and in the overarching economy of God are one in the same, only viewed from different sides of the story.

Frei's work traces the breakdown in the modern period between the literal sense and the figural sense of Scripture. This movement within the modern period of distancing the literal-realistic reading of Scripture from the real world resulted in the "collapse of figural interpretation."<sup>34</sup> *In the pre-critical era figural reading was itself a "literalism extended to the whole story or the unitary canon containing it."*<sup>35</sup> In the critical era, however, the figural sense of Scripture became the opposite of the literal sense. A single meaning was now found in the literal sense of Scripture so that figural readings became a "senseless exception" to that rule.

Also, any unity within the Bible's message itself was distanced from the self-contained literal reading of specific texts. In light of this reductionism within critical exegesis, Frei defines the literal sense of the modern period as "grammatical and lexical exactness in estimating what the original sense of a text was to its original audience, and the coincidence of the description with how the facts really occurred."<sup>36</sup> Figural reading, in light of this definition, lost credibility in the modern period as the literal sense became conflated with the *sensus historicus* or *sensus originalis* more narrowly defined.

Frei describes the pre-critical era, with Luther and Calvin as its key exemplary figures, as a time in which literal and figural readings of Scripture were happily wed to one another. Calvin and Luther both affirmed that the Old and New Testaments share a common subject matter, Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

33 Ibid, 136. See David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 108–9. On the continuity between Calvin and medieval biblical interpretation, see Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

34 Frei, *Eclipse*, 6.

35 Ibid, 7.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid, 20.

For Calvin, the internal testimony of the Spirit and the actual words of the texts conjoined as the Spirit illumined the reader to the religious value of the text. This is not an ancillary or peripheral exegetical principle for Calvin but is the proper stance in one's understanding of God as speaking through his word.<sup>38</sup> This conjoining of Spirit and text coupled with an understanding of Scripture's subject matter as Jesus Christ led Calvin to understand the natural coherence between the literal sense and the figural sense with each sense supplementing the other.<sup>39</sup> The literal sense of particular texts set forth the sense of single stories within the Bible, "holding together their explicative meaning, and where appropriate, their real reference."<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, figural reading is a grasp of a "common pattern of occurrences and meaning together."<sup>41</sup> This pattern holds true under the "unitary temporal sequence which allows all the single narrations within it to become part of single narration."<sup>42</sup> *This understanding of single stories as patterns within a larger story was for Calvin not an imposition onto the text but a necessary implication of the overarching redemptive narrative itself.*<sup>43</sup>

Dawson helpfully leads us through the difficulties of understanding the organic relationship between the literal sense and the figural sense in his reading of Frei. He states, "In other words, to say that literal meaning extends into figural meaning is to reject the idea that what is figural must be nonliteral, or that in figural, the literal can no longer be present. Instead, when a narrative is read figurally, the reader stresses a certain feature of the text that differs from, but does not contradict, the feature of the narrative that would be stressed in a literal reading."<sup>44</sup> Calvin stresses that the figures of Scripture do not have a meaning in their own right but are caught up into another reality where they prefigure what is to come.<sup>45</sup> But this

38 Ibid, 22 John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (LCC 20, 2 vols, Philadelphia Westminster, 1960), 174, 5

39 Frei, *Eclipse*, 27 Richard E. Burnett states that though Calvin was concerned with the literal sense of the text, he was by no means a "literalist" ("John Calvin and the *Sensus Literalis*," *SJT* 57 [2004] 12

40 Frei, *Eclipse*, 34

41 Ibid, 34, Calvin, *Institutes*, 2 11 4

42 Frei, *Eclipse*, 34

43 Ibid, 35, Calvin, *Institutes*, 2 11 1, 2 See also Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 100 n. 48, Burnett, "John Calvin and the *Sensus Literalis*"

44 Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 147 Dawson also gives three rules of figural extension (1) A delicate balance must be struck between figure and fulfillment so that the figure is not lost in the fulfillment, (2) A firm connection between the historical reality of both the figure and the fulfillment, and (3) A clear rooting of the figure, the fulfillment, and the larger story they tell in the temporal flow of ordinary historical events, a rooting that does not depend on a nonprovidential, scientific-historical understanding of the historical relation between event (148)

45 Frei, *Eclipse*, 33, Calvin, *Institutes*, 2 11 1, 2 This relationship between the literal sense and the figural sense is observed in Nicholas of Lyra's allowing for two literal senses or a *duplex*

does not mean that this figural extension diminishes or calls into question the "truth and reality" of the person or events depicted in their own time. Rather, "figural extension of literality means that a real person or event has an additional (and, hence, a new) meaning that does not detract from (but is rather the fuller meaning of) its truth and reality previously open to literal depiction."<sup>46</sup> A Christian reading of the OT is, therefore, a reading that takes seriously the literal sense of the text in its unique temporal setting coupled with the reality of this unique temporal setting being caught up into another realm of divinely ordered sequence in which figure and fulfillment mutually correspond to one another and inform one another in an eschatological reality. The figural extension of the literal sense is an organic relationship between text or figure and the reality toward which it points and signifies. A plain sense reading of Scripture would take into account both of these aspects as mutually coinciding with one another.<sup>47</sup>

Coming full circle to Gal 4, Paul brings the Sarah/Hagar story into a larger eschatological domain and reads it Christianly. There is a sense in which this reading can only take place retrospectively in light of God's revealed activity in Christ. Once this confessional framework is observed, however, this figural or allegorical reading of the narrative is warranted. It is not an imposition onto the literal sense of the Genesis narrative but is a reading of this particular narrative in light of the literal sense of the whole redemptive narrative, or what the fathers would call the *skopos* of the Scripture as a whole.<sup>48</sup>

Paul's understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promised seed of Abraham and the church's incorporation into that seed by means of their union with Christ (Gal 3) sets the backdrop for Paul's allegorical reading of Sarah/Hagar. Paul's appeal to the Genesis accounts is not arbitrary but

*sensus literalis* Kantik Ghosh states, "Such a 'literal' sense encompasses both the surface, immediate meaning of the scriptural words as well as the figurative or Christological meaning" (*The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* [Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 45, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 13)

<sup>46</sup> Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 151 Dawson states that Christian figural reading is without question a reading back from the standpoint of the fulfillment prefigured in persons and events, although the glance backward can only be gained by a prior reading forward from figure to fulfillment (155)

<sup>47</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 27, 33 Timothy Ward, citing Smalley, states that Hugh of St Victor (d 1141) had a sophisticated understanding of the literal sense (*Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 32–33) The literal sense for Hugh of St Victor was not reduced to the *word* but to what the text means Therefore, the meaning of the text may be figural and thus this figural reading is the text's literal sense See also Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (3rd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 89, 93, G R Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42–50

<sup>48</sup> See T F Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995)

highly theological as he presses home the question: Who are Abraham's offspring? Isaac is a figuration of the church because of the church's incorporation into Israel's true son, Jesus Christ. Those who are incorporated into Israel's true son are truly free and representatives here on earth of the real Jerusalem, the eschatological Jerusalem which is above. The allegory, theologically and in light of Gal 3, is quite persuasive and an intricate part of Paul's argument in Galatians.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Jerusalem which is above is the real eschatological Jerusalem and is to be identified with the people of God, the Israel of God (Gal 6:16), a people marked and defined by their union with Christ. An appeal of this sort is not neutral. One can only see it from the perspective of faith; however, one can only *really* see this reading as germane in this realm of faith as the children of Abraham. We need not blush at this kind of figural or allegorical appeal to Scripture found in Paul. It is in this light that Paul teaches us in incipient form how to read the Bible Christianly. One reads the Scripture in light of its subject matter and its true subject matter is Jesus Christ and all that this entails.<sup>50</sup> The history of interpretation and its figural appeal to Scripture is a helpful way to understand the "family resemblance" between Paul's reading of Scripture and subsequent appeals to allegory, figuration, or typology properly understood.

49 Following from this is the recognition that Paul's allegory is not *merely* defined as a response to his opponents (*contra* Barrett). So too, Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 207.

50 A difference should be noted between Paul's reading of the Bible and ours. Paul had no NT but was working with an interpretive rule of faith as he approached the OT (one and the same creator God of the sole Scriptures is speaking truthfully by the Spirit and the Son). We, on the other hand, stand before a two testament canon, both OT and NT, defined by a central subject matter. So the organic link or family resemblance between Paul's figural reading of the OT and our reading of the Christian Bible is defined by Paul who is a pioneer of a vocation that is later to be perfected as Christians read both OT and NT as witness to God's action in Jesus Christ.

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