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In This Issue

I am pleased to be joined by a co-editor in the production of *Reformed Faith & Practice*. Dr. D. Blair Smith is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Charlotte campus of Reformed Theological Seminary, having joining that faculty in 2016. I look forward to our partnership in this project.

January 2020 marked the second annual conference of the Paideia Center for Theological Discipleship at RTS Orlando, on the theme of Soul Care. The three plenary addresses from that conference, by Scott Redd, Michael Allen, and Sinclair Ferguson, are found in this issue. The Paideia Center provides leaders and lay people in the church with resources to grow in their understanding of theology, through the reading and discussion of classic texts. More information about the Paideia Center, including regional reading groups and the 2021 annual conference (January 7-8 at RTS Orlando), can be found on the Paideia Center website: [www.paideiacenter.org](http://www.paideiacenter.org).

JRM
Fragmentation and Wholeness in the Mosaic Eschatology

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Fragmentation is a problem in today’s culture, isn’t it? It’s not just in the large intellectual property reboots that we see going on the big screen, reboots that create new universes that may not continue or even corroborate the narrative of the told in the previous universe (e.g. what does Sony’s Spiderman have to do with the MCU? What does Rogue Onie have to do with A New Hope? These are life’s pressing questions). More seriously, however, we see fragmentation troubling us at every level of society. This can happen in new and innovative ways.

Here are a few more significant examples. If you’ve paid attention to the conversation about gender and sexuality these days, you know about this idea that who I am on the inside is not who I am on the outside. that reality has created some kind of irreconcilable conflict or “dysphoria” – the inner person and the outer person being two different people. It’s a common trope in our daily conversation and sort of incipient Gnosticism at that. Fragmentation can show up in other ways, in typical technological innovations. We talk about our virtual lives, maybe our social media handles, and then we compare that to how we are IRL, “In Real Life.” I heard someone refer to it as the “meat world.” How I am in the meat world is very different from how I am in social media. And you start creating a bifurcation of the self between your virtual presence and your physical, carnal body.

It can happen to all of us, particularly those of us in ministry. How can I keep myself sane and protect my family when I go home to my wife and five daughters, the youngest ones still running to the door to greet me, after counseling someone who is undergoing deep personal stress? How do I receive them after just having had that conversation? There’s got to be some kind of blocking mechanism. I’ve got to compartmentalize. It’s a technical solution to a basic problem of finitude. And yet we shouldn’t forget when we fall into those habits, even if something like compartmentalization or multitasking, we set ourselves on a trajectory that we need to be mindful of. It’s easy to become fragmented.

We know where fragmentation came from. It’s no mystery. We can go back to the garden and we can see what happened right after that first moment of fragmentation, where the man and the woman living in perfect harmony with the
kingly-creator turned away to create a little fiefdom of their own. It is at that point that we actually learn something very important about fragmentation in the human: fragmentation regularly and necessarily results in concealment and deceit. Following your first parents, where do you go? You hide, you obfuscate when you are questioned, you blame others. We are going to see these questions come up over and over and over again in Scripture. It’s the problem of fragmentation.

My address is about Mosaic eschatology, and I want to establish that Moses is the first to really articulate the theme of wholeness as such. He’s the first one to give a clear explication of wholeness. And yet as soon as he does, we see the doctrine reified and reiterated over the course of redemptive history. What I’d like to is lay out a few bullet points on how the doctrine develops in redemptive history. We will start with Moses’ first articulation of this in Deuteronomy 6. We’ll trace it up primarily through the prophet Jeremiah, because the prophets give us a good trajectory on how to go with this. Prophets are in many ways the connective tissue between the Old and the New.

Then we’re going to end up with the gospels, in particular the gospel of John, that we will make a few stops in the Synoptics. I am taking as a model what I would call just an apostolic hermeneutic, the notion that the Old Testament speaks naturally and organically to the New, and that the New Testament gives us eyes, particularly eyes of the risen Christ through which we can read the Old.

This approach has been most recently articulated in popular form by Richard Hays in his book Reading Backwards, and he has expounded on it at length elsewhere. It’s been received as somewhat of a new idea or a new approach to hermeneutics, and yet I would argue it’s actually been with us for quite a long time.

Hays writes, ”I want to suggest to you that we will learn to read the Scripture rightly only if our minds and imaginations are opened by seeing the Scriptural text and therefore the world through the Evangelists’ eyes.” 1 He’s speaking primarily of the Gospels in this case. In other words, we learn to read the Old Testament by reading backwards from the Gospels in the New Testament as a whole, and at the same time we learn how to read the Gospels by reading forwards from the Old Testament. So we’re going to start chronologically with Moses and work our way up to John 17, and then we’re going to stop, pivot, and walk our way back to Moses again at the end.

Deuteronomy 6

Let us go ahead and begin with Deuteronomy 6. One thing I want to lay out early on is that this emphasis on wholeness is connected very closely to the human love of the divine. Worship is the way in which we are made whole. It’s one of the primary ways in which we are unified as humans in the worship of the Lord, and that is through the love of the living God who has redeemed us. But that love begins in the inner person. It extends outward to the whole of the person and then even beyond the person, as we might say. I realize the term “person” has problematic implications if understood in a technical philosophical sense. I am, however, using it in a casual way, in a common register, and not in the philosophical sense. I could say “self,” I might say “individual,” but it moves beyond the whole of the individual to that individual’s effect in the world around them. As a matter of fact, I’m going to argue if my interpretation of the shema in Deuteronomy 6 is correct, then it is actually Deuteronomy 6 that Jesus is citing when he says where a person’s treasure is there their heart is also. The logic of the shema undergirds to that kind of saying. As a result, the human life is never described as an ancillary or secondary arena in which the love of God ought to find expression, but rather as an arena that is inextricably connected to the love that one has for God in the heart. To paraphrase Abraham Kuyper, when it comes to worshiping the Lord, there is not one square inch of the human life over which the Lord God of the shema does not declare “mine!”

The astute reader of the Scriptures will note that this passage in question, Deuteronomy 6, falls within the beginning of a section dealing with covenant stipulations as a whole. Stephen Kaufman, the Jewish scholar, is correct when he argues that what we have in the Ten Commandments is really a table of contents for the rest of the book of the law will continue all the way up roughly to about Deuteronomy 26, and that understanding of the book’s outline would locate the shema under the section dealing with the first commandment. In other words, this

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passage is articulating how it is that we are to worship this one and whole God who exists alone. The *shema* begins, “Hear, Israel.” (Deut 6:4) Listen, Israel. The word *shema* is really just the imperative of the word verb. Then what follows: “The Lord is our God. The Lord is one. That’s probably the most common translation, grammatically, reading it with two verbal clauses. The structure does allow for other translations, like, “The Lord our God is Lord alone.” All of the possible translations are still really articulating two key ideas. The first one is this: Yahweh, and I’m going to use that word, not because that’s I’m committing myself to that vocalization of the name, but because we have to recognize we are dealing with what in the Hebrew Bible is treated as a proper noun, that Yahweh is our God. But not only that, he is of singular nature.

Notice we’re articulating two things about him. One is this kind of genitive relationship that he is our God, and secondarily, that He is one or He is singular. So we have to ask the question, how is it that the Yahweh is our God? The genitive relationship can be described in a variety of ways, it could be instrumental. It can be possessive. It could be one of make up or containment or something like that. How is the Lord our God? Well, can’t be that we own him. It can’t be that he we possess Him. As a matter of fact, this is a common accusation against the idolaters. The prophet highlights this in Isaiah 44:9-22. He keeps coming back to this picture of the idol maker. There he is in his work shed and he’s sculpting or carving away at the idol. And he makes it. He forms it. And then he puts it up on his mantelpiece and he says, you are my maker and bows down before him. That’s an Ancient Near Eastern joke. Nevertheless, how can he say to the thing he just made you’re my maker? You own these things, these are your possessions, you can throw them on the ground. You can’t do that with Yahweh. We don’t possess Him. But how is He our God? Of course, we know from reading the rest of scripture, particularly starting with the with the book of Exodus. Yahweh is our God in the sense that we have a special relationship with him. He is our covenant God. He is bound himself to us. So when we say the Lord is our God, we’re saying not that we own Him, we’re saying not that we possess Him, or that we have some kind of claim to make on His life against His will. We are saying rather that He has bound Himself to us in covenant. By the way, this immediately precedes the section where Moses says that the Lord did not choose Israel because she was great (Deut 7:7). It’s not like Israel earned this relationship. The Lord chose you because you were the least. The Lord chose her because you were the smallest of the nations. Nothing esteemed Israel to God. But guess what, Moses is saying, “He’s still our God. He’s our covenant lord.”
Moses makes another theological statement. He is our God and He is Lord alone. This is typically used as a prooftext arguing for monotheism. The passage does give proof to that, but is not just doing that. This is not merely a monotheistic versus a polytheistic point to be made. Monotheism is an innovation, and I mean that in a good way. It is one of the redemptive-historical developments of the Scriptures, like the Creator-creature distinction. You don’t find it anywhere else in the ancient world. Even if you argue that there’s only Adonai, there’s only the Lord, you still have another issue that we don’t explicitly think about so much anymore today. It is the question of whether Yahweh always the same? In other words, if I go to Peor and worship Yahweh there, and He says no to my request for a son, then I can go to the Yahweh cultic center in the next town over and ask for a son there. That is the kind of thing that you find nonbiblical literature about. A person goes to temple and asks for a son and Baal said no. So what does he do? That Baal said no. Now he has to go down to Hebron because there’s a Baal there, too. You have Baal of Peor and you have Baal of Hebron; you have Baal of Ekron and you have Baal of wherever else. You can go to the different Baals and you might find a different response because the deities have different jurisdictions.

This, of course, is tied to this pagan belief, one that is deeply polytheistic, that deities represent natural and national interests. The story of Abraham is, in many ways, a story about him slowly becoming disabused of the idea that God operates in this manner. Abraham is called out of Ur by this deity, he arrives in the Land, and he finds that God rules there. And so when he goes down to Egypt, he is naturally worried about the Egyptian pharaoh, which leads him to say, Sarai is not my wife. She is my sister (kind of a half-truth because she’s a half-sister, Genesis 12). What is he thinking there? He seems to believe God can’t protect me here in Egypt. His protection, His powers are situated back in Canaan. But now that he is in Egypt he learns this astonishing truth, that the Lord is Lord in Egypt, too (Genesis 20). This is the lesson taught over and over again throughout the scriptures. Our God does not have jurisdictional limitations. He’s one God. Yahweh in Ur is the same as the Yahweh in Canaan and the same as Yahweh in Egypt, Gerar, Goshen, and Babylon. He reigns at the bottom of the sea, the prophet Jonah would pipe up and say.

Notice the logic of the shema. The Lord is our God. He is ours. He is our covenantal God. We are bound to him and He is one. Therefore, we should respond
accordingly; we should respond in like kind. “Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength.”

Notice, again, there are two aspects of the command that correspond to the two divine attributes described above. There is what you are supposed to do and there’s the nature in which you’re supposed to do it. You’re supposed to love. That corresponds to our covenantal relationship with the Father. We’re supposed to love. But we’re supposed to love him as He is. Because He is one, we are to be one and singular, or we might say that we ought to be whole in our love for Him. We’re called to love the Lord, our God, responding to the covenantal relationship that we have with Him. That love should find expression across the whole of the worshiper, in the heart and the soul, and with all strength.

We have these three parts of the human life, heart, soul, strength, that are used as place holders to describe the extent to which we are to love God. The first part, the lev. The lev, which is commonly translated the heart: “Love the Lord, your God with all of your heart.” This raises the question, what is the heart? Apart from several biblical accounts that deal with actual physical death (1 Sam 25:37; 2 Kings 9:24), the Hebrew word lev, which is translated “heart,” does not typically refer to the actual human organ, but rather to the inner space of a thing (“heart of the sea” Exod 15:8; “heart of heaven” Deut 4:11) or the inner space of a person. When used to describe the inner parts of the human life, “heart” often refers to the general cognitive and volitional capacities of the person (in the Hebrew lexicon there was not a clear distinction between heart and mind as in the later Hellenistic sense or much later Western rationalistic sense). Emotions, desires, and human will all emit from the heart of a person.

When Hannah’s prayer is heard, her heart rejoices (1 Sam 2:1). When a person fears, his heart “goes out” (Gen 42:28) or “falls” (1 Sam 17:32). Of course, this ties in with our modern use of the word heart; we think of it as the seat of the emotions today. What was interesting, actually, in the Old Testament, as you keep reading, you realize that heart is also used to refer to cognitive functions and intellectual psychological endeavors. It holds cognitive functions as well, storing up the wisdom

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that guides the sage (1 Kings 3:12; 2 Chron 9:23; Prov 16:23), and is the source of plans and consent, as in “setting one’s heart on something” (of the Lord, Deut 10:15; Job 7:17; 34:14; of humans, 1 Chron 22:19; 2 Chron 2:14; 19:3; Ezra 7:10).

Finally, the heart provides the moral compass from which a person acts in the world either for good, Job 11:13, or for evil, Jeremiah 17:9. Your heart can be bent against God. Again, we ought not to look to it for a fine distinction between the emotional and rational faculties of the human. In the Old Testament, typically speaking, whether you’re talking about the mind or the emotions, whether you’re talking about reason or the emotions, this term heart is used. It is really and truly the inner part of the person. Such distinctions do occur in the New Testament, however, as might be the case in Jesus’ use of the Shema in his own teaching (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). In each of these cases, the word “mind” (dianoia) is added to passage, possibly as an exposition of the word “heart” according to Hellenistic norms. Furthermore, the conjoining of thoughts and desires in the one category of the heart can be found in Hebrew 4:12, where the “thoughts/intentions of the heart” are listed as one of three parts of a person, the other two being “soul/spirit,” “joints/marrow.” The heart is the seat of the inner person, the core of their inner life out of which the rest of their existence springs.

Now we move on from this inner person, this thing that’s at the core of us, we might even say the person who we are on the inside. It is the inner person who where I take counsel. And yet it’s not my outer person. It’s not the words necessarily that I’m saying. It’s not the things that I’m doing. It’s not the clothes that I’m wearing. But the Lord calls also those things to be directed towards his love as well. Notice what happens when we move to the next word. We’re supposed to love God with all of our heart and we’re supposed to love him with all of our nefesh. The word nefesh (translated “self” in my translation, but commonly translated “soul” KJV, ESV, NIV, JPS and more fittingly as “body” by Robert Alter) speaks to the person, the self, perhaps the whole of the living person as a person. Like “heart,” this term can refer merely to the inner parts of a person, as in the feelings, conscience or appetite, a meaning derived from its basic sense of “throat” or “breath,” but it is here disambiguated from the heart, which has led to the use of “soul” that is common in modern English translations of Deut 6:4-5. The term can also be used to refer to the whole of a person, the personality or the self, and is found in reflexive constructions with the meaning “to do something to oneself” (Num 30:5; 1 Sam 18:3; Isa 53:10). Thus, the “self” can refer to the whole of the person as they are, including the body. If the heart refers to the inner person, the soul refers to the whole of the person.
including the outer body. The word “soul” is not a bad translation as long as we don’t think that it merely means something spiritual. It can be used synonymously the word *ruach* or “spirit,” but it is also used for the human in ways that can’t be taken as merely spiritual. As a matter of fact, I would say this use of the word “soul” that we find in the King James and still continue to find in later translations is probably closer to the way we use the word is used when we talk about a ship sinking or a plane going down and we say there are 140 souls on board. We’re not saying just they were spiritual beings. We are not just talking about their spiritual selves; we are talking at the whole of the person. Interestingly, in his recent translation of the Hebrew Bible Robert Alter translates *nefesh* as “body.” I think that’s getting pretty close to how it’s being used here. I’ll come back to that in a minute. Then we come to the last word: *m’od*. Love the Lord, your God with all of your *lev*, *nefesh*, and with all of your *m’od*. Now, *m’od* is a difficult word, but that is not because it is uncommon. It is actually used regularly in the Hebrew Bible. The problem is it is always used as an adverb. And that adverb means something like “very.” So our literal translation of Deut 6:5 could be something like: love the Lord, your God with all of your heart and all of yourself and all of your “very.” There’s one other place in the Bible where it’s used as a noun in this way, and that is when Josiah is described as following the shema faithfully (2 Kings 23:25), so that passage doesn’t help us very much. Interestingly, comparative Semitics does not help us either. We can’t go to Ugaritic or Akkadian to find some use of the word that sheds a light on what’s happening here.

So what we really have to do is go to the ancient versions of the Bible. We have to go look at the Old Greek, the Aramaic Targumim, the Syriac translations, so that we can see how this word was understood by ancient translators and the communities that received the text? When we turn to the old Greek, for instance, we find the word which you’ll know even if you don’t know Greek, the word *dunamis*, the word from which we get the English words “dynamite” and “dynamic.” The Greek word *dunamis* can mean “power” or “might,” but it is not limited to a kind of physical might. It can point to an abstract might or abstract power. Mark and Luke, interestingly use a word with similar meaning *ischus* (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27), which has a broad semantic overlap with *dunamis*. Both words have the sense of power in abstraction, though they can also be used to talk about power that has effect in the physical world, as in cases like Exod 12:41 where “power” (*dunamis*) is used to refer to the divine army, or in Num 2:4-28, where the same word is used to refer to the Israelite encampments. Likewise, in the case of Gen 49:3, “might” (*ischus*) is used to refer to a firstborn child; in Lev 26:20, the same is used to refer to efforts to farming the land; and in Deut 8:17,
it refers to one’s might in multiplying property. We will see that this last point is 
important.

Early Aramaic commentaries on this passage, known as the *targumim*,
translate Deut 6:5 in a way that corroborates this idea of “strength” referring to the 
effect of the person in the world around them. The earliest of these, *Targum Onqelos*, 
renders the strength explicitly as “property,”⁴ while *Targum Neofiti* renders it with the 
well-known (but not necessarily pejorative!) Aramaic word *mammon* meaning 
“money.” Finally, the Syriac translation reflects similar precision in interpretation 
with the term *qanin* meaning “possessions.” So there’s a strong case to be made from 
the comparative translations that this last word *m’od* should be translated, something 
like your power or your property. In one of the Aramaic translations the word’s 
used to refer in particular to movable property. We do not make distinctions these 
days often about movable versus immovable property (this distinction is, however, 
something like “liquidity”), but it is a big deal if you’re a nomadic community. This is 
the property that you can take with you. There is a connection between these 
meanings. Our power is often found in the things that we have control over. There are 
English words with similar meaning, like the words “estate” or “capital”. The word 
*m’od* refers not just to what you own materially, but it is your influence and your 
effect in the world.

We might also use the word “property,” but in the sense of your intellectual 
property, creative property, relational property, or maybe psychological or political 
capital. This is your ability to affect and have control in the world. If this is true, then 
what Moses is saying is that we are to love the Lord, our God with all of our self. But 
that doesn’t just mean you individually, it means your inner self. In other words, you 
can’t hide away your secret thoughts and act like your inner self is not under the 
control of the Lord or under the jurisdiction of the Lord. This includes your body. 
You can’t say, “Well, my body is passing away. It doesn’t matter what I do with it.” 
You can imagine a few Bible verses that address that kind of mindset (1 Cor 6:19). 
God also cares about what you do with your capital, with your estate, with your effect 
in your world. That is, in an important sense, a part of you. And the Lord also requires 
that your capital to be devoted to the love of him. In other words, the Israelites

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Hopkins University, 2002), 351; Sokoloff. “ Readonly,” 311.

entering into covenant with the Lord are not meant to dwell on the heart, self, and strength as discrete, independent parts but rather on the whole, the entirety of human existence. The heart—self—effect/strength dynamic describes can be expressed as concentric spheres emanating out from the inner person to the world around them.

In the immediately following passage, Moses unpacks these words for us. What does he say right away? “And therefore, these words shall be on your heart” (Deut 6:6-9). You’re supposed to bind them to your body. This was understood as a metaphor, that when you bind the law to your hand, it means that the law should affect everything you do, and when you bind it to your frontlets, it’s talking about how the law affects the way you see the world. You are looking through the word of God as you look at the world. But you’re also supposed to talk about it with your children. Talk about it when you’re out on the way, when you are on the road, not just when you are in your household. This is not merely a private faith. You are called to mark it on your door posts and on your gate posts. Everything that you have should be devoted to the love of the Lord.

Jeremiah

Moses sets this trajectory and it is a trajectory that becomes one of the hallmarks, one of the diagnostic tools for the rest of the Old Testament, not just the Deuteronomistic histories, so named because they’re so influenced by the theology of Deuteronomy, but throughout the prophets. I would draw your attention to Jeremiah. Jeremiah, of course, is deeply influenced by this idea of the shema and of Deuteronomy, the book of the law. We know that he was operating as a prophet when the book of the law is found again.
Jeremiah is now the book of the law and told to interpret it and apply it in the Josianic reforms. As a result, we should not be surprised that Jeremiah is very interested in the content of the book of Deuteronomy or that he cites it throughout his own prophetic corpus. The *shema* presents us with one of the constituent ideas behind Jeremiah’s message. When he accuses Israel of turning back to the idols that Josiah had cleared away, he says, "You loved me, but not with your whole heart" (Jer 3:8-10), which is a reference to the immediate reversal of the Josianic reforms during the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachim following the his death of Josiah. Deuteronomic language of the heart is evoked elsewhere in the oracles of Jeremiah. The hearts of the Judahite community are described as “uncircumcised” (4:4; cf. Deut 10:16). Their hearts are “unwashed” (4:10-14); their hearts are “stubborn and rebellious” (5:23-24).

The prophet gives his temple sermon in Jeremiah 7, what does he say? He calls the popular slogan, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,” deceptive because it covers over a false inner belief Their mouths say it, but their hearts do not believe it, and their actions, their estate, and their effect in the world does not reflect it. And therefore, those words are deceitful for you because they mean your judgment, not your blessing. But, he says, if you amend your ways and return to me, what with your whole heart again, another metonym for the whole *shema*. This is Mosaic, Deuteronomic language. If you returned to me with your whole heart, I will let you stay in this place. For Jeremiah, the restoration from exile is going to be marked by wholeness.

In perhaps one of the most well-known passages of Jeremiah, and a favorite of Bible verse embroiderers everywhere, is the Jer 29:13, where the Lord sets the conditions of the restoration from exile: “If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with your whole heart.” Again, this whole-hearted love pursuit seems to set the condition for the “finding of the Lord” in exile (and this closely echoes Deut 30:2; in which the restoration is similarly conditioned upon a remnant’s obedience to the *Shema*).

So, for Jeremiah, the exile is a result of Judah’s poor observance of the Shema and the restoration from exile will be is marked by the righteous remnant’s return to whole hearted love required by the Shema (Jer 24:7). In Leviticus 26and Deut- 30:1-2, the notion that restoration will come to an end when the people return to the Lord in repentance. Jeremiah articulates repentance as both a turning away from sin, and as a seeking the Lord with your whole heart.
As a matter of fact, this whole-hearted repentance is what we’re still waiting for as the Old Testament comes to a close. If we imagine redemptive history as a play and the intermission is about to begin, we might see Nehemiah on his knees in a darkened room, maybe a spotlight on him alone, praying. And these are the last historical words of the Old Testament, Nehemiah praying “Lord, don’t forget about us.” The restoration project in 536 B.C was not a success, and so the people must await the true coming of the kingdom. The curtain closes. The intermission begins.

**New Testament**

And as the curtain opens on the New Testament, depending on which gospel you’re reading, you come upon characters like John the Baptist performing a baptism of repentance to usher in the new eschatological day of the Lord. We should focus in on one aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus is the true Israel. He’s the one who loves the Lord who’s God with all of his heart, self, and worldly effect, and now Israel is forgiven and brought into restoration by being united in him.

Matthew begins this retelling of Jesus’ life as Israeliite history when Jesus comes out of Egypt following the Herodian persecution. Matthew connects Jesus to Israel by referring to him as God’s son in fulfillment of Hos 11:1 (Matt 2:15). If we go back to Hosea 11:1, we have to ask, about whom is the prophet talking? He is talking about Israel being restored from exile as if it is a new exodus. Matthew is citing this passage to indicate that this new exodus is taking place, with Jesus standing in for Israel. We should note that Jesus shortly after goes into the waters just Israel did (the Apostle Paul speaks of the Red Sea as baptism, 1 Cor 10:1-2). As he emerges, God marks him as “my son” (Matt 3:17). In its Matthean context, the language of “son” is covenantal language, again drawing attention to Jesus as True Israel, which is made clearer as continues Israel’s journey by stealing away to the wilderness for a period of forty days, where he succeeds in the trials that Israel failed in her own wilderness wandering. As a result, he returns to the Land, entering from the east, just like Israel as she enters in

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6 Familial language such as son and child (as is husband and wife) has precedent in the Old Testament references to covenantal relations (Exod. 4:22; Deut 1:31; 8:5; Hos 11:1; Ezekiel 16). See also Frank M. Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 3-21. See also G.E. Wright, “The Terminology of the Old Testament Religion and Its Significance,” *JNES* 1 (1942), 404-414; J.W. McKay, “Man’s Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher—Son/Pupil Relationship,” *VT* (22 (1972), 426-35.
Conquest. In Christ’s conquest found in Matthew, however, he arrives first in the northern kingdom bringing the light of restoration to those who went to darkness first (Isaiah 9:2). As True Israel retakes the Land, he announces, “the kingdom is at hand” (). Finally, we have the Israelite who has run the race. Finally, we have the Israelite who love the Lord, his God with all of his heart, with all of his self and with all of his worldly effects.

And as he is about to be betrayed, Jesus lifts up a prayer on behalf of those who are in him, who are united in him. So we turn to John, 17, the high priestly prayer. And there we find Jesus turn his interest to his people. He begins by praying for the disciples, by lifting up the disciples and praying for the suffering that awaits them as they will go out now and be proclaimers of the of the of the gospel. And then he turns his interest to another group. He says I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe because of their testimony. He has progressed from the apostles to the Christian church. He’s talking about us.

As he lifts up that prayer, he is actually expositing the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6. Notice what he prays, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21). Notice that articulation of God’s oneness now being updated to account for the revelation of the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Richard Bauckham is one of the only New Testament commentators who I found who recognizes that this is a citation of the *shema*. Jesus is clarifying his relationship to the Father in light of a common Old Testament creed. God is not now two, and yet, he is restating the ancient creed to account for the reality of the second person of the Trinity.

But notice what Jesus does there. He does something that Moses couldn’t do. Moses could merely assert that the Lord is our God and that the Lord is one. And only by imperatives could he require us Israel love the Lord God with the whole heart, soul, and strength. The prophet Jeremiah receives this command but points us to a new arrangement (Jer 31:31-34) one in which the law will be placed on your heart, that the Lord will put the law in your heart. What Moses commanded us to do, Jesus is now accomplishing the means by which it can take place. Notice what he’s doing, the second person of the Trinity and the first person of the Trinity are here in

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7 There are other such echoes of Deut 6:4-5 in the New Testament, such as 1 Cor 8:6 and Eph 4:4-7.

conversation. The Son asks the “Father make them one, let them be partakers of our communion. Let them be one as we are one.” What Moses could command, Jesus accomplishes.

The rationale for such unity is love, or rather so that the world might see that you have loved me and love them (John 17:26). Just as in Deuteronomy 6, the oneness of the Lord requires oneness of the people. Now we find also that that is to bring about a form of love and response not only of humans to the Lord, but the divine love of the Father for his people. In this Deuteronomic logic, this Mosaic eschatological theme of wholeness is fulfilled in Christ. It is accomplished in Christ’s intercession for us here, but also in him going to the cross and taking upon himself our sins that we might be, as it were, receiving our judgment in him and we might receive his blessing, his reward, by our union with him.

Moses establishes this eschatological trajectory, this notion of wholeness that we are called to. In the manner of the law/gospel distinction, what we are called to in the Law, is accomplished in Christ and applied to us. grounds upon which it can take place until Christ comes and accomplishes his work on the cross. So let me posit this then. If it’s true the Son asked of the Father, “let them be partakers, let them be one as you and I are one.” Will the father forsake the Son? Will he reject the requests that he’s made?

The wholeness that we are called to in Moses, that Israel regularly failed in throughout redemptive history, that Christ has accomplished for us so that we might be counted as part of the true vine, as part of Israel. That wholeness that we’ve been called to is now ours in Christ, and yet we are also called in our sanctification now to repent unto our wholeness. Our repentance must have a direction. Repentance is not just a turning away from sin, it’s not just a self-loathing. It cannot just be a sort of recognition of how terrible things are. It isa repentance towards something. It’s towards the wholeness that we have in Christ. Now, of course, that journey is measured in lifetimes, not in days or weeks. There will be moments when you see wholeness accomplished in your life overnight. In some struggle, trial, doubt, you find wholeness. You may experience it. You may hear stories of people in their conversions see lifelong besetting sins conquered in the course of a few hours. You’ll see other people who are long-suffering, faithful saints who will die never having found relief from a temptation that dogged them their whole lives. See, wholeness is a journey that we are all on. But it’s a positive direction that we yearn towards. While it is also something that has been given to us by our union with Christ.
In John 17, Jesus does not explicitly mention the role of the Spirit. It does come later, not only in Christ’s teaching about the Spirit, but in the fact that he has to ascend to the Father because he has to send the Advocate. It is the Spirit that gives us our wholeness that unifies us. The unifying power of the Spirit that is, as Paul calls it, the Spirit of Christ. And we are unified in him, not merely sharing the same spiritual DNA as we do with one another because we are sharing the same spirit, but because we share the same Lord. We’re united in our allegiance to the Lord that makes us whole. Not only as individuals, but as a group.

One last point: this passage flips our understanding of typical Old Testament--New Testament relationships. Typically it is the Old Testament that teaches from a the corporate perspective and the New Testament that has more of an individualistic teaching. But in this case, it’s the Old Testament that has the individualistic teaching. Deuteronomy speaks to the individual: write it on your hands, put on your hands and frontlets, talk about with your children. The wholeness of the *shema* is very individualistic. Yet Christ takes the call to wholeness in his reiteration of it in his prayer, and he applies it corporately that we as a group would be one joined together in the Spirit of Christ, which is a Spirit of wholeness.

We ought not make too much of the corporate/individual distinction, because of the fluid nature between the two throughout the Scriptures, particularly in the Psalter. The corporate concern of Jesus is significant in the way pervades the whole of his prayer in John 17. Here he speaks of all of his church as one, perhaps as his bride, the beautiful whole that is offered to him as his inheritance. We should be encouraged to know that our Savior on the night he was betrayed thought of all of us and prayed for our wholehearted love.
Sources of the Self: The Distinct Makings of the Christian Identity

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“This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the word of God. I boldly confess my mind is alert, my heart is receptive; I’ll never be the same. In Jesus’ name.” These words speak a blunt and beautiful word, namely, that the Bible reveals who we are, what we have, and what we can do; that this revelation deserves alertness and receptivity; and that all these things change us in Jesus’s name. It’s best said – I have to say – with a big, implacable grin. That is right. This confession comes from the lips of Joel Osteen, which perhaps reveals that committed attentiveness to biblical teaching about the self is no straightforward and simple matter. Who does the Bible say I am? How does it do so? To what effect? These questions warrant our attention. Today I want to draw your attention to the sources of the self or, more specifically, the distinct makings of the Christian identity as we learn from Holy Scripture.

My analysis will proceed by attending to four aspects of Christian anthropology. First, the created self will be considered, so that the original design for human nature might be appreciated as a fundamental and continuing baseline for human existence, a backdrop for human pain and lament, and a map for any human reorientation. Second, the crooked self will be described, so that we can discern the shape of sinful being and the ways in which sin disfigures the dignity of created human nature and depraves every nook and cranny of our being today. Third, the resurrected self will be brought forward for reflection, in order that the gift of new life in Jesus Christ and its consequences for human selfhood may be seen in their brilliance. Fourth, the transfigured self finally warrants attention, that the God of the gospel’s ultimate purposes in transforming, sanctifying, and eventually glorifying redeemed humanity will have their sway over the definition of human nature.

In so doing I am presenting what may appear to be a contemporary variant of an approach that goes back to Augustine himself and that has had a prestige throughout the tradition, namely, the fourfold state of humanity. And yet this is not simply a narrative sketch of redemptive historical moments à la the fourfold state – creation, fall, redemption, final restoration – but a fourfold attentiveness to aspects of anthropological teaching that are pertinent here and now. Whereas the traditional fourfold nomenclature serves to describe epochal history in its movements, here aspects of present reality are explored in nonreductive ways that involve tending to varied, irreducible depictions of the human and Christian self. In each case I gesture to a range of scripturally pertinent passages but linger over one text at greater length.

The following exposition is admittedly schematic and should surely be expanded in a number of ways. Nonetheless, the point in turning to four aspects of Christian teaching regarding the self is to prompt breadth and range in our self-perception. We are prone to meander toward myopia, taking up one aspect of biblical anthropology (whether its created integrity or its sinful depravity or perhaps its Christological redefinition) as if that sufficed. Just as some might complain of putting God in a box, so we can put the human self in a box by tidily and narrowly suggesting that some element of biblical teaching suffices to describe the whole terrain. In the face of such temptations, Oliver O’Donovan has suggested the metaphor of

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3 David Kelsey has suggested a threefold way in which humanity is presented in Christian theology (via creation, reconciliation, and eschatology), though I believe that more can be said regarding their connections than he suggests; see Kelsey, Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology, vols. 1-2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009). Taylor describes three sources of emerging modern selfhood (inwardness, affirmation of ordinary life, and an expressivist notion of nature as a moral source) which impinge upon one another, to which a fourfold Christian reply ought to be offered.
“wakefulness” to describe this recurring call to attentiveness that is given the church.4 Theology commits itself to that wakeful attentiveness to the breadth of God’s Word and its interconnections, cognizant that we are all prone to myopia of one sort or another. To be alert to the totality of biblical teaching about the self – not just the self in other eras yet to come or long past, but the self here and now – we must pay attention to these four aspects of Christian anthropology.

The First Aspect: The Created Self (Genesis 1)

Christian anthropology begins with creatureliness. We are created by the triune God, the maker of heaven and earth. He speaks, and humans exist. He declares them to be very good, and they persist. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). A design for dependence shapes the very logic of creatureliness which Johann Georg Hamann expressed in this way: “Woe to us if we should be found to be our own creator, inventor, and author of our own future well-being. The first command in the Bible says: ‘Eat!’ and the final one says: ‘Come, all is ready.’”5

No text has so shaped Christian imagination regarding the created self as Genesis 1. The signal verses address the sixth day of creation: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them” (Gen. 1:26-28). Some have argued that image of God language has dominated anthropology more than is warranted; for instance, the late John Webster found this to be an instance of misproportioned theological discussion. They are right to observe that the Scriptures speak of the self and of human existence in many ways other than use of image language, but they overreact if they do not also acknowledge the canonical primacy of Genesis 1 as an entryway and, therefore, as a focal image for discerning humanity in a scriptural shape. Image language is not the whole, but it does persist rightly as a crucial reference point.


Committing to beginning with the image is not the same as grasping the meaning of that commitment, however, and four approaches have dominated Christian reflection through the centuries. First, classical Christians tended overwhelmingly to identify the image with that faculty that most closely resembles God and most notably differentiates humans from animals, speaking either of the intellect or of the soul. Like Aristotle, then, they speak of the image identifying human creatures as rational animals. Second, Luther and others have agreed that the image bespeaks closeness to God and differentiation from all other animals, but they viewed it as pertaining to moral agency and holy character. Here humans are moral animals. In the last century, two more views have largely routed the field of interpretation. The third view focuses upon the proximity of image language to the commission given (in verse 26 and again in verse 28: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth”). Humans image God by ruling creatively on his behalf as a sort of ambassador; this third view treats human images of God as political or creative animals. Fourth, Karl Barth and then Karol Wojtyla found verse 27 to be most definitive: sexual differentiation and unity marks out the relational being that mirrors the inter-trinitarian life that God enjoys from all eternity. Sexual relations typify most powerfully what is true more broadly: humans are relational animals in this approach.

Each of these views can offer arguments, some strong. And each emphasis connects with something valid about human existence: humans are intellectual, moral, political, and relational, and each of these facets of human being and action are of theological significance. Yet none of that need imply that these as a whole or in part represent what the language of image is meant to connote. It may well be that these are valid doctrines drawn wrongly from this particular biblical imagery. They might be probed for their textual validity: for instance, does the proximity of image language and the commission or mandate necessarily mean they are equated? They might be probed for the way they seem to suggest that these emphases differentiate humans from other animals: are other animals really lacking each of these facets of life (say, relationality)? They must also be probed for the way in which each one parses humanity and fixes itself upon a sliver of the self as image of God, whereas Genesis 1 seems to speak of the whole human as God’s own image and likeness.

What might we conclude? Anna Williams says that “One of the definitive features of Christian anthropology is that it declines to define humanity in solely
human terms.”6 What does she mean? More importantly, what’s the significance of such a refusal to be so defined? If humans are first named as an image, then they are always and ever defined by reference to someone else. They are an echo, never existent and never understandable apart from their originary source. To be the image of God, first and foremost, ought to evoke a sense of dependence in human beings. The image is not the original; the image is a copy or likeness of that source (whether it is a priceless portrait being imaged on a cheap postcard or it is an eternally self-existent God being imaged by a created being like a man or woman). When we speak of image and likeness, then, we ought to begin with the distinction between God and human creatures, and we do well to focus on how we live rightly before God as those who are not themselves God.

Rowan Williams has argued that Augustine pointed in similar directions regarding human selfhood: “Growing into the image of God, then, is not a matter of perfecting our possession of certain qualities held in common with God … We come to ‘image’ God by grasping that our reality exists solely within his activity of imparting … The image of God in us might be said to entail a movement into our createdness, because that is a movement into God’s own life as turned ‘outwards.’”7 Eric Johnson has spoken of “active receptivity” in this regard, and David Kelsey has lauded the call to “eccentric existence.”8 Expressed variously, as images we live before God in a manner that reflects something of him via our dependence upon him.

The Second Aspect: The Crooked Self (Numbers 14)

We begin with the famous words of Virginia Woolf: “On or about December 1910 human character changed.” She referred to Roger Fry’s exhibition “Manet and the Post-Impressionists at the Grafton Galleries in London, a controversial exhibit

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7 Rowan Williams, “Sapientia: Wisdom and the Trinitarian Relations,” in *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 175; see also: “We image the divine wisdom to the extent that our self-perception is a perception of our own absolute dependence on the self-giving of that wisdom: to the extent that we see when we look at ourselves is freely generative grace,” and “the image is a ‘movement into our createdness’” (181).

that opened that November and represented a new world bereft of the old class system, the old economy, and the old sense of manners and customs. That exhibit represented something decisive to Woolf’s imagination (at least in a symbolic fashion). December 1910 aside, Christians do believe that particular dates do lead to changes in human character; thus, we speak of the state of humanity in Adam (e.g., Rom. 5:12-21). The fall into sin that is retold in Genesis 3:1-7 decisively alters the human condition.

How might this crooked self be understood? A range of texts present themselves as viable pathways: Genesis 3:16-19 presents the curse; Genesis 4-11 widen the cosmic range of sin’s consequence; Exodus 32:1-6 recounts the golden calf incident which will be employed later as a paradigm for Israel’s sin (e.g. Deut. 9:8-29); Psalm 14 laments the worldwide condition of depravity; Psalm 51 poignantly presents the Psalmist’s confession of his own sin and need for redemption; Romans 3:9-20 (and really 1:18-3:20 as a whole) condemns all, Gentiles and Jews alike, as unrighteous before God’s law.

The apostles repeatedly turn to the wilderness generation, however, in shaping the Christian imagination. 1 Corinthians 10:1-22 speaks of those who knew God’s liberating love but were eventually “overthrown in the wilderness” (10:5). Hebrews 3:7-19 builds on earlier teaching that Jesus excels Moses by reminding the Hebrew Christians of those who were “unable to enter his rest” (3:18). Christians are to be just and faithful pilgrims, and the wilderness generation serves as an emblem of sinfulness of which we ought to be wary.

Where do we learn about this wilderness generation’s sin? Every Pentateuchal book speaks of sin, from the golden calf in Exodus 32 to the Nadab and Abihu episode in Leviticus 10. The Book of Numbers, however, offers a lengthy, organized portrayal of human sin. Here the exodus generation dies, and their children are born for entrance into the promised land; Dennis Olson refers to its movement as the “death of the old and the birth of the new.” This transition does not merely happen, however, but is explained and necessitated by a sequence of failures on the part of Israelites.9 David Stubbs has observed the way in which Numbers presents these ten failures by fixing on seven instances. Whereas seven days of creation bring order and blessing the world in Gen. 1:1-2:4, here seven episodes of sin instance devolution and

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the movement to disorder in the middle section of Numbers (from 10:11-25:18).10

Further, the seven episodes of sin appear in the form of a chiasm: the first and seventh pertain to varied misfortunes (11:1-3 and 21:4-9), the second and sixth relate to the absence of food and water (11:4-34 and 20:2-13), the third and fifth address the leadership of Moses (and later Aaron)(11:35-12:16 and 16:1-17:11), and the fourth sits there alone at the center as a sin regarding the call to enter the promised land (13:1-14:45).11

Numbers 14 represents the very center of that wayward generation’s wandering from God. Stubbs observes: “This fourth rebellion is the crux of Israel’s rebellions in the wilderness. It forms the center of the sevenfold pattern of Israel’s unfaithfulness toward God in Numbers, it is the longest of the rebellions, and it is the most serious, both in terms of the offense against God and the punishment given in response to it.”12

God tells Moses that twelve spies ought to be sent into Canaan, the land which “I am giving to the people of Israel” (13:1). The spies were selected and commissioned, and they returned after forty days in that promised land (13:25). They returned to Moses, Aaron, and all the congregation with a report – two really. The majority report of ten spies affirmed the fruitfulness and appeal of the land but observed the size and fortifications of its occupants (13:27-29); when Caleb called the people to go and occupy the land, the majority report warned against such action: “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are” (13:31). The congregation cried out and wept and “grumbled against Moses and Aaron,” calling for a new leader and a return to Egypt (14:1).

Moses and Aaron fell at such words. At this point Joshua and Caleb presented the minority report from the spy expedition, affirming the goodness of the land, acknowledging the size of its occupants, and articulating reasons for hope: “If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us” (14:8). Their reason for this hope is singularly theological: “the Lord is with us; do not fear them”

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10 David Stubbs, *Numbers* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 22-23. Stubbs also observes that the first section of Numbers (1:1-10:10) twice employs the phrase “at the command of the Lord” seven times (in chs. 3-4 and again in ch. 9) thus “underscoring Israel's obedience” and contrasting with the later rebellions (25).


12 Stubbs, *Numbers*, 126.
(14:9). The people went to stone Joshua and Caleb, at which point God intervenes. God chastises the people and calls for their destruction (14:11-12). Moses intervenes with prayer, however, and calls for God’s forbearance (14:13-19). The Lord promises pardon and yet pledges that this generation will die in the wilderness and their children alone will be given the promised land (14:20-38). Moses gave this report to the congregation, who “mourned greatly” (14:39). They then insisted, even against Moses’s warning, to go up the next morning and attack the Amalekites and Canaanites. Though Moses told them that the Ark and he would not go with them, they went and were roundly defeated (14:45).

Chapter 14 seems to tell of two sins. The first sin appears in the people’s refusal to go up and take the land and further their insistence that they better appoint new leaders to guide their return to Egypt. Their justification is offered: “Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” (14:3-4). Their punishment will bring poetic justice in that only those “little ones” will eventually be brought into the land. And why are they judged? They sin by omission, refusing to obey God’s call. Caleb and Joshua identified the root issue in their failed warning: “Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land” (14:9).

The second sin could not appear more different, as it marks a sin of commission. Having received news of God’s judgment and their fate, the people initially “mourned greatly’ (14:39). That initially promising move was following by their assertive action. They rise early, they go up to the heights, and they declare “Here we are. We will go up” (14:40). Even when Moses warns that “the Lord will not be with you” (14:43), “they presumed to go up” (14:44). Here they sin by commission, doing that which they have been warned not to do. And here the issue is identified as presumption or overconfidence, an arrogant swagger that leads them into a futile overexertion.

While there are two distinct sins that appear divergent, other texts look back and find a common root. Deuteronomy 1 recounts the episode (1:19-46) and fixes upon the issue of trust: “in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God” (1:32). Hebrews 3 employs this generation as a warning (3:7-19) and identifies the reason for their failure: “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (3:19). Both texts point to belief or trust as the central issue. They do so because trust is written right into the assessment of Numbers 14 itself. When God gloriously intervenes, he says: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?” (14:11). Though
God’s mighty works have shown him to be trustworthy, they do not trust him. And this is not merely true of the first error but also definitive of the second sin, for their response reveals a misperception of God’s rebuke. They have received his judgment as though the problem was an underdeveloped sense of self-esteem. Whereas God’s convicting words pertain to how they despise and disbelieve him, they nowise evince any concern for or awareness of his importance to them. They do not imagine his presence to be definitive; they gauge their prospects solely on their own strength, whether it leads them to despairing hesitation or prompts them to presumptive overexertion.13

What have we gleaned about sin and crookedness? Dennis Olson says: “In the end, the issue is not competing estimates about the human strength of the Israelite army versus the Canaanites. The question is not who is taller or who has larger fortifications or who has more weapons. Ultimately, all such reliance on human power and estimates is irrelevant. The issue is trusting in the power of Israel’s God.”14 Augustine of Hippo helps here to remind us of a truth that is easily missed: “All those who wander far away and set themselves up against you are imitating you, but in a perverse way; yet by this very mimicry they proclaim that you are the Creator of the whole of nature and that in consequence there is no place whatever where we can hide from your presence.”15 Genesis referred to humans as the image of God after the fall (5:3; 9:6), but this continued reality does not mean that humans continue to be a good or valid image. By refusing to lean into God trustingly, humans image God poorly. “Whether in pride or despair, the old wilderness generation failed to learn the fundamental lesson of the first commandment—to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.”16 With their self-enclosed estimation of future prospects, both small and great, they portray or reflect an image of God that is inept or disengaged. Hence the image of Augustine and later Luther that the self here is bent crooked and becomes curved in upon itself, incapable and frankly disinterested in looking outward

13 This self-definition also masks honesty about dependence on others or minimizes its value; see such an argument presented powerfully in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Reveries of the Solitary Walker (trans. Peter France; New York: Penguin, 2004), 104.

14 Dennis T. Olson, Numbers (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 80 (also 86).

15 Augustine, Confessions, Book 2, Section 14.

16 Olson, Numbers, 89.
for direction and sustenance. Sin varies, as the distinct moments of Numbers 14 signal, but it always somehow mangles that way we are made for “active receptivity.”

**The Third Aspect: The Resurrected Self (Galatians 2)**

The story of humanity does not end with enmity. God intervenes. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being with in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:1-5). Life and resurrection come from God’s generous, omnipotent hand. The Adamic self is followed by the Christian self.

A host of texts depict the Christian self, that is, the self that is united to Jesus Christ: Matthew 5:2-11 portrays the one whose character marks them out as a child of God (5:9), while John 15:1-11 speaks of the way in which fruitfulness, love, and joy are experienced only in abiding in Christ; Hebrews will reflect at length in chapters 5-10 on access, even boldness and confidence, that can be had in and through Jesus; and Paul repeatedly takes up the language of union with Christ in a variety of prepositional constructions.18

If we want to grasp the strange logic of the gospel, however, perhaps no text focuses attention upon the transformative impact of union with Christ and widens one’s grasp of its cosmic implications as Galatians 2:15-20. “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no

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longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

The context must be observed. Paul has told of the Antioch Incident where the apostle Peter recoiled from table fellowship with Gentile believers when a party appeared from Jerusalem (2:12). His example was followed by “the rest of the Jews ... even Barnabus” (2:13). Interestingly, Paul repeatedly terms this behavior “hypocrisy,” for it is a public relapse that veers from the normal practice of Peter, Barnabus, and the Jews who typically shared a table with these Gentiles (2x in 2:13). Paul will turn to more fundamental issues to address this cafeteria dispute, but it is in fact the cafeteria dispute that he addresses. The matter involves identity and belonging: are these Gentile converts one with the Jews like Peter? More fundamentally, though, it is a Christological question: is union with Jesus Christ enough to make a way to unite these diverse persons and to overturn those social and cultic divides?

Paul invokes language of justification, the declaration of justice before God, to address those matters of identity. But he also turns emphatically to Christology which is the root of justification anyways; solus Christus (“Christ alone”) is always the root of sola fide (“by faith alone”) in Protestant theology. And what does he say of Christ and his pertinence for human beings? 2:19-20 fix attention upon the transforming consequence of life in Christ in two ways: displacing our dying self, and resurrecting our Christian self. First, Paul employs repeated language of displacement: “through the law I died to the law” (2:19); “I have been crucified with Christ” (2:20); and, finally, “it is no longer I who live” (2:20). Law leads to death – we share accursed death with Christ (as his own death – not some metaphor or analogous experience – is our own), so that, in the end, the “I” who lives is no longer “I.” Second, Paul uses repetitive statements of agency and action: “so that I might live to God” (2:19); “it is ... Christ who lives in me” (2:20); and “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (2:20).19 Jonathan Linebaugh emphasizes the relational character of displacement and reorientation, that is, of death and resurrection, by observing the movement from dative syntax to the employment of personal terms and prepositions: “According to Paul’s grammar, death and life are not abstract or absolute concepts,

they are relative—or better: relational. In Galatians 2:19, life and death are first defined with the dative: death is death to the law and life is life to God. As the confession continues, prepositions color in these relations christologically: Christ died for me (hyper emou), which is itself the concrete gift (Gal 2:21) that grounds and includes my having been crucified with (syn) Christ and on the far side of which “Christ lives in me” (en emoi).”

The setting shows the subversive impact of that union upon all other realities. How many other identity-defining matters could be added to the ones in play here? Leaving to the side more grotesque variants such as racism or sexism, more insidious demands can subtly seep into church potlucks. Use of the right Bible translation, keeping of the right liturgical calendar or sabbath-keeping regimen, “getting the gospel,” expressing some particular demeanor (whether of simple reverence or of celebratory jubilation) in worship, being appropriately gospel-centered, etc. Galatians will later speak of the relativizing impact of Christ Jesus: “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:26-29).

The experiential distinctions between male and female and slave and free are significant. But that first distinction stands singularly at the head: “neither Jew nor Greek.” It not only leads the litany of 3:28 but also represents the key example in 2:11-21. What so significant? Misogyny or patriarchy shift male power in ways detrimental to women, and slave economies powerfully lead to the exploitation of the many by the few. But neither misogyny nor slavery are mandated by God. The Jew/Gentile distinction, however, was a divinely mandated distinction rooted in God’s electing call (Gen. 12:1) and God’s covenantal promise (Gen. 17:8; see the exposition in Gal. 4:21-31 of the Sarah and Hagar story in Genesis). God made a distinction, electing some and passing over others, thereby predestining some to life and consigning others to death. The reason the Jew-Gentile distinction lingers throughout so many New Testaments texts as a matter for judgment and prudence is that it is a social divide of divine origin. It is not happenstance or mere cultural preference. While it could be clouded by pride or sin, it is not itself birthed of or sustained by sinfulness.

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And yet God relativizes or, better, fulfills it in Jesus Christ. The culinary regimen of Moses and the hygienic rituals of Abraham no longer mark out those in and out. Why? Because we share in Christ by faith, in his death we die and in his life we live. In his death all our identities – success and failure, spirituality and social markers – are crucified. In his life all our person – righteousness and blessing, belonging and purpose – is birthed anew. There is substitution here (see especially Gal. 3:10-12), but there is also incorporative union.

Many things might and should be said of resurrected life in Christ, but we have focused upon the fundamental way in which union with Christ reorients the human to life extrinsically. So is the Christian self the same self from creation? Is there continuity or utter disjunction? Linebaugh concludes: “No: death and life divide the no longer and now living I and the life of the latter is gifted, ex-centric, and in Christ. But also yes: though I no longer live, there is a me that is ever and always loved. To speak “the speech of the dead,” is seems, is to talk twice: life and death and death and life separate the self. And yet, in and across the passages of creation, sin, grace, and glory there is a me that was and is and will be loved. To combine the confession: I am—outside myself, by grace, and in Christ a me whom God did, does, and will ever love.”

Augustine and Martin Luther employed the image of the human who had been curved in on itself in sin now being drawn outward again. The self here has been not only directed to but connected with the death and life and, therefore, the blessing of Jesus.

The Fourth Aspect: The Transfigured Self (Song of Songs 4 and 7)

We might be inclined to think that closing with Christ concludes the sequence. In all sorts of ways, of course, it does, and yet other Scriptures will speak in ways that go beyond the displacing and reorienting language of Galatians 2. Jesus foretells of the commendation given the Lord’s own in the words of a parable: the master


declaring “well done, good and faithful servant” eventually prompts his eschatological prophecy that the King will invite those “blessed of my Father” to “inherit the kingdom prepared for you” and will extol their generosity and self-forgetful care for the least among them (Mt. 25:23 and 31-40); not surprisingly in his sojourn on earth, Jesus himself would prize the generosity of the widow giving her mite (Mk. 12:21-24; Lk. 21:1-4) or the faith of the centurion (Lk. 7:9) or the confession of Peter (Mt. 16:17) or the single-mindedness of Mary (Lk.10:42). The particular character and specific actions of humans are cause for praise, from the lips of God on the throne and God incarnate in his earthly sojourn.

Delight and celebration in Song of Songs perhaps press this notion further than any other text. Before considering particular passages in the Song, its broader place in the canon deserves mention. The Song of Songs is titled in such a way to evoke the wonder that this is the greatest of all such songs (just as “holy of holies” is the holiest place, so “song of songs” means that this song is better still than the Psalms and all the rest of scriptural hymnody). Through the ages, Jews and Christians have been able to say that with a straight face only because they believed this tale of lover, her beloved, and their varied friends or townsfolk ultimately figures the love of the people of God and God himself or, more specifically, of the bride of Christ and Christ himself. Various other texts employ this marital and erotic imagery in negative ways (see Hosea) and positive evocations (see Eph. 5:32). The Song of Songs works with this marital and sexual figure at great length.

In that frame, then, it is not surprising that the lover speaks of her beloved and his beauty. At points it may seem foreign or lead the reader to blush, but it makes all the sense in the world that the figure of the church should praise her Lord and redeemer. But that’s not all that the Song includes. The Song also recounts twice the delight that the Christ figure takes in the bride (Song 4:1-16; 6:13-7:10). Again modern ears may be thrown by the comparisons (“your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes” [4:2] or “your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies”[7:2]), but many may be more startled at the very acclamation itself. It is one needful thing to say “I am my beloved’s and he is mine” (6:3; also 2:16), but a sufficient reading must also confess “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me” (7:10). He desires the bride, and he recounts with brilliant detail what draws him to her in her particularity and specificity. God does not merely graciously agree to tolerate humans but delights in their created forms.

That divine delight startles, so we need to be changed to receive it as wise and appropriate. In his treatise On Loving God, Bernard of Clairvaux spoke of the love of
God as involving four stages or degrees of growth and maturation.23 First, one loves oneself for one’s own sake. Second, one loves God for one’s own sake; here God is loved, but instrumentally or for the purpose of something – oneself – that one deems higher. With the third degree, Bernard speaks of the sweetness of salvation in that one can now love God for his own sake, not for his utility in scratching some other itch. God is here viewed as the prize and the treasured possession. And yet this is not where Bernard stops, but he goes on to speak of that final degree of the love of God wherein one loves oneself for God’s own sake. Here the fear of the Lord not only redirects our religious life or the way we view our relationship to God, but it comes to have primacy in all areas of life (most especially one’s self-image or self-perception). Whatever my own love of myself may be, it ought to always be for God’s sake or not at all.24 But, viewed inversely, for God’s sake I’m meant to have an appreciative and thankful delight for who I have been made and re-made to be.

“Although, therefore, Christ offers us in the gospel a present fullness of spiritual benefits, the enjoyment thereof ever lies hidden under the guardianship of hope, until, having put off corruptible flesh, we be transfigured in the glory of him who goes before us.”25 Those words come from John Calvin, not from a desert father. Note that the Genevan reformer turns to the language of transfiguration here, not that of transubstantiation, as he describes the fullness of blessing that is ours now. God’s presence yoked to the Christian self involves its radiant indwelling and transfiguring illumination, not its transfer to some other category of being. As with transfiguration, the substance of the human remains definitively human – the image of God, human nature, natural law, each of these tent-posts of definitive human shape remain intact. Unlike transubstantiation, the human form does not mask something miraculously other and divergent or heterogeneous in its character; while the soul is invisible, the sanctified soul does not morph into anything other than a human soul. As with transfiguration, the human bears witness to the presence of something greater than itself, the very indwelling of God’s own Holy Spirit conforming the human unto the creaturely image of God’s own Son. Unlike transubstantiation, “Christ in you, the


24 Bernard here takes up a tradition from Peter Lombard (on signs and things) that goes all the way back to Augustine of Hippo, first in On Christian Teaching and then in City of God.

25 John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, II.ix.3 (1:426).
hope of glory” does not entail mixture with the divine or ontological exchange of any sort. Personal union – the stuff of covenant and of communion – marks the sanctified life, and here we see that, adapting the words of the Psalmist, grace and nature meet, the indwelling of God and the definitive shape of human nature (first in Adam and then eventually in Jesus himself) kiss each other.26

**Concluding Implications for Further Reflection**

From where have we have come? To where might we be going? Each of these four aspects has bearing on the present experience of Christians today, a point with which we ought to conclude. Each plays a role in identifying who we are, albeit in distinct ways. We do well not to shoehorn identity language into only one of these, whether that’s toward creational or Christological aspects. To identify a self with its textured specificity will require all of these elements, if it is to be whole. That said, noting the importance of breadth is merely a prompt for further exploration about how to relate to each aspect. Other questions arise only when we appreciate the biblical and theological breadth by which the self is identified and described – when is one aspect pertinent? how do they relate? while it is helpful to identify all four aspects, in what ways do we relate to each of them? in what situations is someone out of tune or unaware of one or another aspect in particular? – and warrant our consideration. Christian reflection on the self needs to continue, as it has for centuries now. In conclusion, I suggest two implications.

First, we ought to be wary of supposed Augustinian anthropology gone reductive. There is a narrowed Augustinianism that views the human simply through the prism of sin and misses that other element: created goodness. Against the Pelagians, Augustine did confess that every nook and cranny of our selves has been depraved or disordered by sin and death. Sin cannot be confined, and its spread cannot be segmented and regimented.

Augustine also spoke of sin as a privation precisely because he wanted to avoid lapsing into Manichean dualism. He insisted that we remain creatures of the living God. Depravity and disorder do not unwind or reverse the results of God’s kind action, however much they turn it sideways. Some take this privative approach to sin to lack existential bite, but it is precisely the existence of the good disordered that

26 These last sentences are taken from Michael Allen, “Grace and Nature,” in *Sanctification* (New Studies in Dogmatics; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 225.
actually makes sin so heinous (i.e. the abusive parent is so jarring because parents are such a good and, in this case, so mangled). We dare not reduce Augustinian anthropology to a misanthropic word. Augustine affirms the goodness of creation in the present tense alongside the extensiveness of sin, and our current reflections on the self must be alert to both duties.

Augustinian teaching on goodness without his anti-Pelagian reflection depravity leads to a vapid affirmation and an inability to challenge the status quo or appreciate our need for salvation. But Augustinian hamartiology without a corresponding appreciation of the beauty and regnant goodness of creation now actually undermines the shrill nature of sin and death and refuses to offer thanks and praise to God for his good gifts to which even our most sinful efforts cannot give defeat.

Second, we need be equally concerned about reductive views of Christology that treat the redemptive change wrought in Christ wholly through its justifying or substitutionary aspects. Indeed, there is a need for a wider grasp of new creation as well, wherein our identity is wholly caught up in union with Christ and our life, peace, and power are drawn entirely from his self, yes, but also where our created and natural specificity is transfigured to be worthy of praise (even from God’s own lips). We cannot confess any less than both the justifying words of Christological union from Galatians 2 as well as the divine delight in his bride as found in Song of Songs 4 and 7.

The church has a mission to offer care to souls, those already inside and those presently outside, by speaking words of life and comfort and peace in Christ alone. Systematic theology helps us to discern how we might do so without removing Christ from the wider scriptural context (taking creation and sin into account as well) or delimiting Christ by failing to see all that he is and does (attending not only to justification but also to that other gospel gift: transformation unto glory). Christ assumes our plight, walks our path, dies our cursed death, and rises for our glory and blessing. He is substitute and our most defining characteristic, so that we not only enjoy his riches but also bear his very name. And yet he also sings over us in the particularities that he, with his Father and Spirit, created and then recreated by his gracious power. We boast only in him, but he does take delight in regaling the glories of his work in us (not just that which binds us together as one, but also that which marks off our distinct and particular histories and intricacies).

Created giftedness is no antique epoch. Sinfulness is pervasive, to be sure, but not the sum total of our anthropology. Christological definition is in fact definitive, but it opens the way to divine delight in our created, transformed, and someday
transfigured particularities. To sum up: We dare not homogenize humanity or reductively confess the gracious work of Christ. If we are going to diagnose and care well for souls, we need to know their various aspects. To appreciate how Christian identity is made, we need attentiveness to the distinct, biblical sources of the Christian self.
Assurance: Historical, Biblical, and Pastoral Considerations

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What we are here to do, as this fellowship of students and scholars, pastors and professors is three-dimensional. There is a theology that is biblical, there is a retrieval that is historical, and there is application that is pastoral. In looking at the subject of assurance (in which we will pay some attention to the Puritan view), I want to deal with the subject under these three headings. First of all, with some historical considerations. Secondly, some more biblical considerations. And thirdly, time permitting, with some practical and pastoral considerations.

Historical Considerations

In James Orr’s The Progress of Dogma¹ (a very different book from Newman’s Development of Doctrine), book, he makes the point that the flow of discussion of doctrine, and the story of the Christian church, follows the lines of systematic theology. While an obvious objection to his thesis was the discussion of eschatology early on in the story of the Christian church, we can see how he might have reached that conclusion. The way in which the Church wrestles with the truth of God begins with first principles and builds upon them. And so, it should not, I think, be much of a surprise to us that serious discussion, locus-type discussion of the issue of assurance, comes later on in the story of the Christian church. In many ways it really comes to the fore, although not in massive discussion, in the Middle Ages. And if we bookended the Middle Ages between the views of Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), we would see a certain consistency running through the Middle Ages with, of course, individualized nuances. Gregory’s view seems to have been that assurance was highly improbable, and moreover, with regard to its effects, undesirable. The reason for the latter would come to the surface at the Reformation: if it was possible to have assurance, then the role of the sacramental system and the power and authority structure of the church would immediately be threatened.

Thomas was more measured, and much more sophisticated in many ways. His views at this point at least, I think, are typical of the late Middle Ages and of scholastic

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theology. They are more subtle, and certainly more judicious. Thomas thought that assurance was possible either on the basis of evident marks of grace in the believer’s life or by God vouchsafing assurance to an individual by special revelation. (He had written this before the experience in which he confessed that he had seen things that went beyond everything he had ever written.) But Thomas believed that this was for the few, and he also believed that assurance on the basis of marks of grace in one’s life was conjectural (conjecturaliter). This is, I think, significant. There is a certain inevitability about such a view when these marks of grace are the fruit of an infused grace that, virtually by definition, lies beyond our perception. How then can we be sure that we have received a sufficiency of grace that assures us of our salvation?

Granted that there were some exceptions to this perspective, it was the general view of the late medieval church.

It was built, of course, on the medieval ordo salutis. Contrary to much popular protestant assumption, that ordo was focused on how the individual was “saved by grace”. No self-respecting medieval theologian, I think, would ever have said “You are saved by your works, period.” But—and for the Reformers this was a very significant qualification which, if true would mean, at the end of the day, (to use Paul’s words) that “grace would no longer be grace” (Rom. 11:6). If it is co-operating with infused grace that leads to justification, which takes place at the end of a process mediated through the sacraments, then this is a doctrine of the justification of those who have been made righteous by co-operating with grace. In essence the teaching was:

eventually, if that grace infused into you works in you a faith that is suffused by love, then you are justified on the basis of what that infused grace has accomplished in you. But within that matrix, in terms of such an ordo salutis, who in his or her right mind is ever going to be in the position of saying, “infused grace has worked into me such righteousness that God may justly justify me on that basis”?

This, then, was the reason it was highly unlikely in the medieval structure than an individual would experience assurance of salvation.

It is worth pausing here to note two things. First, this view of grace was dissolved by the Reformation. The medieval theology reifies grace; it abstracts grace from the person of God and views grace as a “something,” makes it substantial, a tertium quid between God and the self. The New Testament then is (mis-)read in those terms. There is no such “thing” as grace!

But secondly, in my own view, the post-Reformation church was not immune from falling back into that view of grace. Indeed, it seems to me that it may be the dominant popular evangelical view: that grace is a tertium quid between God and the
soul, and we “get it” (or we don’t get it). But what especially Calvin understood was that grace is not a something; it is not infused. Rather it is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is entirely personal.

When we survey the development of post-Reformation Christian experience at this point it becomes clear that this lapse back into the medieval conceptualization has bedeviled the church. It is as if there are individuals and communities in the reformation tradition where the twin notions of grace as a “something” and salvation on the basis of the work of God within rather than the atonement of Christ without, have continued to prevail. It is certainly true in some branches of the reformed tradition in which assurance of salvation (and participation in the Lord’s Supper) have become the privilege of the minority and not the inheritance of the church as a whole. I believe that this is true in my own country of Scotland, which is often thought of as being wholly captured by the Reformation. But I recall in my early Christian experience the extent to which claiming to have assurance was regarded virtually as a form of arrogance—for how could one so young know that “enough” had been done within for justification?

Over against this whole way of thinking about the gospel, the Reformation’s emphasis on justification outside of me in Jesus Christ, true of me the moment I trusted in him and was united to him, immediately produced a massive outburst of deliverance and relief, joy and assurance.

It is not difficult to see why. Nor is it difficult to see why this approach to assurance was in the crosshairs of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Trent, of course, was by no means a united group of theologians; and it described things in a sophisticated way. But it states clearly enough that “no one can know with certainty of faith that he has obtained the grace of God.”\(^2\) This comes within the general context of what follows under the heading on the increase of justification received.

Here then is the reason why in the process of the Counter-Reformation, we find Cardinal Bellarmine saying the principal heresy of Protestants is that saints may obtain to a certain assurance of their gracious and pardoned state before God.\(^3\) If I had been Cardinal Bellarmine writing this, I imagine would have written that the principal heresy of Protestants was justification by faith alone in Christ alone. But Bellarmine was probably shrewder because he saw that it was the fruit of this teaching

\(^2\) Session VI. Chapter 9, Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics.

\(^3\) In De Controversiis. De Justificatione Impii, III.ii. 3.
that had the potential to destroy the Roman *ordo salutis* and with it the Church’s sacramental system, and with that the authority woven into the warp and woof of the Church’s whole priestly structure. It would render certain sacraments unnecessary (it did!); and it would alleviate the priesthood of its authority, which in a sense was the only mediation that could provide any objective hope of salvation to men and women. So, Bellarmine’s words were very telling.

This may well be at least part of the reason why – if I may coin the expression – in the Counter-Counter-Reformation, the theme of assurance became such an important thing. I am thinking of what lies behind the title of William Perkins’s’ 1592 work, *A Case of Conscience: The Greatest that Ever Was: How a Man May Know Whether He is a Child of God or Not, Resolved by the Word of God*. And this, in turn, is one reason why – and here we narrow our focus—it has been a big question in the history of reformed theology over the last 200 years, and also provoked a controversy in the academy and church in recent times.

I am thinking here of the issue of—

**Calvin versus the Westminster Confession?**

This is one of the areas in which if not total contradiction, a tension has been perceived between the teaching of Calvin and the Puritans in general and the statements of the Westminster Confession. To this we now turn.

Most of us will have encountered this fairly common discussion. It has tended to focus on two specific statements. The first is Calvin’s statement in the *Institutes*:

> Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us. Founded on the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁴

A “firm and certain knowledge”—words often contrasted with the following from the Westminster Confession: “This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it.” (XVIII.3)

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In some ways, that tension seems to be strengthened if we read on in Calvin. For later in the same chapter, he writes:

> From this we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension. . .   We add the words "sure and firm" in order to express a more solid constancy of persuasion. For, as faith is not content with a doubtful and changeable opinion, so is it not content with an obscure and confused conception, but requires full and fixed certainty, such as men are wont to have from things experienced and proved...He alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation . . . No man is a believer, I say, except him who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death . . . (Inst. III.ii.15,16,17)

Broadly, Calvin has been extolled on the one hand, because he seems to wax almost lyrical in giving no place to the practical syllogism that would cause me for a moment to look at myself. But then, on the other hand, his words have been lamented by those who wish he had waxed less lyrical and been a lot more prosaic, like the Westminster Divines. Thus a significant number of interpreters have drawn the conclusion that we are on much safer ground with the Westminster Confession of Faith’s affirmation that infallible assurance “doth not so belong to the essence of faith...”

In my own view, for what it is worth, it ought to have been universally recognized that Calvin’s position is much more subtle. This is sufficiently important to take a little time to demonstrate. For what he says here in Institutes III. 2. 7 is set within both the larger context of his theology as a whole, and indeed this specific chapter, Calvin himself is the best interpreter of these somewhat crystallized statements. For example, he urges us to understand that the purpose of the sacraments is to encourage assurance. If these visible expressions of the gospel have this function for those who may not be enjoying the fullness of assurance, then Calvin is implicitly recognizing that the confidence of a genuine believer may not be so “firm and certain” after all. Indeed, Calvin argues, this is a function of baptism that Satan seeks to hide from us: it is to produce in us...
the singular fruit of assurance and spiritual joy which is to be gathered from it . . . how sweet is it to godly minds to be assured, not only by word, but by sight, that they obtain so much favor with the Heavenly Father . . . (Inst.IV.vxi.32).

Or take his teaching on the Lord’s Supper. The cup is called the “covenant in his blood” Calvin explains,

For he in some measure renews, or rather continues, the covenant which he once for all ratified with his blood (as far as it pertains to the strengthening of our faith) whenever he proffers that sacred blood for us to taste. . . . Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from this Sacrament . . .. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of heaven, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him . . . (Inst. IV.xvii.1-2).

Thus, baptism because it tells you who you are, and the Supper, because it is communion with Christ in whom all grace is to be found sufficient to your needs, minister assurance to the struggling believer.

Not only so, but Calvin also gives a place to the value of the practical syllogism. He recognizes that in Scripture, saints encourage their souls in God by looking not only to the objective work of Christ, but to the subjective ministry of the Holy Spirit:

The saints quite often strengthen themselves and are comforted by remembering their own innocence and uprightness, and they do not even refrain at times from proclaiming it ... the saints by innocence of conscience strengthen their faith and take from it occasion to exult.

Calvin explains very carefully that this is not a denial of salvation by grace: a conscience that is erected on grace—

is established also in the consideration of works, so far, that is, as these are testimonies of God dwelling and ruling in us . . . Therefore, when we rule out reliance upon works, we mean only this: that the Christian mind may not be turned back to the merit of works as to a help toward salvation but should rely wholly on the free promise of righteousness. But we do not forbid him from under girding and strengthening this faith by signs of the divine benevolence
toward him . . . the grace of good works shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us. (Inst. III.xiv.18)

What we see here is Calvin’s deep Trinitarianism emerging in the application of redemption, his sense that the *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. There is a ministry of the Spirit in the believer correlative to the ministry of the mediator outside of the believer. Thus he says the saints quite often strengthen themselves and are comforted by remembering their own innocence and uprightness, and they do not even refrain at times from proclaiming it—not thereby falling back on their own works as a ground for salvation, but recognizing the fruit of the Spirit as a reason for confidence that they are truly Christ’s.

Of course, Calvin’s point is there is an inherent consistency in, albeit there is an eschatological already and not-yet character to the relationship between the work of Christ for us in his death, resurrection, and ascension in anticipation of his coming in glory, and the ministry of the *allos paraklētos*, who is given to us to work the fruit of this into our souls. Recall his arresting opening statement in Book III of the *Institutes* as he transitions from the exposition of the accomplishing of redemption to its application:

First, we must understand this that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us . . .

And so, we need to remember: The secret energy of the Spirit by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits. (Inst. III.i.1)

So when we need to set Calvin’s statement here about our “sure and certain” conviction about God’s fatherly benevolence towards us, revealed in the once-for-all accomplishing of redemption within his recognition of the ongoing nature of the ministry of the Spirit within us enabling us to enter progressively into the enjoyment of Christ and his benefits.

As an aside, it is fascinating that some who seem to underline the contrast (even contradiction) at this point between Calvin and Westminster are also condemnatory of the so-called “proof-text” theology of the Divines (ignoring the fact that those same Divines were opposed to using proof texts for the simple reason they
did not do their theological work by that method! The proof texts were required by Parliament despite their protestations.

I mention this because they themselves fall into the error of “proof-texting” Calvin without properly contextualizing him. For had they read on patiently and sensitively, without leaping to conclusions, they would have heard Calvin say:

But someone will say: “Believers experience something far different: In recognizing the grace of God toward themselves they are not only tried by disquiet, which often comes upon them, but they are repeatedly shaken by gravest terrors. For so violent are the temptations that trouble their minds as not to seem quite compatible with that certainty of faith.” Accordingly we shall have to solve this difficulty if we wish the above-stated doctrine to stand. Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief. Far, indeed, are we from putting their consciences in any peaceful repose, undisturbed by any tumult at all. (Inst.III.i.17)

Further, Calvin writes of the fact that the disciples were true but weak believers before the resurrection:

We ought not to seek any more intimate proof of this than that unbelief is, in all men [i.e. who are believers] always mixed with faith. (Inst.III.i.4).

Thus it is:

He who, struggling with his own weakness, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety, [who] is already in large part victorious. (Inst.III.i.17)

Again:

I have not forgotten what I have previously said, the memory of which is repeatedly renewed by experience: faith is tossed about by various doubts, so that the minds of the godly are rarely at peace—at least they do not always enjoy a peaceful state. (Inst.III.i.37)
What is the explanation for this? Here is Calvin’s response, significantly to be found just before his definition of faith: “Experience obviously teaches that until we put off the flesh, we attain less than we should like” (Inst.III.i.14). If we ask how Calvin harmonizes all that he has said, he gives us his answer: “In order to understand this, it is necessary to return to that division of flesh and spirit which we have mentioned elsewhere” (Inst.III.i.18).

In Christ we are no longer dominated by the flesh, but by the Spirit; but we are not yet delivered from the flesh. So long as this eschatological tension exists for the believer, so long will there be, according to Calvin, a possible gap between the definition of faith and the actual experience of the believer:

The greatest doubt and trepidation must be mixed up with such wrappings of ignorance, since our heart especially inclines by its own natural instinct toward unbelief. Besides this, there are innumerable and varied temptations that constantly assail us with great violence. But it is especially our conscience itself that, weighed down by a mass of sins, now complains and groans, now accuses itself, now murmurs secretly, now breaks out in open tumult. And so, whether adversities reveal God’s wrath, or the conscience finds in itself the proof and ground thereof, thence unbelief obtains weapons and devices to overthrow faith. (Inst.III.i.20)

Yet, Calvin insists, faith triumphs, for one simple reason: faith is not an abstraction; it is personal trust in Jesus Christ; it is fiducia. Here Calvin and the Puritans speak absolutely with one voice: the least faith gives us a strong, whole, and saving Christ. He saves completely those who come to God by him:

The root of faith can never be torn apart from the godly breast, but clings so fast to the inmost parts that, however faith seems to be shaken or to bend this way or that, its light is never so extinguished or snuffed out that it does not at least lurk as it were beneath the ashes . . . . though it be assailed a thousand times, it will prevail over the entire world. (Inst. III.i.21)

With this should be compared the words of the Confession:

This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory; growing up in many to the
attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith. (XIV.3)

Here then are clues that suggest Calvin and Westminster are on the same trajectory. That should have been obvious whenever these two statements, from Institutes III. ii. 7 and Chapter XVIII of the Westminster Confession were compared. To do so was to “compare apples with oranges” as though the statements were about an identical topic. But Calvin’s statement is a definition of faith; the Westminster Confession’s statement is a description of the believer’s experience. Definition and experience are not the same thing.

Calvin defines faith in its pure form, as it were, but then he goes on to explain that nobody actually experiences faith this way. The Westminster divines, having explained that faith is a resting trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (not so different from Calvin, after all) are describing the vicissitudes of the Christian life in the light of the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. In both contexts the same emphasis is placed on everything we need for salvation and assurance of it being found in Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit uniting us to him so that we enjoy both him and his benefits. The assurance of salvation is our inheritance, our birthright the moment we are united to Christ. But like every other aspect of living for Christ in a fallen world, an individual believer will experience that in diverse ways, at diverse times in his or her life. And diverse believers will experience that in ways that are diverse from one another. Yet at the end of the day, all that is needed for our assurance of salvation is to be found in him and experienced by us through the ministry of the Spirit.

So much then, however briefly, for the historical context in which many of us find ourselves in this Calvinian tradition of Reformed theology. Let me turn secondly to some biblical considerations in relationship to the experience of assurance.

**Biblical Considerations**

In what I say here there will obviously be echoes both of Calvin and the Puritan theology. What are our principles here?

1. Assurance of salvation comes to us through faith in Christ. It is not received by us by viewing anything that is outside of Christ. If one thing is common to Calvin and the Genevan Puritan tradition, it is surely this, since the essence of faith is *fiducia*, that is an entrusting of ourselves to Jesus Christ.
Faith, in this sense, is inherently marked by assurance. It is the act of receiving Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, as mine. Christ is all he is quite apart from my faith. Faith with empty hands takes hold of Christ and therefore that faith contains within itself, as reformed theologians have often expressed it, the germ of assurance. John Murray puts it like this: “The germ of assurance is surely implicit in the salvation which the believer comes to possess by faith, it is implicit in the change that has been wrought in his state and condition.”

He goes on to say:

However weak may be the faith of a true believer, however severe may be his temptations, however perturbed his heart may be respecting his own condition, he is never, as regards consciousness, in the condition that preceded the exercise of faith. The consciousness of the believer differs by a whole diameter from that of the unbeliever. At the lowest ebb of faith and hope and love his consciousness never drops to the level of the un-believer at its highest pitch of confidence and assurance.

Does that seem an overly bold statement? Murray is saying that if you are a believer, then at the level of consciousness you can never be in the same position you were in when you were an unbeliever. The consciousness of the believer differs by a whole diameter from that of the unbeliever. And if we can fast-forward for a moment, one of the pastoral tasks that we have is showing people, if they are believers, how it is that there is evidence this is true of them when they come to us doubting it. It is a basic pastoral principle that we adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion here; we do not assume that the person seeking help understands himself or herself properly. Therein may lie the problem.

Professor Murray’s somewhat startling statement is, I think, very significant. Both faith and assurance are realities embedded in complex and complicated individuals. We need to be simplified. Sin complicates, Christ simplifies. This is true when it comes to assurance. We are dealing with complicated people. The act of believing in Christ is embodied in hugely complicated, complex, sinful individuals. So

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6 Ibid.
often our pastoral task involves clearing away the rubble in the thinking of Christians who come to us in need of help and counsel.

It is in this context that what we noted earlier is important, namely that we need to have a right understanding of the grace of Christ. That is to say, we need to see that all grace is in Christ.

(2) The theological masters in this area where theology and experience, objective and subjective coalesce, have often recognized this. A failure rightly to understand the grace of God in Christ usually leads to an inability to take in that they are as loved by the Father as they are by the Son; and as loved by the Spirit as they are by the Father and the Son. The inability to believe that the Father really loves me is at root a theological issue.

The younger contemporary of the Westminster Divines, John Owen, has a very striking statement about this. He writes about the inability of Christians to apprehend the love of God the Father. They live

... with anxious, doubtful thoughts ... What fears, what questionings are there, of his good-will and kindness! At the best many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus.  

And he adds, tellingly, “at the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in [the Father] towards us but what has been purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus.”

Sometimes this very theology is purveyed from evangelical pulpits in such statements as: “The reason the Father loves you is because Christ died for you.” But that verges on heresy. It is virtually the opposite of what John 3:16 affirms (although that may be the very text of the sermon!). For the truth is “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” where “God” is the antecedent of “his only Son” and therefore a reference to the Father. “The Father himself loves you” (Jn. 16:27). This is the mighty truth embedded in the biblical gospel.

Now this might seem to some to be a recondite comment, outside the scope of their own observations. But it underlines the way in which biblical theology and biblical psychology belong together. A wrong view of the gospel at this point leads to a

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theology that implies “the Father has begun to love me because his Son persuaded him to do so by dying for me on the cross.”

But that paradigm leaves a permanent, one might almost say eternal, problem: the Father himself is not the fountain of God’s love for sinners; he has been constrained to love them. If so, not only is the harmony of the Trinity technically destroyed, but the possibility of genuine assurance has been deconstructed because there is uncertainty about the disposition of one member of the Trinity!

So it is a vitally important part of our theology to recognize that the gospel teaches us that Christ truly reveals the heart of the Father to sinners.

(3) It is the work of the Spirit to produce in us a life style that so conforms to the gospel that we ourselves begin to recognize that while we are not yet what we shall be, or even what we desire to be, we are no longer what we once were. We are now Christ’s, and as such heirs of assurance.

And this, of course, is where the teaching of 1 John comes into its own, in terms of what Robert Law called “the tests of life”. Perhaps the language can mislead, as though John were speaking about qualifying tests rather than diagnostic tools. When that is the case, the principles that are given to encourage are sometimes unfortunately misused as sticks with which to beat down the people of God. But their proper work is to enable Christians to see themselves as they really are in Christ—those who believe in him, who experience a wholly different attitude to sin, who love their fellow believers. These are the marks of those who have been born from above and have a title to see themselves as children of God.

Assurance comes through faith in Christ; it is encouraged by walking in the way of Christ; it involves understanding the grace of Christ. But there is more; there is the mystery of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, the testimoniun internum Spiritus sancti. Paul speaks about the witness of the Spirit in Romans 8:18 and refers to it without thus describing it in Galatians 4.

Among expositors there is a significant disagreement about whether Paul is speaking about the testimony of the Spirit to our spirit or with (i.e. in concert with) our spirit. Perhaps most notably C.E.B. Cranfield has argued that Paul’s use of the συν compound verb summartureō here should not be read to suggest that the Spirit’s testimony is with, i.e. alongside and in addition to the witness of our spirit. Our spirit, he argues, has no standing in this matter of whether we are the children of God or not.

But, surely, this is exactly the point. My spirit may have a consciousness that I am a child of God, but yet be assailed and I be engulfed with doubt whether I am a
child of God or not. Am I to be left in distress? There are too many συν compound verbs in Romans 8:16-17 to doubt this thrust; and so, we ought to take Paul to be speaking about the Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are the children of God. In addition, Cranfield’s alternative seems (at least to me) to verge on special and individual revelation and unintentionally opens the door to a form of continuing revelation.

The simplest way to understand Paul here lies partly in the Deuteronomic principle of two witnesses establishing the truth of the matter (Deut. 17:6); here the witness of my spirit is confirmed in the court of conscience by the conjoint witness of the Spirit.

In Romans Paul illustrates this witness of the Spirit with our spirit in our cry “Abba, Father!” In the earlier and somewhat parallel passage in Galatians 4:6 he tells us that “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father!’” When we take these statements together it leads to the conclusion that there is a parallel between the believer saying, “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor. 12:3) and saying “Abba, Father!” No one can say the former “except in the Holy Spirit.” It is not that two distinct voices are heard, the believer’s and that of the Spirit. Rather, in the believer’s cry (“Jesus is Lord!” or “Abba, Father!”) the consciousness from which the cry arises is effected through the ministry of the Spirit in us. When he or she utters these cries, the Spirit is bearing witness with, not to, their spirit.

So, what is that witness? How does it come out? Within the flow of Romans 8:15-17 it comes out when we cry, “Abba, Father!” Here we should make two observations. As B.B. Warfield says, “Distinct in source, it [the testimony of the Spirit] is yet delivered confluently with the testimony of our own consciousness.” It is, then, in a word, not a substitute for the proper evidence of our childship; but a divine enhancement of that evidence. A man who has none of the marks of a Christian is not entitled to believe himself to be a Christian; only those who are being led by the Spirit of God are children of God. But a man who has all the marks of being a Christian may fall short of his privilege of assurance. It is to such that the witness of the Spirit is super-added, not to take the place of the evidence of “signs” but to enhance their effect and raise it to a higher plane; not to produce an irrational, unjustified, conviction, but to produce a higher and more stable conviction than he would be, all unaided, able to draw; not to supply the lack of evidence, but to cure a disease of the mind which will not profit fully by the evidence. . . . The Spirit . . . does not operate by producing conviction without reason; an unreasonable
conclusion. Nor yet apart from the reason; equally unreasonable. Nor by producing more reasons for the conclusion. But by giving their true weight and validity to the reasons which exist and so leading to the true conclusion, with Divine assurance.

The function of the witness of the Spirit of God is, therefore, to give to our halting conclusions the weight of His Divine certitude.8

Significant in this context—and confirmatory of Professor Murray’s comment cited earlier—is the Paul’s employment in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 of the onomatopoeic verb krazein. It is used of Christ crying out on the cross (Mk. 15:39) and of a woman crying out in childbirth (Rev. 12:2). Its context is weakness, frailty, being overwhelmed. This is not (contrary to Käsemann) glossolalia. Rather it stretches to express the cry of the believer when he or she has been broken down. It is then that the witness of the Spirit is so significant—and so full of grace. For in the cry for help that issues from the heart, “Abba Father” the germ of assurance is present. The merely religious person who is capable of saying the Pater Noster will rise no higher than to cry out in a crisis “Oh God.” But the child of God, however frail, experiences the Spirit bearing witness with his or her spirit, and cries out “Abba, Father!”

Enshrined in that cry is the instinctive sense, and the subliminal knowledge that we are the children of God. And that is assurance.

Pastoral Dimensions

Well, that brings us, briefly, to our closing section and to some pastoral reflections. First of all, we need to remind ourselves that in pastoral ministry we are dealing with complex and often very complicated individuals. Part of our responsibility as spiritual physicians therefore is to have an adequate biblical understanding of the anthropology and pastoral anatomy and pathology of the soul so that we are able to diagnose the spiritual dysfunctions better than those who seek our help are able to do—and to know our biblical pharmaceuticals well enough to prescribe the divine remedies.

People assume they know themselves. But often their tools of self-interpretation are faulty. Certainly that is true in this area of assurance. But as we grow in our understanding of the body of divinity, we are better able to diagnose what

is going wrong in the body of Christ and its individual members. It is this that enables us, physician like, to probe and poke—“Does it hurt here? do you find this happening there? do you have these symptoms? what are you taking into your body? We are able thus to come to a diagnosis and thus to a prescription and prognosis.

Against this background, let me mention some ways in which symptoms that damage assurance present themselves. It will add a practical dimension to these reflections if the reader is left to work out the remedies!

1. The tendency to confuse the foundation of our salvation and the means of our assurance. There is a sister danger: thinking of the experience of assurance as being subjectively rather than objectively grounded. The maxim is still true “For every look you take at yourself, take ten at Christ.” Or a hundred.

2. Misunderstanding the role of affliction in the Christian life. How many Christians come asking why these things are happening in their lives who are not framing their lives against the biblical background of how and why it is that God employs affliction?

3. A misunderstanding of the power of the nature of sin. Here Anselm’s watchword to Boso in another context is just as applicable here: “You have not yet considered the greatness of the weight of sin.”

4. The role of natural temperament or past experience may be a special hindrance to assurance. Assurance is a psychological as well as a theological reality. There is of course a doctrine of assurance. But having or not having assurance is a psychological phenomenon and is intimately related to who and what I see myself to be and how I understand myself in relationship to God. People come with different views of themselves, with different conditions and life-baggage. There are undoubtedly some psyches and patterns of experience that create such strong knots in the spiritual anatomy that powerful medicine, patient and prolonged treatment is necessary for the knot to be first loosened and then unraveled. That may require time and will involve the frequent inpouring of the gospel. Here those of us who preach need to make sure that as we proclaim Christ we keep well in view the emphasis of especially the Letter to the Hebrews on the way in which assurance is related to the wonder of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through him.

5. Attacks of the devil are hindrances to assurance and they often have that as their specific aim. This was already true in the Garden of Eden where in denying the veracity and authority of God’s word aimed at destabilizing our first parents’ assurance of the goodness of God. How interesting therefore that when Paul comes to
the end of Romans 8, his rapid-fire questions in 8:31 employ the personal interrogative who? While he lists impersonal forces (“Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” are impersonal but he does not ask “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?” but Who shall . . . ?”).

For Paul there is more than a “what...?” in view. And he shows us how Christ is all sufficient to bring us to share his full assurance, even in the face of the opposition of the devil.

6. Our own consciences can hinder assurance. It is right that we live by our conscience. But it would be a mistake to trust our conscience absolutely. There are strong consciences and there are weak consciences; and sometimes those who regard themselves as having a “strong” conscience are in Pauline terms “weak” believers. They believe God has restricted their lives in ways that he has not. The inevitable result is either a false and unstable assurance based on their conformity to their conscience or a real loss of assurance because they cannot live comfortably in the presence of the Father. Like the elder brother in our Lord’s parable, they will eventually feel “All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me . . .” (Lk. 15:29, NIV—it is significant that he casts a side glance to his brother’s failure to live a life dominated by a moral conscience, v. 30).

Assurance is nourished when the conscience is fully illuminated by the truth of the gospel and the knowledge of the love and generosity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

7. Last, but not least, is the simple principle that either ignoring or being hindered from being present at the means of grace is bound to cloud our assurance.

When these dysfunctions, and others, are relieved by “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God [the Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14), then, as the Westminster Divines underscore, this will lead to a heart Enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, And, rather than lead to the presumption or antinomianism that the medieval and Tridentine tradition feared, it produces strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance. (XVIII.3)

No wonder, when it dawns on us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have conspired to save us, and to bring us into fellowship with God, give us assurance that we are loved and that we are secure in Christ, and to experience our “chief end” of glorifying God and enjoying him forever.
Thoughts on Theological Anthropology: Man as Male and Female

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What does it mean that God created (and that God redeems, sanctifies, and perfects) Adam/man as “male and female” (Gen 1:27; 5:2)? The question of “sex identity” never seems to be far from the surface of conservative evangelical discourse.¹ The recent publication of Aimee Byrd’s latest book, Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,² and the reviews that have followed are only the most recent entries in a decades-long conversation.

Many are tired of these conversations. Can’t we just move on?! Others are dissatisfied with the options currently on the table but worry that raising questions might signal either indifference or, worse, the beginning of a slide down the slippery slope toward theological revisionism. I understand both responses, which are not unrelated to the current state of the discussion, which is often repetitive, sometimes silly, and rarely self-reflective or self-critical.

Over the past couple of decades, I have found myself increasingly dissatisfied with the ways “complementarianism” is defined and described by its contemporary defenders. The Trinity controversy of 2016 not only strengthened that dissatisfaction, it also suggested to me what might be the “structural weakness” (to borrow Bobby Jamieson’s language) lying at the heart of many contemporary approaches to manhood and womanhood.

I’m not interested in rethinking the ordination practices of my denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. I’m not interested in proposing a “third way” beyond complementarianism and egalitarianism because, well, that’s not how the discovery of truth works (with apologies to Hegel). I’m not interested in “broadening” or “narrowing” complementarianism (for reasons that will become clearer below, I don’t find those categories all that helpful). I am interested in stepping back from the contemporary conversation, returning to first principles, considering the full sweep of

¹ Here I follow Prudence Allen, who distinguishes “sex identity (the natural state of females and males)” from “sex activity (sexual intercourse leading to childbirth)” (The Concept of Woman, Volume III: The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500-2015 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 13).

scriptural teaching, as well as that teaching’s reception by the church, and asking if and how we might transcend the limitations of our present discourse.

What follows is a first step in this regard. I have three basic points to make. First, contrary to contemporary tendencies toward reductionism, I will suggest the need for bringing a greater number of concepts into play when considering topics of moral and theological significance such as anthropology. Second, I will suggest four sets of gender roles that might enrich the ways we think about the identity and calling of men and women. Third, I will suggest three social concepts that can help us think about the nature and ends of our social lives in general and of our relationships as men and women in particular.

Here’s my thesis: A more diversified account of the social roles of men and women, and a more expansive account of the nature, forms, and ends of our social life will not only better account for a traditional understanding of the roles of men and women in family, church, and society. It will also offer a richer array of opportunities for our mutual agency in realizing God’s purposes for man as male and female.

If conservatives typically worry that expanding agency threatens to erode traditional roles, progressives typically worry that defending traditional roles threatens to restrict agency. Contrary to both worries, I believe that a more expansive theological anthropological framework will better ground traditional roles and further expand the vistas of mutual, personal agency for men and women seeking to live a life that is pleasing to God.

**More Concepts, Please**

A systematic theology of human beings requires true theological and moral concepts. Because such concepts disclose the nature of reality, they enable us to think well about human beings: their natures and callings, their capacities and ends. True concepts are the building blocks of good systematic theology.

True theological and moral concepts, in turn, must be authorized by Scripture if they are to command our thought and obedience. Scripture may authorize true concepts in different ways. Scripture may remind us what we should have known through the study nature (e.g., natural law) or Scripture may reveal things we never could have known through the study of nature but only through divine self-disclosure (e.g., the blessed Trinity). Scripture, in other words, authorizes true concepts by rehabilitating the natural knowledge of God and all things relative to God and by declaring the supernaturally revealed knowledge of God and all things relative to God.
In order to fulfill its vocation, systematic theology requires a sufficient number of concepts. To take a ready example, the concept of a divine “person” by itself is insufficient for thinking about the person of Jesus Christ. In addition to this concept, we must also have some conception of the oneness of God, of divine and human natures, of the unfolding covenant of grace in history, of various offices (e.g., prophet, priest, and king), and of the sacrificial system. Only with a sufficient number of concepts in place can we think well about the person of Jesus Christ.

The reason for this has to do with the nature of systematic theology. We sometimes think that theology is a “system” in the way that a machine is a system, with different cogs and levers, whose relations to each other are a matter of the machine-maker’s (in this case, the systematic theologian’s) invention. But theology is not that kind of system. As the title of Edward Leigh’s seventeenth-century compendium of doctrine indicates, theology is A systeme or body of divinity. That is to say, theology is not a system in the way that a machine is a system. Theology is a system in the way that a body is a system. The systematic theologian’s job when it comes to theology is not to invent the relationships between one theological concept and another but to discover them.

What’s the significance? You can take a screw out of a machine and describe it truly as a screw without describing its place and function within the larger machine. You can’t do that with an organ in a body. Part of the meaning of the organ is determined by its functions and relations to other organs, the various systems within the body (e.g., respiratory, nervous, etc.), and the body as a whole. This is why considering any topic in theology always requires us to consider a sufficient number of concepts. A screw may be described by itself and, in being so described, it may be described truly. A heart may not.

The “structural weakness” of contemporary complementarianism, as I see it, is that it attempts to account for manhood and womanhood with an insufficient set of concepts. The concepts it employs are not themselves false (e.g., equality, authority, submission). They are isolated, not well complemented by other concepts that are necessary for making sense of who we are and what we are called to be as men and women made, redeemed, and yet to be perfected by the triune God. Like notes abstracted from a larger composition, these concepts by themselves fail to exhibit the harmony of the divine composer’s true intention for men and women.3

In the remaining two sections of this article, I want to suggest a fuller set of concepts that, taken together, provide a more expansive framework for thinking about the identity and calling of man as male and female. That fuller set of concepts includes four gender roles and three social concepts.

**Four Gender Roles (times two sexes, times multiple social contexts)**

In a recent review of J. Budziszewski’s book, *On the Meaning of Sex*,4 Bobby Jamieson identifies what I believe is the key “structural weakness” in contemporary complementarian approaches to manhood and womanhood, namely, the widespread tendency of defining manhood and womanhood *by means of the marriage relationship*. Jamieson’s point is not that biblical teaching on the relationship between husbands and wives has no bearing on theological anthropology. His point is that taking the husband-wife relation as paradigmatic for what it means to be a man or a woman more generally is potentially reductionistic.5

Jamieson finds in Budziszewski’s natural theology of sex a more promising approach to addressing the general question of what it means for man to be “male and female.” According to Budziszewski, “a woman is a human being of that sex whose members are potentially mothers,”6 whereas a man is “a human being of the sex whose members have a different potentiality than women do: the potentiality for fatherhood.”7

As is clear from Budziszewski’s book and Jamieson’s review, while biological motherhood and fatherhood provide the starting point for defining womanhood and manhood, biological motherhood and fatherhood do not exhaust the potential meanings of manhood and womanhood. Even on a domestic level, fathering involves more than being a sperm donor and mothering involves more than carrying a child to term. Furthermore, fathering and mothering are modes of male and female agency capable of being exercised beyond a domestic context, even by those who do not exercise those modes of agency in a biological sense. The gender roles of “father” and

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“mother” are analogical concepts that identify roles capable of being fulfilled beyond the family in civil and ecclesiastical contexts. Deborah, for example, is called a “mother in Israel” ( Judges 5:7); and Paul describes himself as a “father” to Timothy his “son” ( 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 2 Tim 1:2).

If this is correct, we have not one but two sets of gender-specific roles capable of being fulfilled by men and women. Men may be husbands and fathers. Women may be wives and mothers. Moreover, unlike the marital set of roles, the parental set of roles have potential applications beyond the context of the family. Again: Deborah is a mother in Israel; Paul is a father in the church.

In addition to these two sets of gender-specific roles, let us consider two other sets that further enrich our understanding of the potencies of male and female social agency. In 1 Corinthians 11, while discussing the practice of prophesying in the church and the proper decorum that must accompany that practice, Paul appeals to the order of creation: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” ( 1 Cor 11:8-9). According to Paul, there is a natural order built into God’s creative design for men and women that the church should reflect in its ministry (so 1 Tim 2:13-14).

For the sake of the present discussion, it is important to observe that Paul does not stop there. After reiterating his judgment that “a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” when she prophesies ( 1 Cor 11:10), Paul adds: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” ( 1 Cor 11:11-12). The ordered relation between men and women that grounds Paul’s judgment regarding head coverings is not the only relevant relation to consider when thinking about men and women. In addition to the authority-relation of men and women, there is a dependence-relation of men and women that must be taken into account as well, and both of these relations may be understood properly only when viewed in the context of their underlying relation of dependence on God.

Paul’s comment suggests, then, a third gender-specific role that must come into consideration. The dependence-relation of a child to his or her parent. Again, like its corresponding gender role of father and mother, the dependence-relation of a son or a daughter is one that may exist not only in the context of the family but also—in analogous forms—in other social contexts. As Paul is Timothy’s “father,” so Timothy is Paul’s “son.”

This leads us to a fourth gender-specific role: that of sibling. This role, which represents one of the New Testament’s dominant ways of addressing the Christian
community, “brothers” (e.g., 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25), also originates in the context of the family. Men and women come into existence as “sons” and “daughters” and, in many cases, as “brothers” and “sisters.”

To summarize: “Adam” is inflected in two distinct, non-interchangeable sexes, male and female. Those two sexes, in turn, are each capable of existing in four distinct roles. Men may be husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. Women may be wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. Furthermore, while each of these roles originates in the family, the basic social unit of human society, except for the husband-wife relation, the other roles find analogous instantiations in other social contexts. In both civil and ecclesiastical contexts, we may be fathers and sons, brothers and sisters to those who are not members of our natural family.

Two further points are worth observing regarding these gender-specific roles. First, not every role is defined by an authority-relation. Within the context of the family, the husband is the “head” of the wife (Eph 5:23); and children are called to honor and obey their parents (Eph 6:1-2). However, the relation between brothers and sisters is different, as parents often have to remind their children, “Sweetheart, you are not his mother. I am.” Second, roles that are defined by authority-relations do not map exclusively along lines of sexual differentiation. Mothers stand in an authority-relation to their children. Sons and daughters are called to honor their fathers and mothers in the Lord. What is true in the family has broader application in the church as well. Paul thus instructs Timothy: “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim 5:1-2).

It is important to emphasize that gender-specific roles are not the only roles that are relevant for human society. There are teachers and students, bosses and employees, heads of state and citizens. The point for now is that, when it comes to gender-specific roles, one set of roles (husband and wife) is not sufficient to account for the full array of callings that God has given to human beings as men and women. Christian social teaching about man as male and female, if it is to speak well, must speak about human beings in two sexes, four roles, within the context of various analogous social settings and social purposes (domestic, civil, ecclesiastical).

Three Social Concepts
While suggestive, the four sets of gender-specific roles discussed above are insufficient by themselves to illumine Christian wisdom about man’s identity and calling as male and female. Sex, taken by itself, does not answer every question that arises about human social life. Not all roles are gender-specific.

In seeking to establish a framework for theological anthropology with respect to the question of sex, at least three other social concepts are needed: (1) commonality and equality, (2) diversity and structure, (3) mutual fellowship. If the gender-specific concepts described above are the “notes,” then the three social concepts described below are the “scale” on which those notes play harmoniously, beautifully in accordance with the divine composer’s design.

**Commonality and equality**

“Commonality” is an anthropological concept that presents itself to us across the entire range of God’s works in relation to human beings in nature, grace, and glory. Human beings have a common nature. God created both man and woman in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-25). God named both man and woman “Adam” (Gen 5:2). Human beings are recipients of a common grace (I speak here not of “common grace” in the technical sense but of a saving grace that is shared in common). Both men and women are recipients of a common baptism (Gal 3:27-28; Eph 4:6). Both men and women are common heirs of “the grace of life” (1 Pet 3:7). Finally, human beings share a common destiny in glory. As now we enjoy the status of being God’s children by God’s grace, so one day we will be fully conformed to the glorious image of Christ Jesus at his appearing (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

The common nature and status of men and women in nature, grace, and glory entails the notion of our equal standing before God. In creation, our status as the image of God locates us under God’s sovereign dominion and over the rest of God’s creatures. Contrary to the various ways of measuring social standing in the ancient world–ethnic, socio-economic, sexual–baptism accords men and women equal standing before God as heirs of his inheritance (Gal 3:28-29), an equal standing that the church is called to acknowledge in its congregational order as well (James 2:1-5). Biblical teaching regarding the natural commonality and equality of men and women

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8 These three concepts are drawn from Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 262.
informs later patristic teaching, such as we find in Lactantius’ *Institutes*, V.15-16 and Augustine’s *City of God*, XIX.14-17.

We must of course be careful not to read modern conceptions of equality back into Scripture (see the next point). But we must also remember that modern conceptions did not appear *ex nihilo*. Modern conceptions of equality, insofar as they go astray, are themselves corruptions of something originally positive and good that, when located within the larger economy of God and all things in relation to God, finds its proper meaning and significance. God named them “Adam” (Gen 5:2). God commanded that we baptize them (Matt 28:19; Gal 3:27-28). God promises them future glory (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2). And these common blessings bring with them shared responsibilities and callings in nature, grace, and glory (Gen 1:28; Rom 6:3-4; Eph 4:4).

**Diversity and structure**

Talk of shared responsibilities and callings brings us into the sphere of social reality. And here both natural and revealed theology teach us that, modern egalitarian visions notwithstanding, diversity and structure are essential to well-functioning societies.

Not every form of diversity, or even every form of inequality, is inconsistent with commonality of nature and equal standing before God. In his discussion of humanity’s status as male and female, Thomas Aquinas mentions various forms of natural inequality that do not compromise or threaten our fundamental status as creatures made in God’s image, baptized in Jesus’ name, and destined for God’s kingdom. Even in an unfallen world, Thomas argues, there would have been disparities in knowledge and virtue, in bodily strength and beauty, and in domestic and civil roles and responsibilities.9

The question, of course, is how can such differences and distinctions square with our common nature and equality before God and men? Is equality simply an (eschatological?) ideal, incapable of realization in the here and now of our social lives? Must all forms of social diversity and structure threaten our shared status as the special objects of God’s creative, redeeming, and perfecting work?

The answer is “no.” But to perceive why a negative answer is necessary, we must think more deeply about the relation between equality and diversity, and also about

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9 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q 92, art. 1, ad 2; I, q 96, arts. 3-4.
Thoughts on Theological Anthropology: Man as Male and Female

their end. “What is required,” according to Oliver O’Donovan, is “a coordination of our understanding of equality with our understanding of the humane forms of community. To have any substance a claim for equality must reflect decisions about what differentiations are constructive and healthy for human existence and what are not. But those decisions in turn reflect a judgment about which differentiations help, and which hinder, the meeting of person with person on the basis of equality, with neither slave nor lord.”

Certain forms of social order are inherently unnatural, the products of the fall. In Book XIX of The City of God, Augustine identifies slavery as a form of social order that is inconsistent with our common nature and our common good. Other forms of social order, he argues, are not necessarily unnatural, despite the fact that they are regularly corrupted and distorted by sinners. These natural forms of social order presuppose in their exercise our common nature as human beings and aim at our mutual fellowship. Commenting on the paterfamilias, the head of the Christian household (NB: a broader category than today’s nuclear family), Augustine states:

This is the origin of domestic peace, or the well-ordered concord of those in the family who rule and those who obey. For they who care for the rest rule,–the husband the wife, the parents the children, the masters the servants; and they who are cared for obey,–the women their husbands, the children their parents, the servants their masters. But in the family of the just man who lives by faith and is as yet a pilgrim journeying on to the celestial city, even those who rule serve those whom they seem to command; for they rule not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others–not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.

That which distinguishes Christian social order is its submission to a twofold ordering principle: the Christian exercise of authority is ordered under God and to God. It is ordered under God in that it recognizes God-given orderings of human social relations while refusing to engage in sinfully disordered forms of human social relations. The Christian exercise of authority is ordered to God in that it recognizes that all creaturely forms of authority are not ultimately designed to serve those in authority (the definition of tyranny!) but rather to serve

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10 O’Donovan, The Desire of the Nations, 263.

those under authority, to promote their temporal and eternal well-being, the latter consisting of eternal fellowship in the city of God.

Classical Christian social teaching learned the latter lesson from the Lord himself, who did not come “to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This leads us to our third and final social concept.

**Mutual fellowship**

Rooted in our common nature, ordered under God and to God, Christian social order is realized in mutual fellowship. As O’Donovan observes, community—the sharing of all things in common within the context of a common life—is not merely the context of virtue formation in Christianity (as it is in the Greco-Roman world). Christian community is the goal of virtue formation.\(^{12}\) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father reach their term in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). And what is true of divine saving agency is true of created, redeemed, sanctified, and glorified human agency as well.

Christian social order has an equalizing tendency. This tendency is rooted in the saving agency of Jesus Christ. In John 15:15, Jesus states: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” The point, of course, is not that Jesus is abdicating his position of divine Lordship in relation to the disciples. The point is that he has exercised his authority in order to elevate their social status, giving them access to “all” that he has heard from the Father. By revealing the fullness of the Father’s heart to them, Jesus has raised the disciples from the status of servants to the status of friends, granting them the truest and highest dignity that human beings can enjoy.

All Christian social order has an equalizing tendency toward friendship, toward mutual agency and mutual fellowship in the good things of God. This doesn’t mean that all Christians are friends—at least not yet—for our spatial, temporal, and social finitude precludes this. Nor does it mean that there is no place for authority in the family, the church, and society. It does mean that all Christian agency is friendly,

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aimed at mutual agency and mutual fellowship, including the agency of those in authority.13

Thus, when Paul describes the social virtues of love in 1 Corinthians 13, one of his repeated themes is love’s willingness to defer to the agency of others so that it can develop, be exercised, and contribute to the common good: “love is patient . . .” (1 Cor 13:4).14 Similarly, when Paul describes the end of authoritative ministerial agency in Ephesians 4, he says that the body of Christ will reach maturity, under that ministerial agency’s guidance, when each part of the body is working properly to contribute to the body’s growth (Eph 4:16; cf. 1 Cor 12:4-7).

Conclusion

God created man as male and female. In God’s sovereign goodness in nature, grace, and glory, these two sexes array themselves in diverse gender-specific roles as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, roles that, in turn, have manifold applications in family, church, and society. Some of these roles involve authority-relations, others do not. All of these social relations presuppose our common humanity and are ordered to our mutual fellowship, under God and in communion with God.

Where does this leave us in our understanding of the identity and calling of man as male and female? My goal has not been to address every question that a theology of sex identity should address but rather to sketch a sufficiently complex conceptual framework within which such questions might be addressed. In concluding this already lengthy discussion, I want to make one observation about the shape of our existence as male and female.

There seems to be a built-in teleology to our sex identity. Husbands and wives become fathers and mothers. Fathers and mothers bear sons and daughters. Sons and daughters become brothers and sisters. Men and women are born. Men and women die. But this cycle is not circular. It is teleological. One day, they will no longer marry or be given in marriage (Matt 22:30). In that day, there will be no more husbands and wives and therefore there will be no more fathering and no more mothering. In that day, all will be sons of God (Rev 21:7) and all will be brothers and sisters of the one

13 On the relationship between friendliness and friendship, see O’Donovan, Entering into Rest, chap. 6.

14 O’Donovan, Entering into Rest, 2
appointed to be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29). Learning to walk together as men and women therefore not only involves learning who God made us to be and living in accord with God’s good design. Learning to walk together as men and women also involves learning who God has redeemed us to become and, in a manner appropriate to the overlap of the ages in which we live, learning what it means for all of us to be sons and daughters of the living God and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The better we learn this lesson, the more beautifully we will grow into our social identity as the bride of Christ, which is the ultimate end of our life together.

When a musician stands next to a tone deaf person while singing, it can be an excruciating experience. Robert Alter writes to confront English translations of the Bible which are largely tone deaf in his view.


Alter acknowledges the inherent difficulties of translation from the first page. “The practice of translation, as I have learned from experience, entails an endless series of compromises, some of them happy, some painful and not quite right because the translator has been unable to find an adequate English equivalent for what is happening – often brilliantly – in the original language” (ix). He begins with an examination of the King James version as the foundational English translation. Through this he introduces some of his primary criticisms of translations.

One criticism is that English translations have a “rage to explain the biblical text,” (7), by which he means adding interpretive language which is not representative of the Hebrew or which goes beyond the simplicity of the Hebrew. It is a valid point which is easy to establish from various translations. Another criticism is that too often English translations make it sound as if scripture was originally written
yesterday rather than reflecting its ancient pedigree. He is not arguing for archaisms for their own sake as much as for language which reflects the nature and tone of the original.1

Aside from the KJV, Alter compares the Hebrew primarily with these translations: JPS (Jewish Publication Society) Bible (2002), New Jerusalem Bible (1985), and Revised English Bible (1989) [NB: not the RSV]. He shows no awareness of nor interaction with translations such as the NASB (1971/1995), NIV (1984/2011), or the ESV (2001). While one would not expect exhaustive comparisons of all English translations, some of the universal assertions he makes against English translations are actually untrue when it comes to the wording of those which he ignores (e.g., p.105 in connection with the translation of Esau’s dialog in Genesis 25, where the ESV proves him wrong). Such omissions undermine the trustworthiness of some of his assertions.

Alter looks at five criteria for evaluating translations: syntax, word choice, sound and word play, rhythm, and the language of dialog. In regard to syntax, one of his primary points of concern is with parataxis, “the ordering of words in parallel clauses linked by ‘and’” (4) which is so prevalent in the Hebrew narratives. He also focuses on word inversion (syntactic fronting), which often is done for the sake of emphasis in the original. He berates most modern translations for largely ignoring these dynamics (while ignoring several translations).

Word choice is likely what most people think of when they consider Bible translation. Alter makes some curious judgments in this chapter, such as saying that the Hebrew word nefesh should never be rendered in English as “soul”, as he claims “there is no biblical notion of the soul” (48). His non-Trinitarian theology also comes to the fore in other claims. He also tosses in diction as a criterion in this chapter, which would perhaps be more logical in the last chapter. Some of the examples he burrows into in this chapter seem pedantic and bury the reader in needless detail to make his points.

The chapter on sound play and word play amounts to consideration of puns and alliteration, both of which he admits are very difficult to reflect in translations. Some of the examples he gives from his own translations seem to prove his own point that trying to preserve such things end up being a negative trade off. In the midst of this treatment he makes one of his central assertions: “My own contention is that

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1 To read his list of Ten Commandments for Bible Translators, see https://theamericanscholar.org/the-ten-commandments-of-bible-translation/.
meaning in the Bible or in any literary text cannot be reduced to lexical values, that it involves the communication of affect and can never be separated from the nuanced connotation of words and their dynamic interaction as they are joined through sound, through syntax, and through poetic or narrative context” (76).

Rhythm is a consideration that most casual readers of the Bible pay little attention to, and if Alter is to be believed, the same is true for most translators. He states, “Rhythm is the beating heart of literary prose, and as in the relation of the heart to the human body, arhythmia [sic] can be life-threatening to the writing” (84). This is a bit of overstatement perhaps, and it is an almost impossible quality to retain in a translation. His examples from Melville and Shakespeare may not be helpful in making his point for many readers. Perhaps the rhythmic cadences of rap music would be a more immediately recognizable example in English, but such plebian intonations would be alien to Alter’s generation. He does make an apt point when he says, “The dimension of sound would have been all the more urgent for the first audiences to whom these texts were addressed, who would of course not have read them silently but rather would have listened to them” (102).

Though he focuses on dialog in the prior chapters, it takes center stage in the last chapter. This is where his background in comparative literature is particularly helpful. Unlike a Greek epic poem, most of the important matters in the Old Testament are presented through dialog. As with other criteria, he claims that modern English translations drain biblical dialog of its vitality by trying to regularize it too much or by being insensitive “to the nuances of language that would be appropriate for ancient speech” (115). Like the rest, this chapter is weakened by ignoring many English translations which actually do a decent job of reflecting such considerations (eg, his treatment of the story of Jephthah’s daughter on pp.116-117 fails to note that the ESV does indeed reflect the Hebrew dialog well). There is no concluding chapter; merely a one-page summary of some points at the last.

Reformed scholarship focuses on the inspiration and authority of Scripture, which is necessary. It is also attuned to text-critical and lexical issues when it comes to translation. But apart from those who are involved in creating English translations, many who interact with English renderings of Scripture consciously or unconsciously assume that translating the Hebrew and Greek is a somewhat mechanical process. Technologies like Google Translate add to such a misconception. Anyone who has studied languages other than their own knows that learning another language ultimately means learning to think in a different way. Idiomatic phrases, poetic
language, and other aspects of language do not translate readily with computer-generated tools. This work is a helpful corrective to that notion.

In spite of its omissions of common English translations and its repetitive and somewhat preachy tone, Alter’s book is a worthwhile read for anyone who interacts with the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Though the crisis of translating is not as bleak as he suggests, it is a helpful reminder of the challenges of translating God’s Word into English or any other language in such a way that is as faithful to all aspects of the original languages as possible.

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With Michael Bird as the editor, Zondervan has embarked on a new series that provides “volume-length works that cover the important historical-critical and contextual issues for each of the New Testament books” (back cover). That is, each volume will cover “introductory” matters such as authorship, date, background, purpose, etc. for a particular NT book or closely-associated NT books in more depth than standard one-volume introductions (e.g., Carson and Moo, Kümmel, Brown).

The first released volume in this series is authored by Nijay K. Gupta and concerns 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Gupta is a professor at Portland Seminary (George Fox University), which is broadly evangelical in the Wesleyan and Friends traditions. He is a very capable NT scholar and has previously written a commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians (New Covenant Commentary Series, 2016).

As one would expect, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* is broken up into two major sections, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians. Each major section has the same four-fold outline: (1) Text (Greek text, genre, outline), (2) Background and Situation, (3) Themes and Interpretation, and (4) History of Interpretation. The vast majority of this book presents and well summarizes scholarly arguments for variously debated views. Although much of this book includes the concerns of critical (liberal) scholars,
refreshingly, Gupta also includes the viewpoints of many strong evangelicals. Further, Gupta does include his views, although not in a heavy-handed manner.

The following are notable aspects of this work. Gupta includes a well-balanced discussion of genre questions concerning NT letters in general and its application to the broad meanings and outlines of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He notes those scholars who emphasize “epistolary” conventions (e.g., standard openings) and “epistolary” types (consoling letter, paraenetic letter) as opposed to others who use Greco-Roman “rhetorical” categories (e.g., narratio, probatio) from different types of “rhetorical” speeches (e.g., deliberative, judicial, epideictic). In the end, Gupta is non-committal and sees both methods as reinforcing each other.

Virtually all agree that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in the early AD 50’s. Pauline authorship for 2 Thessalonians, however, is hotly contested. Gupta has a twenty-four page explanation of the arguments pro-and-con. His explanation of the “con” arguments is especially good. Gupta, however, does conclude that Pauline authorship is “more reasonable” (p. 220). I offer two minor complaints here. His discussion of the “pro” arguments could have been much stronger by (1) noting problems with the typical “pseudonymous-was-culturally-acceptable” view and (2) including the implications of divine authorship as this is the strongest “pro” argument, even if many reject it out of hand.

Concerning the socio-background of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Gupta has a thirty-three page discussion of several monographs for 1 Thessalonians and a related nine pages for 2 Thessalonians. He tends to agree with Nicholl (From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica, 2004) who, based on a combination of Greco-Roman cultural factors, Acts 17:1–10, confusion over Paul’s eschatological views, and an exegesis of 1–2 Thessalonians, concludes that the sudden death of some Christians caused concern that these deaths were due to the wrath of God. Summarizing scholarly views of the socio-background here is complicated by those who have a very low view of Acts and those who deny Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, but Gupta’s summaries of various views are accurate and have a commendable clarity.

Given there are no explicit quotes of the OT, is the OT a significant influence on Paul for 1–2 Thessalonians? Many in scholarship, especially the history-of-religions school, have denied significant OT influence. Others have simply ignored the question because there are no explicit quotes. Gupta rightly argues that 1 Thessalonians “is suffused with scriptural language and imagery” (p. 37) and 2 Thessalonians has a “significant influence” from the OT (p. 192).
Not typical of an “introduction,” Gupta does include a brief discussion with some detailed exegesis for a variety of “themes” in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Here, Gupta more directly gives his views as opposed to summarizing other scholars. For 1 Thessalonians, he covers “Eschatology and Hope,” “Faith(fulness) and Loyalty,” “Thanksgiving and Joy,” “Metamorphosis,” “Work and Labor,” “Holiness, Purity, and Integrity,” “Love,” and “Christian Tradition and Teachings” (pp. 90–106). For 2 Thessalonians, he covers “Dignity and Honor,” “Truth and Deception,” “Justice and Peace,” and “Cooperation, Orderliness, and Work” (pp. 231–36). I have some quibbles in these sections, e.g., his over-emphasis on loyalty for understanding πίστις, but the reader will get a reasonably good overview of the major themes in 1–2 Thessalonians.

Gupta includes a chapter on the history of interpretation for each book. He provides a necessarily brief, but informative, overview from the apostolic fathers to the present. I especially appreciated his concern for the apostolic fathers through the Reformation.

In sum, Gupta’s 1 & 2 Thessalonians is well done. The strongest points are the summaries of scholarly views concerning (1) the socio-background of 1–2 Thessalonians and (2) the authorship of 2 Thessalonians.

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In a series uneven as the Brazos Theological Commentary, a voice like Leithart’s is always a welcome one. He’s a master at his craft and a delight to read. While typology, intertextuality, and literary readings of the Bible have become common fare amongst academics, preachers, and seminarians, very few have done as much as Leithart to show just how fruitful these approaches can be.

With this book, Leithart completes his triptych on the “1 & 2”s of the Old Testament. His commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel, A Son to Me, came out in 2003, in which he stretched some of his now characteristic typological muscles. 1 & 2 Kings
appeared in the same series as his Chronicles and has now been hailed as one of the preeminent examples of theological interpretation. Despite his infamy in Reformed circles, Leithart is a paragon of exegetical precision and care, mixing literary insights with philosophical musings and an almost unfathomable knowledge of theology and the Bible. This volume is no exception. Leithart’s meticulous eye for detail, patterns, and types goes to work mining the depths of an oft-neglected set of Old Testament books.

When most people think of 1 & 2 Chronicles, more than likely they depreciate it as an abridged telling of Samuel and Kings. Not so, says Leithart. In his mind, these books present a stunning vision of life under the reign of God. Two themes in particular drive Leithart’s reading of Chronicles—ecclesiology and typology. Any longtime reader of Leithart will recognize these as familiar fellows for him. In this book, ecclesiology and typology are almost inseparable. His typology is often ecclesiological, and his ecclesiology arrives out of intricate typologies.

Ecclesiology takes center stage in 1 & 2 Chronicles. Leithart argues Chronicles allows for fruitful reflection on liturgy, polity, and unity, providing models and examples of how the church may come to a greater understanding of all three by studying these pages (2). He regularly notes instances where assemblies (qahal in Hebrew) appear (7, 9-10, 48, 127, 185-186, 203, 211). The Chronicler highlights assemblers, so Leithart says, exactly because he is so concerned with the shape and practice of Israel’s cult and kingdom. According to Leithart, the Chronicler’s painstaking detail of temple administration throughout the two books even provides a model for worship and church reform:

Music turns creation into culture and cult. Music makes us warriors by enlivening our spirit. Soldiers march to battle in rhythm. The pounding beat and soaring chords of warm-up music fill athletes with the spirit of the game. Martyrs go to the arena singing psalms and hymns. Singing is, finally, a form of prophecy. Chronicles is a manual for church reformers, as well as for church musicians. (7)

This theme of music, cult, and temple service flow throughout the commentary, beginning with David, and ending with the reign of Josiah who rehabilitates much of David’s liturgical reforms. In the pages of Chronicles we get a glimpse of a church and assembly.
Typology runs the engine for everything else. Most of Leithart’s truly remarkable insights concern subtle and easily missed typologies that add layers to the text. The spine of his typology, though, follows Israel’s history from Creation to the reign of David: “Chronicles begins with the name Adam and end with the decree of Cyrus. It is a hint that the Chronicler is retelling the entire history of the Old Testament in, with, and under the history of kings” (4). Throughout the entire work, Leithart calls the reader’s attention to various Davidic figures, each with their own Solomon and Saul. Creation and recreation appear regularly throughout the text as Adam and other little “a” adams march out into the world. Creation, sin, exile, resurrection—this is the entire narrative substructure running from 1 Chronicles 1:1-2 Chronicles 36:23.

So, should you read this commentary? A good rule of thumb is to read whatever Leithart puts out. It goes without saying that he must be read with caution. Leithart, while claiming the heritage of the Reformation, does not mind confessional tracks. Once that’s understood, very few writers alive today deliver as much and as often as Peter Leithart does. Plus, Leithart is one of those rare souls in theology who cranks out enjoyable copy at an astounding rate.

Another reason you should read this commentary is more pedagogical. Leithart’s keen, literary eye for the texture of the text is on full display as he works carefully through 1 & 2 Chronicles, keying readers into puns in the Hebrew, making almost unobservable structural notes, and connecting all the dots to the wider biblical narrative. Like his work in 1 & 2 Kings, Leithart presents a model in how to read the Bible carefully. Even if you disagree with him, and you almost certainly will, he is a master tutor in training your eyes on the text and drilling down deep.

Finally, Leithart’s greatest contribution is reading 1 & 2 Chronicles as an intentional and masterful unity. This is one of those books we skim through in our quiet time, hardly noticing the differences and not stopping to examine those we do notice. That simply won’t do for those who want to be better readers of Scripture.

Despite the high praise, this is not a perfect book. Those familiar with Leithart’s work will spot many of the same weaknesses that afflict his oeuvre. First, regardless of what Leithart may say, not every pericope proves to be a chiasm. Extremely dubious chiasms appear more often than one may like, and they can get tiresome after a while. Second, gematria (the assignment of numeric values to Hebrew characters), while no doubt useful in some passages, can get out of hand when used indiscriminately. While more tempered than some of his other works (e.g., Revelation,
2 vols., in the ITC), the number-crunching often seems a baroque flourish rather than substantial exegesis.

The last critique is the most critical. Leithart’s reading of 1 & 2 Chronicles is dizzying and astounding. There are pages of absolute brilliance, awarding close readers. Unfortunately, this book felt like it failed to land its punch. Things didn’t quite come together. Most of the interesting exegetical points receive almost no theological treatments. Treatments that did appear felt undercooked. In many ways, this book felt incomplete, missing some of the vibrancy that we’ve come to expect from Leithart.

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If Reformed pastors enter the pulpit with a defective view of preaching, their efforts will fail. It’s not enough for us to study and prepare – our points may be logical, our attention to detail may be meticulous, and our precision unfolding the text may be exact – but all our labor is in vain if we don’t properly understand what a sermon is supposed to accomplish in the life of a congregation. When we are merely conveyers of information, our churches may grow in understanding of the scriptures, but they will not grow in holiness and in love for God and man.

Until the Lord’s return, experiential preachers will remain the church’s greatest need – preachers who inform not just the intellect, but who reach into the hearts of God’s people. It’s this kind of preaching to which Joel R. Beeke summons the Lord’s ministers in *Reformed Preaching*.

He approaches this experiential preaching with three main headings: definition and description of experiential preaching (part 1), historical examples of Reformed experiential preaching (part 2), and preaching experientially today (part 3).

“Reformed experiential preaching is preaching that applies the truth of God to the hearts of people to show how things ought out to go, do go, and ultimately will go
in the Christian’s experience with respect to God and his neighbors – including his family members, his fellow church members and people in the world around him” (41). 19th century Anglican Charles Bridges puts the relationship between truth and experience well: “Christian experience is the influence of doctrinal truth upon the affections” (352).

The impartation of truth is critical to preaching, but unless truth produces love in Christ, preaching fails to attain its goal (23). According to Beeke, the goal of experiential preaching “is to know the Lord personally in a way that is true to the Word” (48). As he labors in the pulpit, the preacher seeks “a holy people for the glory of God” (69), men and women who “live solely and wholly for God” (24).

The preacher must ask himself, “Does my preaching find an echo in the experience of true believers? . . . Does my preaching cultivate a self-reflection by which people test their experience by the Scriptures?” (50)

Five themes in this section captured my attention.

First, experiential preaching is Christ-centered. Experiential sermons are full of the Christ who awakens, justifies, sanctifies, and comforts sinners (61).

Second, experiential preaching is biblical. It is commanded in scripture, for example in 2 Tim. 4:1-8, 2 Cor 5:11, and Isaiah 40:1-2 (51-52). Scripture also provides models of experiential preaching in the ministries of Jeremiah, Micah, Jesus, and Paul (53-54).

Third, experiential preaching is uncomplicated. Beeke advises against overly intricate sermons. “People today need to hear a single theme derived from the scriptural text and pressed home in a memorable, organized way with passion, energy, and application” (79).

Fourth, experiential preaching is authentic. The preacher needs a gritty realism about the difficulties his congregation will face as they live by faith, dependent on God’s grace. If he ignores or minimizes suffering, he will overwhelm his congregation with unrealistic – that is, unbiblical – expectations (86).

Fifth, experiential preaching is demanding. The experiential preacher must take stock of his own life. He must have for himself an experiential acquaintance with the doctrines he preaches. His personal progress in the Christian life is essential. How wonderful it would be for a listener to say of his minister, “He is preaching the same Christ as he did ten years ago, but his preaching is richer, deeper, and fuller now.” (85) McCheyne got to the heart of this truth when he said: “A minister’s life is the life of his ministry” (82).
In section two, Beeke surveys the lives and ministries of twenty-four Reformed preachers spanning five centuries, from Ulrich Zwingli to Martyn Lloyd-Jones, as well as providing introductions to Puritan preaching and the Dutch Further Reformation.

In his whirlwind survey of experiential Reformed preachers, Beeke demonstrates that although circumstances, personal giftings, academic learning, and homiletical styles differ from preacher to preacher, they all preached experientially, making skillful applications from the text.

Several common traits emerge in these preacher’s lives.

*They shared a high view of preaching.* It is God-owned preaching that saves, sanctifies, and sustains his pilgrim people. Calvin preached some 4,000 sermons. At the end of his life, he counted them more important than his written works (113). Richard Sibbes extolled preaching as “the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world” (146).

*They preached dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit.* Thomas Watson understood that “ministers knock at the door of men’s hearts, the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door” (156). Recognizing his dependency upon the Spirit, the experiential preacher is a man of prayer. Robert Traill’s pronouncement is sobering: “Some ministers of meaner gifts and parts are more successful than some that are far above them in abilities; not because they preach better, so much as because they pray more. Many good sermons are lost for lack of much prayer in study” (157).

*They shared a burden for the holiness of the minister.* I found an example from the life of 17th century Dutch minister Joducus van Lodenstein especially helpful. Wearied and discouraged by the lack of holiness in his own congregation and the lamentable spiritual condition of his nation, he was led “to look inward and see that the only thing he could control was his personal devotion to Christ” (276). Ministers often fret over matters beyond their control while neglecting what is within their grasp.

*They shared a commitment to application in preaching.* In a chapter on the Westminster Directory for Public Worship and preaching, Beeke observes: “Application occupies 40 percent of the directory’s treatment of preaching, so clearly it is a predominant concern in the Westminster method” (198). I am reminded of J.C. Ryle’s words in his commentary on Matthew: “Personal application has been called the ‘soul’ of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without a direction: it may be well written, rightly dated, and duly signed; but it is useless, because it never reaches its destination.”
I agree with Beeke’s advice that the preacher should not go more than ten minutes without making an application lest he lose the congregation’s attention (356). I see this challenge all the time in my students’ sermons. They are so excited about what they’re learning about the text, that they fail to take the time to apply it to their own – and their listeners’ – hearts.

Beeke’s survey spans five centuries. It inspires and provides abundant footnotes – which directs the minister to additional reading. As I hope this review indicates, this book is packed with memorable quotations that will prove timely and immensely helpful for ministers of every generation. We can rejoice that God has given his ministers a great cloud of preaching witnesses.

The final section of the book is an appeal to today’s ministers to preach experientially. Such preaching requires the proper balance between the objective and subjective elements of the Christian faith (chapter 20). Failure to find that balance can lead to sterile intellectualism on the one hand, or vacuous sentimentalism on the other.

As a homiletics professor, I urge my students to do the hard work of finding that balance. I want earnestness to distinguish their ministry. When they preach on the attributes of God, they must earnestly desire for their congregation to know this God personally – even as they do – and to delight in him, adore him, love him, and joyfully submit to him. Preaching Christ is more than securing the congregation’s assent to the order of salvation. Students must be persuaded that as they preach the gospel, Christ himself – not merely facts about Christ and his work – is offered to needy sinners, to be received in faith and repentance.

Before a man can preach balanced and experiential sermons, he must apply the truths he handles to his own heart, and this requires a close walk with God. The author is blunt: “You cannot be an effective experiential preacher if you live at a distance from God” (371). In the words of John Owen, the minister must experience “the power of the things we preach to others” (371). I find this a striking reminder of the obvious. Pastors who preach about prayer must pray. How can they summon men to patience under trial if they themselves lack patience? How can they call their congregation to forgive others if they hold grudges, harbor anger, and keep offenders at a distance? Again, Owen: “No man preaches that sermon so well to others who does not preach it first to his own heart” (371).

Applications that appeal to the conscience require that pastors know the scriptures, their own hearts, the hearts of their people, the culture in which their
people live, and a profound understanding of their congregation’s abundant temptations and trials.

In my preaching labs, I require students to make one application for each point of their sermon. In addition to retaining a congregation’s interest, this discipline forces them to think carefully (and I hope prayerfully) about their listeners. What does God’s word say to his those in various stages of Christian growth – from the unconverted to the young believer to the mature disciple. Whether struggling, tempted, and failing, or grieving, fearful, and anxious, the congregation must know that God is for them in Jesus Christ. Every step forward in the pursuit of holiness calls for heart-felt thanksgiving and persevering trust in the Savior.

Throughout this section, Beeke offers practical advice on diverse matters: studying the scriptures and people; preaching the attributes of God, man’s original nobility, sin’s ruin, and Christ and his salvation; seeking the congregation’s repentance and holiness; preaching to the conscience; and preaching evangelistically.

I enthusiastically recommend Reformed Preaching. One of Beeke’s strengths is that he writes in the same way he encourages ministers to preach – he writes from the heart, to the heart. For five centuries, the Lord has given his church a succession of Reformed experiential preachers. Pastors and seminarians who want take their place among them will find this book invaluable. It encourages ministers – encourages me – to preach from the heart to the heart.

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