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What Is Mortal Shall Be Swallowed Up by Life (2 Cor 5:4): A Critical and Constructive Engagement with John Hick's Theology of Death in Death and Eternal Life (1976)

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“WHAT IS MORTAL SHALL BE SWALLOWED UP BY LIFE” (2 COR 5:4):
A CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH JOHN HICK’S
THEOLOGY OF DEATH IN *DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE* (1976)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

HONGMEI ZHAO

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ABSTRACT

The springboard for my investigation is John Hick's theology of death or "par-eschatology" in *Death and Eternal Life* (1976), a postmortem soteriology rooted in Irenaeus' teleological framework of person-making. I organize my project around the two constitutive aspects of human existence: time and space, or temporality and embodiment.

Regarding postmortem temporality, I present: 1) new scholarships in the New Testament, early Christianity, and Reformation studies, and 2) recent developments in ecumenical dialogues and the Justification-Sanctification Debate. Through this, I demonstrate a widely emerging emphasis—the centrality of sanctification in the Christian understanding of salvation. I argue that this crystalizing consensus lends logical support for Hick's insistence on the non-finality of death in the grand temporal process of salvation.

Regarding postmortem embodiment (and embodiment in general), I introduce George Berkeley's sacramental Idealism as a better alternative to Hick's conception of the body under Dualism. I show how philosophical and theological difficulties in both the Physicalists' and the Dualists' explications of "resurrection" are resolved within Berkeley's framework. Moreover, Berkeley's version of embodiment not only does not contradict relevant Christian orthodoxies, it in fact better conveys their theological underpinnings. Lastly, I highlight the unique strength of Berkeley's Idealism for understanding embodiment by describing: 1) how it helps overcome the current *impasse*

between Dualism and Physicalism in the Mind-Brain Debate in philosophical anthropology, and 2) metaphysical writings of many founders of Quantum Physics which cast sympathetic votes for Berkeley.

In the constructive portion of my dissertation, I lift from the Scripture a biblical theology of death which consistently underscores the causal connection between sin and death, holiness and life, and sanctification and resurrection. I then clarify that these well-known biblical themes are not metaphorical but metaphysical: the causalities are *immanent*. My effort here is to explicate a Metaphysic of Sanctification based on Aquinas' teleological ontology originated from Augustine's earlier notion of evil as "non-being." Overall, my dissertation is an attempt to respond to the continuous call for Christians to give a coherent and credible account of the Resurrection Hope (1 Pt 3:15-16) that is faithful to the Gospel and relevant for our time.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Question of Death and Its Importance for Christian Theology

Some say that, death, being a timeless topic for us mortals, is always also a timely topic for us. In Peter Kreeft's words, "Death puts life into question. ... The question of the meaning of death is also the question of the meaning of life, the greatest of all questions. ... Because life ends in death, life is either startlingly more meaningful or startlingly less meaningful than we usually think."¹

A significant cultural phenomenon in our day is the so-called "death awareness movement," which emerged after the publication of American psychologist Herman Feifel's anthology *The Meaning of Death* (1959).² As Lucy Bregman describes, thanks to the "death awareness movement," the era of the 1950s when death was borne in sheer silence and total denial is behind us.³ In contrast to the previous mentality which thought of "death" as an obscene word,⁴ the "death awareness movement" is marked by its explicit admission of death as part and parcel of being human, as well as its conscientious effort to manage death scientifically. The movement emphasizes the personal and the

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Love is Stronger than Death* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), xvi.

² Herman Feifel, ed., *The Meaning of Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959).

³ Lucy Bregman, *Beyond Silence and Denial* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

⁴ Phillippe Aries, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

subjective dimensions of death long ignored under the orthodox model of western medicine. The best representation of the movement may be the newly established field known as “thanatology.” It was developed as a systematic and interdisciplinary approach for scientific studies of the bodily mechanisms and the psychological, forensic, and social aspects of death. In addition, it promotes death awareness among the public through professional seminars, training and certification programs, college education courses, etc. As the result, a large quantity of “death and dying” literature has been generated to assist the dying, their family, and professional caretakers.

What’s more, scientific efforts have been made under the objective of eliminating death all together. For example, some gerontologists (i.e., specialists on aging) tried to understand why we age in order to discover why we are mortal; other researchers embarked on a “mission for immortalization” through cryonic technologies. Kevin Keith describes this war against death as the “life extension movement.”⁵ According to Jonathan Weiner, “the study of longevity is now in an almost feverish state.”⁶ However, Lucy Bregman notes that, despite of all these heroic attempts, a very important element is still missing from the “death awareness movement”: namely, the discussion of what lies beyond death. Bregman concludes that, on the final account, such “eclipse of eschatology” results in a limitation of its ammunitions against death.

⁵ Kevin T. Keith, “Life Extension: Proponents, Opponents, and the Social Impact of the Defeat of Death,” in *Speaking of Death: America’s New Sense of Mortality*, ed. Michael Bartalos (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 102-151.

⁶ Jonathan Weiner, *Long for This World* (New York, NY: HaperCollins Publishers, 2010), 13.

The inadequacy of a this-worldly focus on death can be detected through the public's ever intensifying interest in that which lies beyond. The most remarkable indication of that may be the best-selling records set time and again by the so-called "light" books. These books contain fascinating stories brought back by people who returned from the brink of death, known as Near Death Experience (NDE). Even though written accounts of NDE go as far back as Plato's *Phaedo*, they exploded during the past century, likely the result of the invention of modern resuscitation techniques. Popular interest in the NDE started to take off after Raymond Moody's *Life after Life* (1975), which is a report on a qualitative study in which Moody interviewed 150 people who had undergone NDEs.⁷ Today, in addition to numerous books written by near death experiencers, medical practitioners, and researchers worldwide, we have international research centers devoted to the study of NDE, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal since 1987, online websites for collecting NDE data globally, annual conferences on NDE, regional chapters formed by near death experiencers, and even counseling services specialized to help them readapt to the life after NDE.

Considering this high degree of attention death draws from our culture, it is lamentable that sustained theological engagements with the topic of death are currently lacking. Lucy Bregman comments that "contemporary Christian treatment of various death-related themes drops some ideas totally, employs others sparingly, and disagrees on what in the past went unquestioned. Much of this re-visioning has happened rather

⁷ Raymond Moody, *Life after Life* (Atlanta, GA: Mockingbird, 1975).

silently. [And] It seems to cross theological boundaries;”⁸ “forgotten choices, hidden shifts of language, and deliberate substitution of new images for old, fill our story. ... Yet, as a resource for contemporary person in their requests for meaning and community in the face of dying, death, and grief, Christianity has proved an ambiguous and frequently disappointing source.”⁹ As the result, death is rarely preached about at the pulpit, and is usually handled in a make-shift fashion on the practical side of church ministry.

Why such reticence? The following statement from *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* published in 1999 may reveal the key rationale behind it.

It is theologically advisable, then, not to try to say too much about death or the state after death. Christian comfort in face of death can be neither explanation nor doctrine, but only reiteration of the promise that “neither death, nor life ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁰

Undoubtedly, I think it is extremely important to remember that God’s faithful promise is the *sole* and the *ultimate* foundation for the Christian Hope beyond death. And yet, I think it is also important for Christian theology—the academic discipline commonly defined as “faith seeking understanding”—to heed the call for Christians to always be prepared to give an account of the Christian hope to whomever asks (1 Pt 3:15-16). Furthermore, as clearly manifested through the unprecedentedly high occurrences of depression, drug abuse, and suicide, this day of ours is afflicted more than ever by despair. Therefore, my dissertation is an endeavor to respond to the call to give an

⁸ Bregman, *Beyond Silence*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Schoberth, “Death,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 783.

account of the Resurrection Hope in our time—with all our heart, all our mind, and all our might.

Research Methodology

Even though much took place since its first publication in 1976, John Hick's massive work *Death and Eternal Life* still offers us a rare platform today for conducting a multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and inter-religious investigation of death. In the book, Hick diligently carries out a wide-spectrum conversation with various thinkers from historical anthropology, theological anthropology, modern culture, philosophy, parapsychology, secular humanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, the New Testament, medieval Christianity, and contemporary Catholicism and Protestantism. Correspondingly, my dissertation adheres to Hick's "principle of openness to all data," which is necessitated by the universal nature of the phenomenon of death itself. Such openness is based on the conviction that all truths— insofar as they *are* truths— originate from God and so are inherently harmonious with one another and mutually illuminating when properly understood. Moreover, my dissertation follows Hick's "principle of spelling out possibilities" rather than claiming certainties. Such caution is necessitated by the profoundly obscure nature of all eschatological topics including "death." Nevertheless, our investigative exercise helps ensure the rigor of our thinking, to the extent possible.

In addition, to enhance the quality of my study, I adopt the theological approach by David Tracy, particularly his "criterion of adequacy" for analyzing human experience and his "criterion of appropriateness" for retrieving the Christian tradition.¹¹ Specifically,

¹¹ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

I understand “adequacy” to mean validly taking stock of significant developments in contemporary culture and rendering an explication of them that is intelligible, persuasive, and life-transforming. I understand “appropriateness” to mean evermore deeply reaching into the deposit of the Christian faith and accurately translating the Gospel message for our time. Overall, I aspire that my theological investigation may be both faithful to the Christian witness and relevant to our experiential context.

Thesis Statement

There are three questions commonly addressed in the theology of death: what happens at death, what happens after death, and what causes death. Through critical and constructive engagements with John Hick’s theology of death, my dissertation generates the following response to these questions: 1) death does not mark the end of our sanctification process which—as necessitated by our finite nature—has to be gradual and which *alone* leads to the salvation understood in the Christian soteriology; 2) postmortem embodiment (as well as embodiment in general) may be best envisioned within George Berkeley’s sacramental Idealism; 3) while the Scripture consistently points to “sin” or moral evil as the cause of death, it is important to be clear that the kind of “death” caused by sin is first and foremost death in the *spirit* rather than in the body. More importantly, the lethal connection between moral evil and existential privation and annihilation of being is *immanent* rather than external or haphazard because, for human beings, the moral law is the preordained operative principle for ontological perfection and fulfillment.

Roughly speaking, my dissertation may be seen as being organized around the two constitutive aspects of human existence: namely, time and space. I begin by reviewing the recent theology of death literature (Chapter Two) and John Hick's Theology of Death (Chapter Three). After this descriptive portion is the critical portion of my dissertation. Here, I present various supports for John Hick's "minority report" against the claim of the "finality" of death (Chapter Four). But I submit George Berkeley's sacramental Idealism as the better alternative to Hick's dualistic conception of postmortem embodiment (Chapter Five). Finally, with the necessity of time and the mechanism of embodiment proposed in the previous chapters for postmortem salvation, I finish my dissertation on a constructive note by attempting a "metaphysic of sanctification," which is an explication of the biblical theology of death through Thomas Aquinas' teleological ontology (Chapter Six).

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURES IN THE THEOLOGY OF DEATH

In this chapter, I review contemporary theologies of death since 1930s, and I supplement this review with related advancements in eschatology since 1980s. Due to the limitation of scope, my review includes only sustained works on the topic and it does not include pastoral, contemplative, textbook, and anthological pieces. Overall, the literatures I cover may be schematized as revolving around two themes: the postmortem question of *time*, and the postmortem question of *body*. Accordingly, I devote the first two sections of this chapter to describe theologies clustered along these two lines. Notably, given the intrinsic connection between space and time, or body and temporality, this schematization is approximate rather than exact; works using one of the two themes as their focal point often in various degrees also touch upon the other theme as well. In the third section, I describe the most recent theology of death by Henry Novello. His 2012 book is a conscientious effort to integrate major works in the past to build a theology of death for the 21st century. In the next section, I introduce related developments in eschatology, which includes both critiques of the theologies of death we reviewed and new advancements in eschatology. In the last section, I present a more synthesized summary of the three key findings related to postmortem time, postmortem body, and the ontological connection between sin and death and holiness and life, with the aim of transitioning into open questions to be explored further in the following chapters.

The Question of Postmortem Time

Overview

In this section, I review works by six authors, whose theologies of death hinge one way or the other on the notions of time and eternity. Karl Rahner's *On the Theology of Death* (1961), Roger Troisfontaines' *I Do Not Die* (1963), and Ladislaus Boros' *The Mystery of Death* (1965) accentuate the finality of death and so the significance of the moment of death, albeit each in its own ways. Eberhard Jungel's *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* (1971), on the other hand, is a critique of the worrisome framework beneath the previous three authors' theologies. Michael Simpson's *The Theology of Death and Eternal Life* (1971) is an attempt to explicate central eschatological concepts like time, eternity, death, and resurrection in a way that is intelligible to and relatable for people today. Finally, Russell Foster Aldwinckle's *Death in the Secular City: Life after Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (1974) argues against the finality of death by invoking God's divine attribute of holy Love.

Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (1958)¹

To avoid any methodological misunderstanding of his theology of death, Karl Rahner opens his short treatise with the following words: "Theology ... is the methodical attempt to secure an explicit understanding of what has been heard and accepted as the word of God ... from the mouth of the Church."² As a Catholic theologian, Rahner clearly states that the "unquestionable foundation" and the "point of departure" for

¹ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961).

² *Ibid.*, 7.

Catholic theological reflections should always be the clearly determined doctrines taught by the magisterium of the church. And this is exactly how his work is to proceed: it gathers a few officially established doctrines on death, sets them alongside other types of knowledge, and then attempts to parse out more fully what these doctrines entail. Moreover, Rahner considers this theological work of his to be speculative rather than dogmatic, as the result of inevitable methodological constraints.

Rahner is known for the anthropological framework that binds all his theologies. The theology of death he puts out here is no different, especially in terms of the anthropological theme of human freedom and its fulfillment. Specifically, Rahner perceives the human person as a combination of freedom and constraints, a freedom under constraints. In his own words:

Man is a union of nature and person. He is a being who possesses, on the one hand, antecedent to his own personal and free decision and independent of it, a specific kind of existence with definitive laws proper to it and, consequently, a necessary mode of development; on the other hand, he disposes freely of himself and is, in the last analysis, what he himself, through the exercise of his liberty, wills himself to be.³

Within this anthropological framework of human freedom, Rahner understands death as an event which affects the whole person. He elaborates it through five themes: 1) the soul becomes pan-cosmic upon its separation from the body, 2) death is the consummation and the fulfillment of human freedom, 3) physical disintegration in death is a manifestation of the original sin, 4) among all of his acts Jesus' death carries unrivaled significance for our salvation, and 5) the hiddenness of the nature of death makes death an event of our condemnation or salvation—depending on our attitude towards it.

³ Ibid, 13.

*Death is the Separation of the Soul from the Physical Body, upon Which the Soul
Becomes Not A-cosmic but Pan-cosmic toward the Physical Universe*

The first doctrine Rahner works from is that which defines death as the separation of body and soul. Rahner thinks that it is a reasonable description. For the term “separation” effectively conveys an article of faith that, although in death the body lives no more, there is an element in the human person, the spiritual element, which lives on beyond death. However, to Rahner, this definition is still theologically unsatisfactory, because it does not say enough about what death brings to the soul. Specifically, since the soul has a substantial connection with the body as the form of the body, the soul “must also have some relationship to that whole of which the body is a part, that is, to the totality which constitutes the unity of the material universe.”⁴ Consequently, besides its separation from the body, how is the soul affected by death in its relation to the totality of the material universe?

To this end, Rahner hypothesizes that, after severing its bond in death with a particular body, the soul becomes not a-cosmic, but “pan-cosmic,” i.e., it enters into a more open, more extensive, more intimate relation to the universe, “to that ground of the unity of the universe ... in which all things in the world are interrelated and communicated anteriorly to any mutual influence upon each other.”⁵ Notably, the soul’s pan-cosmic relation to the universe does not mean that the entire world becomes the body for that particular soul; neither does it mean that the soul suddenly becomes omnipresent in the universe. What it really signifies is that, in death the soul becomes “a co-

⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

determining factor of the universe precisely in the latter's character as the ground of the personal life of other spiritual corporeal beings."⁶

To support this hypothesis, from an ontological perspective, Rahner points to the scholastic understanding which considers the soul's informing the body to be "a substantial 'act'" of the soul, something that could absolutely cease only if the soul itself ceased to exist. As the result, the soul carries a "transcendental relationship to matter" even after death, a relationship "posited by the very essence of the soul."⁷ Through the substantial union of body and soul in the human being, the soul is always in communication with the material reality; only that, in death, the soul's deep connection with the material dimension is rendered more open. From a theological perspective, Rahner argues that if death were a complete release from the body and a total departure from the physical realm, it would be difficult to understand why resurrection of the body is considered such a crucial component anticipated at the eschaton.

Death is the Consummation of Human Freedom Which Concludes the State of Pilgrimage

The second doctrine Rahner works on is that which defines death as the end of human pilgrimage. From this doctrinal stipulation, he spells out its implication from human freedom, i.e., death is the consummation of human freedom. As Rahner puts it, "Death brings man, as a moral and spiritual person, a kind of finality and consummation

⁶ Ibid, 22.

⁷ Ibid, 32.

which renders his decision for or against God, reached during the time of his bodily life, final and unalterable.”⁸

A main reason for death to be the consummation of human freedom comes from what he calls a “truly historical and Christian conception of the temporal character of the universe,” of which the earthly life of each individual is an integral part.⁹ Specifically, this conception understands temporality as directional and teleological, rather than circular or indefinite. The flow of time is preordained by God to carry creatures towards their eventual perfection and fulfillment; “it moves in a definitive way... towards a perfectly determined, final and irrevocable end.”¹⁰ Given that the doctrine marks the finish line of our pilgrimage at death, and that this pilgrimage to realize human freedom must arrive at its consummating destination, death naturally is where Rahner situates this fulfilling consummation.

Equally importantly, Rahner emphasizes the consummating nature of death as the result of the utter seriousness of free choices made during the pilgrimage life. Human freedom is “unique, unrepeatable, of inalienable and irrevocable significance,” not “something provisional that can be superseded or changed into something indefinite or into its opposite.”¹¹ For human freedom to really count, it must at a certain point generate something definitive and unalterable. Given that the doctrine announces death to be the end of pilgrimage, death has to be the end place where choices are no longer available for

⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁹ Ibid, 28.

¹⁰ Ibid, 28.

¹¹ Ibid, 27.

the choosing, and so also the consummating place where all the serious choices that have been made get completely settled; no further.

Notably, Rahner's talk about death as a consummating event is based on an anthropological understanding that the human being is a composite of inert matter and free spirit. Consequently, human death has two sides: while death as the end of biological life is endured passively, death "as the end of man as a spiritual person must be an active consummation from within, brought about by the person himself, a maturing self-realization which embodies the result of what man has made of himself during life."¹² Furthermore, Rahner does not want to give the impression that the consummating nature of death has to do only with an isolated point at the end of life. Rather, death consummates because the state a person is in at death is the very fruit brought forth by that person's own life, his entire life. In other words, the consummating nature of death is the result of death being that which concludes a person's pilgrimage existence. There, one necessarily reaps what one has been sowing.

That said, Rahner is quick to clarify that, such consummating "finality" of death does not mean no further development after death or a static future life with God; rather, the doctrines of purgatory, resurrection, and consummation all indicate a progress, "never-ending movement of the finite spirit into the life of God."¹³

¹² Ibid, 31.

¹³ Ibid, 27.

Death as a Consummating Event Which Involves Disintegration of the Body is the Result of the Original Sin

Assuming that the human being is by nature a union of spirit and body, Rahner explicates the destructive liaison between death and sin, given that disassociation and physical disintegration of the body occur in death. To Rahner, that death is somehow related to sin does not imply that, had the first human beings not sinned, they would have had an endless bodily life on earth, since that would entail an earthly life without definitive fulfillment. Rather, that death results from sin means that, had the first humans not sinned, they would have experienced a “‘death’ without dying,” which is “a pure apparent and active consummation of the whole man from within, without death in the proper sense, that is, without suffering from without any violent dissolution of the actual bodily constitution.”¹⁴ Through such a death, they would have attained “a perfection of an *embodied* kind, ... the perfection we now look for as the final result of the redemption and as the eschatological miracle of the resurrection of the body.”¹⁵ In other words, had there not been sin, human death would have been a consummating event both for the body and for the spirit, rather than leaving the physical body behind.

Thus, Rahner calls bodily death a punishment for sin, a contradiction to the total constitution of human being as a union of spirit and body, since it shows that human being’s bodily reality is presently apart from God’s transforming grace. However, there is an ontological orientation implanted by God in each person towards the final end of complete fulfillment—body *and* soul. Interestingly, Rahner speculates that the transfigured

¹⁴ Ibid, 35.

¹⁵ Ibid, 34.

corporeality of the glorified body in resurrection would have “a perfect *plasticity* in relation to the spirit,” and may also have localization in more than one place, being “open for maintaining or entering into free and unhampered relations with everything ... [as] the perfect expression of the enduring relation of the glorified person to the cosmos as a whole.”¹⁶

Among All of Jesus' Acts, His Death is the Most Important for Our Salvation

Leveraging on the first two themes above, Rahner articulates a distinct soteriology which accredits Jesus' death with the biggest import among all of his saving acts. Specifically, Rahner interprets the creedal confession of Jesus' descent into hell as a descent into the lower world, the center of the world, “establishing contact with the intrinsic, radically unified, ultimate and deepest level of the reality of the world.”¹⁷ This descent, by the way, is an essential element of human death. For Rahner, it is precisely Jesus' death thus understood which represents our redemption, because Jesus' strongest redeeming act was carried out “precisely under the characteristics which are proper to death alone and not to any other moral act.”¹⁸

One such characteristic unique to death is its being a final consummating act, as described above. Since Christ took on human nature, he lived a human life which reached its fulfillment only by passing through death. What's unique in Jesus' case is that, his death is a consummating act of *total* loving obedience in *absolute* freedom. Thus, “in so far as any moral act of man is to be considered as a disposing over his entire person with

¹⁶ Ibid, 26.

¹⁷ Ibid, 64.

¹⁸ Ibid, 60.

regard to his interior destiny, and in so far as such a disposition receives its final character *only* in death, it is clear (on the supposition that Christ assumed the flesh of sin and death) that we cannot really say that Christ could have redeemed us through any other moral act than his death.”¹⁹

Death not only consummates a human being’s personal reality lived out in the pilgrimage state, it also renders the human being’s relationship to the whole *pan-cosmic*; only then is his total reality achieved in life and in death integrated as a determining factor of the entire cosmos. In other words, it is through death that a human being introduces the result of his earthly life as his contribution to the ground of the unity of the world. It follows that “through Chris’s death, his spiritual reality ... becomes open to the whole world and is inserted into this whole world in its ground as a permanent determination of a real ontological kind.”²⁰ This means that, the world has become ontologically different as the result of none other than Jesus’ death, because through Jesus’ death his spiritual reality has become “a feature and intrinsic principle of it [the world], and a prior framework and factor of all person life in this world.”²¹

To justify his understanding of Jesus’ death as the singular event which established his pan-cosmic relationship to the whole world, Rahner argues that this hypothesis helps explain the claim that Jesus’ death ushered in “a definite situation in regard to salvation for *all* spiritual beings belonging to this universe in virtue of their

¹⁹ Ibid, 62-63.

²⁰ Ibid, 63.

²¹ Ibid, 65.

bodily constitution.”²² It also sheds light on the claim that “Christ’s humanity can enter into an effective *active* relationship with *all* men.”²³ Using words reminiscent of Teilhard’s notion of the “cosmic Christ,” Rahner describes it as the following: “When the vessel of his body was shattered in death, Christ was poured out over all the cosmos; he became actually, in his very humanity, what he had always been by his dignity, the heart of the universe, the innermost center of creation.”²⁴

Notably, for Rahner, the world does not equal to “the handful of crude and superficial data gathered from everyday sense-experience,” but is “profound, mysterious and filled with spiritual realities.”²⁵

The Obscurity of the Nature of Death, though a Consequence of Sin, Avails the Occasion for Choice Which Leads to Either Damnation or Salvation

On Rahner’s account, the original sin caused death to be destructive to the physical body, and so the consummating event of death became a “veiled ending” whose inner character of active consummation cannot be tangibly experienced with certainty from this side of death.²⁶ However, the obscurity of death makes it possible for death, as an act of human being, to be “an event of salvation or of damnation, according to whether it is *endured* in faith or in godlessness.”²⁷ Mortal sin in death consists in the will to die

²² Ibid, 66.

²³ Ibid, 67.

²⁴ Ibid, 66.

²⁵ Ibid, 66.

²⁶ Ibid, 42.

²⁷ Ibid, 36.

under one's own control, a refusal to consentingly give oneself up to God. In contrast, the human being "ought to understand the concrete existential situation of death, in so far as it is his own deed, as the *culmination* of that anticipatory attitude (a prefiguration of faith) in which man surrenders himself and what he is in unconditional openness to the disposition of the incomprehensible God."²⁸

Rahner calls death undergone in such trusting attitude "the twilight in which *alone* the faith is possible by which man appropriates the salvation effected by Christ."²⁹ As to exactly how this salvation is effectuated by Christ, Rahner describes that: "The real miracle of Christ's death resides precisely in this: *death* ... now, through being embraced by the obedient 'yes' of the Son, while losing nothing of the horror of the divine abandonment that belongs to it, is transformed into something completely different, into the advent of God in the midst of that empty loneliness."³⁰

But how did Christ turn death into the advent of God? Rahner elaborates that, when Christ obediently surrendered himself to the innermost part of the world "his death, as an act of grace, helped to offer to God the '*flesh of sin*'—which death really is—transforming it into a *flesh of grace*; so that we now can, through his grace, belong to God and to Christ in death."³¹

Notably, Rahner emphasizes that death as transformed by Christ as the advent of God is only available for Christians who die in the state of grace. And how does it come

²⁸ Ibid, 43.

²⁹ Ibid, 47.

³⁰ Ibid, 70.

³¹ Ibid, 71.

through for the Christians? Rahner explains that, insofar as love, faith, and hope of the Christian become constituents of his death, which is the consummating act of a human being, these fundamental acts of love, faith, and hope transform death *itself* into “the *highest* act of believing, hoping, and loving.”³² As the result, “the dreadful falling into the hands of the living God, becomes in reality: ‘Into thy hands I commend my spirit.’”³³ This is what the Christian obtains in death thanks to the saving grace of Christ’s death.

At this point, I have to acknowledge that, I find Rahner’s soteriology quite puzzling. One of my questions has to do with the way Rahner articulates how Christ effectuates his salvific work. With spatial phrases like the shattered body of Christ being poured out in death over the cosmos, Christ’s humanity being in active relationship with all people, him offering the flesh of sin to God and transforming it into the flesh of grace, etc., it seems that Rahner intends his articulation to be taken literally, in the *physical* sense. This is particularly counterintuitive for me, given that physicality is innately deterministic, while human freedom is the central motif of Rahner’s theology.

The other question I have is related to the way Rahner articulates how death for Christians is a salvific event. Rahner seems to want to highlight the incomparableness of death as an event for faith, hope, and love, a singular occasion for exercising the culminating act of freedom. According to Rahner, such acts of faith, hope, and love turn the death of a Christian into the advent of God. But, of course, this “advent” is not in physical terms, since God is not physical. Then, how is this transformation of death the result of Christ’s universal saving death, as described in Rahner’s terms?

³² Ibid, 71.

³³ Ibid, 72.

Summary: Death Consummates Human Freedom and Opens the Soul to a Pan-cosmic Relation to the Material World.

Rahner's well-known depiction of death as the consummation of human freedom is the logical result of situating his understanding of human freedom within the doctrine of death as the end of the state of pilgrimage: since freedom is destined for fulfillment, and death is the end of this process, freedom's fulfillment must occur at this end point. The other well-known theme in Rahner's theology of death, i.e., the pan-cosmic status of the soul after death, is constructed from the Thomistic notion of the soul as having an essential inclination towards matter. On the basis of these two themes, Rahner assigns death an unsurpassable significance in both human death and the death of Christ.

Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die* (1963)³⁴

Similar like Rahner's, Roger Troisfontaines' theology of death is also articulated within a teleological framework. Only that, here, Troisfontaines adopts the language of "growth" rather than "freedom." Specifically, he portrays our earthly existence as a process that follows the "law of personal growth": during this growing process of the human being, "his action comes more and more from within him; the environment that once held him so tightly now widens; his self-consciousness is deepening; he realizes more and more his capacity for personally determining the type of relationship he desires to maintain with his own given situation."³⁵ Troisfontaines especially emphasizes that, this process unfolds on a series of successive levels of increasing activeness vis-à-vis

³⁴ Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die*, trans. Francis E. Albert (New York: Desclee, 1963).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 180.

one's environment, with full activeness possible only at death when material constraints limiting one's existence are no longer there.

I identify three key themes in the book: 1) immortality deduced from God's love, 2) death is the result of the body having served its functional purpose for the growth of the soul, and 3) death is the first and the final moment for a genuinely free choice for God.

Human Immortality Is Entailed by God's Love for Us

Among all the contemporary theologies of death I came across during my investigation, Troisfontaines' book makes the most explicit argument for human immortality on the basis of God's love for us. He quotes Gabriel Marcel's hero's words in declaring: "Loving a person means saying to him: 'you will never die.'" And so, Troisfontaines lays out a three-part "syllogism of faith" in human immortality as follows: every true love wishes to cling to its object forever; God loves me; therefore, God wishes me to be with Him forever. In his words, "Creating us out of love and for the sake of love, He also creates us immortal."³⁶ Notably, Troisfontaines wants to be clear that, conviction of this argument will only grow from actual experience of ongoing communion of love with others, most of all with God. This is because our immortal life is willed by God to be lived out in loving fellowship, not in isolation.

³⁶ Ibid, 65.

Death is the Result of the Earthly Body Running Its Course as the Means for the Growth of the Soul Which in Resurrection at Death is to Take on a New Body Willed by Itself

On the one hand, human consciousness is incarnate, in that it is tied to the world through the earthly body. On the other hand, consciousness follows a law of growth proscribing “man’s forever-binding obligation to tear himself *away*, willingly or reluctantly, from an environment where his equilibrium was more passive, or external, and to enter into a more vast, more complex new situation.”³⁷ Consequently, the earthly body, “this placenta of the spiritual person,”³⁸ is beneficial only for a while, and must be relinquished when the growth of the soul has reached a stage where the body has run its course and become now an impediment to the growth. In other words, the soul’s relation to the earthly body is extrinsic, temporary, and merely functional. Troisfontaines describes the functional relation of the body to the soul by drawing analogies between the physical body and scaffolding, props of a building, cocoon, and mother’s womb. Hence, the moment of death, in a genuine sense, is a moment of birth—into eternal life; in fact, our entire embodied existence on earth is meant to be a preparation like pregnancy for this moment of real birth.

Furthermore, based on Teilhard de Chardin’s theory, Troisfontaines predicts that if the law of growth prevails in the process of becoming, “consciousness will detach itself from its existential relationship with the body and with the world sufficiently enough to

³⁷ Ibid, 133.

³⁸ Ibid, 146.

give them both on the ontological level a new true structure.”³⁹ Specifically, it means that the soul will find that its relationship with the world becomes easier and more universal; in addition, given that the human spirit is by nature an incarnate spirit, this entails that in the resurrection state, the spirit will acquire a new body fashioned after its *own* will. Notably, this prediction is in line with how he conceives the human growth, i.e., as a process of “progressive independence of the various forms of hereditary, familial, and social determinism,” of being “able to place my *own* self and determine personally my *own* manner of ... being.”⁴⁰ In other words, he understands human growth to be gaining more self-determination and more control of one’s own existence against external compulsions.

Death is the First and also the Final Moment for Making a Genuinely Free Choice of Eternity

On Troisfontaines’ account, death is the first moment for making a truly free choice. This is because, even though the body is indispensable for the soul’s growth on earth, “it also darkens the light of the mind.”⁴¹ Death is the first moment when, released from such darkening constraints of the body, a sudden revelation occurs to the person, so that “man will then discover all of his constitutive relationships with the world, with other men and especially with God as the Creator and Final End;” and this “new gifts of knowledge and consciousness make him capable of that one act of perfect freedom upon

³⁹ Ibid, 106.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 148.

⁴¹ Ibid, 146.

which everything depends.”⁴² Hence, death is the first instant when a *fully informed* and so also *fully free* choice is to be made, the choice between “whether it is to enter a personal communion with everything that exists, or remain forever opposed to its own self.”⁴³ Notably, Troisfontaines thinks that his theory of special revelation in death helps reconcile God’s “universal salvific will, the necessity of an explicit act of faith, with the data of experience,”⁴⁴ especially in the cases of the mentally handicapped, the unbaptized infants, and the heathens who have never heard the gospel. Specifically, under this theory, death is the event which all people are placed on an equal footing; despite of disparities of fortune during their earthly lives, for each person at death, “the only thing that counts is the soul’s fundamental orientation toward communion or isolation ... by personal choice” in death.⁴⁵

Death is also the final moment for making a genuinely free choice that bears *eternal* significance. This is because our mortal earthly life has already provided us the chance to train ourselves for making such an extremely important choice for communion with God. As Troisfontaines puts it, “In a thousand and one ways, at every conscious instant of his life, he learns that good and happiness are never found in the direction of selfishness and pride. Armed with this experience he will, at the moment of death, give his answer to the divine proposal.”⁴⁶ The choice made in death is eternal also because, at

⁴² Ibid, 147.

⁴³ Ibid, 106.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 176.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 154.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 182.

death, “the choice is made in perfect consciousness, there will be *no reason* or any possibility to restate the question later.”⁴⁷

To further support the eternal finality of the choice made at death, Troisfontaines presents several theological arguments. For example, the scripture indicates that “It is appointed unto men to die once, and after this comes the judgment.” (Heb 9:27) This shows the seriousness of death, after which the person’s fate is irrevocably sealed. Troisfontaines does not see any need for extending the earthly time of trial, since each of such extensions can only be finite and imperfect, and “Finite added to finite yields nothing but finite;” whereas the supposed “switch from becoming to being [at death] supposes a change of axis” completely.⁴⁸ Moreover, the case of the “good thief” indicates for Troisfontaines that, entering the Kingdom of God is not a “having,” which takes time, but a “being-with” which as “communion is a matter of a *single* act, a matter of *qualitative* intensity, and not of quantity. Two persons can become friends within one hour just as well as in twelve hours. . . . The all-important thing is to meet Jesus Christ, and answer His calling, even if it is truly heard in the last minute only.”⁴⁹

Objections arise here. Troisfontaines underscores death as the paramount moment of final choice. In his words, “although the whole adventure has been subject to countless vicissitudes, it will be a success if my last act is successful.”⁵⁰ But such privileging the moment of death, even as that which levels the playing field for all, seems to be in

⁴⁷ Ibid, 151.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 168.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 170.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 186.

contradiction to his previous theme of the earthly life as a training ground for making this eternity-defining choice. Nevertheless, Troisfontaines thinks that “it does not diminish the importance of the successive choices on which my final attitude is progressively built.”⁵¹ In my view, however, a disharmony remains, especially in cases of people, such as the unbaptized infants, who do not have a fair chance in life to train themselves: if all ends at death, either these people are offered a fair chance at death that comes with special revelations, which seems to void the value of earthly life; or, the final choice is decisively influenced by the series of decisions before that, and so they are dealt an unfair hand by not having opportunities of such practice. In other words, if death is the final cutoff point, either the earthly journey matters, but ends unfulfilled; or, its fulfillment comes with the price of devaluing the earthly life it claims to fulfill. In my view, the dilemma between the significance of earthly life and the efficacy as well as the universality of God’s saving will is caused ultimately by the doctrine which declares the finality of death.

Summary: Death as the Ontological Promotion at the End of Earthly Growth.

Troisfontaines’ conception of death may be captured with his phrase “an ontological promotion,”⁵² when the person relieved from the limited “training wheel” of earthly body is now bestowed with an unprecedented wealth of knowledge about the self, the world, and God, which enables him to choose consciously and freely for the first and also the final time whether to exist with or without the loving communion with God and with others. Death is the graduation from one’s earthly education, the whole purpose of

⁵¹ Ibid, 179.

⁵² Ibid, 74.

which is for this eternal crossing, “the crossing, whereby life is finally able to blossom out in full.”⁵³ Death is the spiritual birth from the second pregnancy of earthly existence, the true birth which leads the person to life everlasting.

Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death* (1965)⁵⁴

Similar to Troisfontaines, Ladislaus Boros also depicts death as the moment which carries matchless import for eternity. What is different here is that Boros’ investigation utilizes the so-called “transcendental method” from Martin Heidegger’s existential philosophy, which detects death to be “essentially present in the structure of every living existence, and can, therefore, be grasped in the existent being itself at the point of intersection of the various pointers to death.”⁵⁵ Specifically, Boros focuses on those quintessential aspects of human consciousness and, starting from these concrete experiences of life, traces them back to the *a priori* reality which makes them possible.

In the first half of the book, Boros captures this *a priori* reality to be death’s culminating role toward which all the key aspects of human consciousness point. And he describes it in the “hypothesis of a final decision” (HFD), something very similar to but fuller than the way Troisfontaines describes of death. Specifically, based on Rahner’s theme of death as a descent into the center of it all, Boros conceives death for *all* people, including infants and the mentally challenged, to be a full encounter at this center with oneself, a total presence to the world, and a face-to-face meeting with the Creator of all for the first time. There, equipped with utter clarity of understanding, complete freedom

⁵³ Ibid, 185.

⁵⁴ Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).

⁵⁵ Ibid, 23.

from bodily constraints, and full awakening of consciousness, the person is perfectly enabled to make a final decision to be or not to be with God, which will last for eternity.

In the second half of the book, Boros tries to demonstrate the validity of this hypothesis by showing how it helps to clarify and reconcile some challenging doctrines in theology. For example, like Troisfontaines, Boros thinks that the HFD presents justification for the doctrine which declares death to be the end of our pilgrimage. Also like Troisfontaines, Boros thinks his hypothesis helps reconcile the universality of God's salvific will for all people, with the unconditional necessity of an explicit attitude for Christ in order to receive salvation. Again, like Troisfontaines, Boros does not think his privileging the moment of death in any way devalues decisions made during life. Because "life is a training for conversion" at death;⁵⁶ the final decision is "the fruit of the decisions that have prepared it, though it does stand above them by giving its final, conclusive judgment on them."⁵⁷

Besides these points, similar to those in Rahner's and Troisfontaines' works, there are also three themes that are unique in Boros' theology of death: 1) essential aspects of human consciousness all point to death as their moment of fulfillment, 2) Jesus' bodily reality as the physical instrumental cause of grace, and 3) death is a temporal process in a non-temporal transition.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 99.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 97.

Essential Aspects of Human Consciousness All Point toward Death as that All-Decisive Moment for Their Fulfillment

Using the transcendental method, Boros singles out several essential aspects of being human, and argues that the trend of the earthly unfolding of their realization all points toward death as the moment for their eventual fulfillment. As Boros explains it in a summarized fashion in a later article: “Only in the moment when it is *impossible* to go further into the same, fragmented future, can he fully realize his nature. . . . But this moment can occur only in the moment of death. For only in death can there simply be *no more ‘further’ in the same direction.*”⁵⁸

It may be worth pointing out here, in my view, Boros arguments are all based on the theological doctrine that, death is the end of the pilgrimage state; also, they are based on the teleological presupposition that, these essential aspects of being human *will* be fulfilled in the end. Specifically, here are several aspects of human consciousness Boros uses to make his argument for the HFD. First, using Maurice Blondel’s discussion of human will, Boros spotlights an unquenchable thirst in our volitional drive for an end, which infinitely exceeds what can be accomplished through conscious, concrete, and individual actualizations of it in the world. This unreflective thirst is our innate dynamism toward God, which cannot be satisfied except in death. Second, Boros invokes Joseph Marechal’s theory of knowing, which describes total self-reflection as being clogged by the material principle until “the moment of death when the spirit frees itself from material

⁵⁸ Ladislaus Boros, “Death: A Theological Reflection,” in *The Mystery of Suffering of Death*, ed. Michael J. Taylor (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1973), 139-155.

concretion.”⁵⁹ Third, Boros refers to Henri Bergson’s work on perception and remembrance, which explains how the mind’s mastery of daily life in the vast world is only made possible at the price of sharp selectivity of human perceptions; such inhibiting circumscriptions in our activity of perception are lifted only at death. Fourth, Boros brings up Gabriel Marcel’s analysis of love, which is defined as “trusting readiness to surrender itself and be at another’s disposal.”⁶⁰ According to this analysis, since our embodied existence revolves around our body, we never reach the good in itself “but only the good that stands in a concrete relation to ourselves.”⁶¹ Because the body is our absolute possession, corporeity immerses us in “the spheres of having.”⁶² This results in “a self-seeking of our [bodily] existence” which makes impossible the total surrender of self until death, when our body departs and our soul is exposed without reserve.⁶³ Fifth, Boros himself puts out a theory of the human person as a composite of the physical “outer man” and the spiritual “inner man.” Very similar like Troisfontaines, Boros posits the human existence as a progressive development of “an independent center of being, the widening of ones’ sphere of existence and the positing of one’s own liberty.”⁶⁴ Human being “experiences an urge to posit himself and, by this means, to become

⁵⁹ Boros, *The Mystery*, 82.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 43.

⁶¹ Ibid, 44.

⁶² Ibid, 46.

⁶³ Ibid, 83.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 83.

completely free.”⁶⁵ But this urge to completely posit itself free from corporeal constraints and circumstantial contingencies cannot be realized until death, “a farewell to the ‘outer man.’”⁶⁶ Death is the place of total freedom, because “Only then can he really posit himself fully when he can call into existence, out of the bases of his own being, a body (no less), and a relationship with his surroundings and his neighbors.”⁶⁷

Christ’s Bodily Reality as the Physical Instrumental Cause Required for Our Salvation

Extending Rahner’s brief reference to Teilhard de Chardin’s notion of the “cosmic Christ,” Boros lays out the “Christological basis” for the hypothesis of a final decision, i.e., it is a decision made in the realm fully enveloped by the “cosmic Christ.” Specifically, first, like Rahner, Boros crowns Jesus’ death with the primary importance among all of his salvific works. This is because, as the hypothesis of a final decision suggests, nothing human arrives at its full reality until it does so in death. Hence, “Christ’s human reality, the instrumental cause of our redemption, reaches the perfection of its instrumentality only in death.”⁶⁸ Second, following Rahner’s theme of the soul’s pan-cosmic relation to the universe after death, Boros presents a theory regarding how Christ’s *bodily* reality can be the instrumental cause of God’s salvific grace for people of *all* places and *all* ages. To him, without the HFD, such universal instrumentality of Christ’s physical body would be inconceivable, since physicality by nature is limited by

⁶⁵ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 168.

time and space; and yet, the universal access to Christ's physical reality is absolutely essential, because every human being is under the grace of Christ. As Boros explains: "If Christ's bodily reality is the physical instrumental cause of grace, and if every grace is Christological, then in the production of every grace, we must include its physical communication through Christ's body."⁶⁹

Boros thinks that, unlike his HFD, Aquinas' distinction between spiritual and bodily contact does not fulfill the requirement of universal access to Christ's physicality. Specifically, Aquinas argues that, Christ' bodily reality possesses a spiritual power which works not through the physical but the spiritual contact. Against this, Boros argues that the spiritual contact cannot do away with the requirement of the bodily contact. He thinks that the healing miracle in Capernaum shows plainly that "the spiritual contact is the intensity of faith with which the physical contact is made;" and so, "*the spiritual contact should rather be seen as a mode of the bodily contact.*"⁷⁰ If so, how is universal physical contact with Christ made possible—according to Boros? His answer is the soul's pan-cosmic relation to the universe after death. As described in the HFD, since in death Christ descended into the center of the universe, "at that moment in his *bodily* humanity he became the real ontological ground of a new universal scheme of salvation embracing the whole human race;" "all men without exception can enter into bodily contact with Christ,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 146-147.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 147.

and *precisely* by means of the [corporeal] cosmic reality which each man is so intimately connected.”⁷¹

More specifically, Boros describes the crucial impact of Jesus’ descent into the center of the universe as bringing in “a cosmic spring, the harvest of which will be the re-making of our universe in newness and splendor at the end of time.”⁷² On Boros’ account, Jesus’ triumphant descent to the root of the world has created a brand new situation in the scheme of salvation, in that it ushers in the dawn of the “ultimate finality of a [material] world *permeated and transformed by the spirit*.”⁷³ Boros sees this impact being expressed particularly in Jesus’ resurrection, which to him is the other side of descent, and both belong to the same salvific event of Jesus’ death. What is accomplished ontologically through Jesus’ death is both “Descent into the interior of all visible creation, and resurrection as an entry into the pneumatic openness of the corporeal,”⁷⁴ thus introducing the whole *corporeal* world into the dimension of the *pneumatic*. The universal transfiguration has been initiated through it, albeit invisibly, and the great sign of this is Christ’s risen body, which has been “removed from the domain of cramped, transitory, impermanent things, sealed off into particular compartments and present through being tied to conditions of time and space” and has now been permeated by the spirit.⁷⁵ Christ’s transfigured body in resurrection is the eschatological archetype of the

⁷¹ Ibid, 149.

⁷² Ibid, 15.

⁷³ Ibid, 156.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 157.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 157.

human race and of the universe as a whole. In Jesus' descent: "Free of all the 'fleshly' constraints of time and space, Christ is able to reach the men of all times and places and make them members of his transfigured body, i.e., enable them to participate in his 'pneumatic' corporeity. Any man who, by reason of a personally realized donation has entered, through Christ's body, into union with the Godhead, is one of the redeemed."⁷⁶

Notably, similar questions related to Rahner's soteriology arise in Boros' case here as well. Specifically, what does he mean by "corporeality permeated and transformed by the spirit"? How would it manifest in the corporeal? And why is bringing such permeation of the corporeal a central part of Jesus' salvific work? Moreover, what does it mean to enter into God (*the Spirit*) through Christ's *body*? What is "a personally realized donation" which effectuates such entrance? And how?

Death is a Temporal Process in a Non-Temporal Transition

To be precise about his HFD, Boros emphasizes that "The final decision ... occurs neither before nor after death, but *in death*."⁷⁷ Logically speaking, the final decision cannot occur before death because, so long as there is still time left on earth, the decision is not yet final. But it cannot occur after death either, because "Apart from the fact that such an assumption misconceives the metaphysical constitution of the completely personal act, it would also be contrary to the Church's teaching on the inalterability of the state a man reaches through his death."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid, 157.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 4.

But, is there really such a thing as “*in death*”? According to a major objection raised against the HFD, the answer is “no.” This objection points out that, decision is a *temporal* concept, since time is required for decision making; but death is a *break* between the state of life and the state of death, and so is non-temporal, and can offer no possibility for deciding. How can a temporal event, i.e., the final decision, take place in something which is not temporal, i.e., death? Boros’ reply is that “death is a non-temporal transition whose very non-temporality, nevertheless, procures a passage in time from one state to another.”⁷⁹ This means that

the last moment before the break and the first after it merge into one another. ... Therefore, the moment of death, the transition itself, is—when looked at from the subsequent condition—the last moment of the preceding condition, and—when viewed from the preceding condition—the first moment of the succeeding condition. ... So then, although the transition in death must be regarded as something non-temporal, i.e., outside of time, the passing and what occurs in the passing are temporal. Because of this, the moment of death offers an opportunity for decision.⁸⁰

Ironically, Boros’ defense here of the timing of the final decision *in death* shows me, instead, the logical infeasibility of all the “final decision” theories. This is because, as pinpointed by Boros’ critics, death really is a not temporal event—a person is *either* alive *or* dead, there is no moment in between. Therefore, decision can only be made either *in* life or *after* life; there is any state between the two. If we adhere to the doctrine of the finality of death, like all the “final decision” theorists happen to do, decisions can only be made during life; and yet, this stipulation would miss out on the very reason why the theory of “final decision” was developed in the first place, i.e., all the things left badly

⁷⁹ Ibid, 23.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 5.

wanting during the earthly life, a sorrowful fact these final decision theorists have so ably reminded us.

Summary; The Final Decision for Eternity is Made at Death under the Fullness of Being

Even though, similar to Troisfontaines, Boros foregrounds death as the decisive moment for eternity, he makes his argument not so much from the laws of growth like Troisfontaines, but directs our attention to the essential aspects of human existence which he argues would be left wanting, if such a decisive moment is not offered to us at death. That said, the gist of his theology of death is the same as Troisfontaines': "There is in death a fullness of being which life does not possess,"⁸¹ such that a final decision for one's eternal destiny is made under full capacities of the person.

Eberhard Jungel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* (1971)⁸²

Eberhard Jungel's theology of death aims to correct a wrong turn made in varying degrees in all three theologians' works above. In the preface of the book, Jungel stresses the necessity for Christian theology of death to explicitly and primarily rely on revelation as its main source, saying that: "We cannot apprehend death in its own terms. Death is mute. And it renders us speechless. If we are to speak about death at all, then a word must come from 'beyond' death. Christian faith makes the claim that it has heard such a word.

⁸¹ Ibid, vii.

⁸² Eberhard Jungel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975).

It has earned the title ‘Word of God.’ It is with the help of this word that it embarks on its enquiry about death.”⁸³

As Jungel sees it, there is a great danger that “edifying speeches” on death may divert our attention away from the reality of bitterness and pain associated with death. Christian theology must resist this danger, and yet provide a credible answer to the question of death, because “There is a sense in which Christian faith as a whole amounts to an answer to the question of death.”⁸⁴ Specifically, Jungel concentrates his theology of death upon the fact that “The divine attitude which was final and decisive for Jesus himself was the expression of God’s relationship to a *dead* man,”⁸⁵ and so God’s faithfulness has been best revealed in His raising Jesus from the dead. For Jungel, God’s faithful working unambiguously shown in Jesus’ resurrection is the basis of the believers’ participation in what took place in Jesus’ death.

Two themes are distinct in Jungel’s theology: 1) death is enigmatic seen from human experience alone; 2) seeing death as the “true liberator” derives from a noetic-centered anthropology rather than Christian anthropology.

Death is Enigmatic When Seen only from the Human Experience

Seen from human experiences alone, death is indefinable. This is because to define something presupposes a certain control over; but all men die, and so are no masters of death. Also, as depicted in Leo Tolstoy’s novel on the death of Ivan Ilyich, death is a foreign concept for human beings to apply to themselves. Death seems strange

⁸³ Ibid, vii.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 103.

and so is hard to believe, because “Although it is of man’s essential being to find a way and to take that way, when it comes to death he discovers that there is no way out. ... Death remains alien to him.”⁸⁶ At the same time, however, death is also “an inalienable part of us,” since “Everything can be taken from us, even life itself. But no-one can take death from us.”⁸⁷ Matter of fact, death is part of this mortal life of ours since the very beginning of it—albeit as its “infinite offence,” its “absolute opposite.” “As an essential part of us it remains most alien to us. And it is this which makes death so enigmatic.”⁸⁸ We can know *that* death is; but as to *what* death is, we know it only peripherally through experience of life. Specifically, we learn from our experience of life’s temporality that, “with every fragment of life experienced, as lived in its immediate after-effect, there is the feeling that this broad prospect of life-to-be-experienced has contracted ... which may also be called the experience of life’s directedness toward death.”⁸⁹

Conceptualizing Death as the “True Liberation” is Based on a Noetic-centered Anthropology Contradictory to the Christian Faith

In the book, Jungel especially protests against an anthropology upon which certain theologies of death are built, because he observes that anthropology to be alien and threatening to the Christian faith. It is an anthropology which defines the human person primarily as a being destined for *knowledge*, and defines life and death according to this concept of the human being. More specifically, the true end of the soul is to

⁸⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 14.

possess knowledge regarding that which is truly real, and not their transient appearances; the soul's final aim is to know "the things themselves" which never pass away.

Unfortunately, the body with its senses mediates a kind of "knowledge" which is misleading, and so, it is a hindrance to the soul's essential pursuit for truth. Consequently, due to its embodiedness, earthly life is seen primarily as an imposed existence in bondage to that which is subject to transience and decay, even though it does serve as a training ground for attaining pure knowledge apart from the body. Correspondingly, death is hailed to be the real liberation which is anticipated with joy.

Upon death, the soul is released from the body; "the body perishes because it attaches itself to that which is perishable, the soul is immortal because it attends to that which is imperishable and indestructible."⁹⁰ Now, freed from the constraints of the body, the soul is finally able to fulfill its proper function, which is to know truth, to know the real. Death "demonstrates what true knowledge is, for once set free from the body the soul is permitted to come to itself."⁹¹ In other words, "Death is regarded as the one event which can effect knowledge itself;"⁹² death is "a promise which is fulfilled in terms of the increase in knowledge which men can experience in their lives. . . . death is an event which itself augments knowledge. Death thus casts no shadow, but rather light."⁹³

Jungel points out that "That death is not only the object of knowledge but also influences knowing itself is one of the acknowledged facts of the Platonic interpretation

⁹⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁹¹ Ibid, 46.

⁹² Ibid, 49.

⁹³ Ibid, 50.

of the death of Socrates.”⁹⁴ Notably, there are indeed many alarming resemblances between this noetic-centered anthropology Jungel describes and the anthropological outlooks adopted in the previous three authors’ works. In contrast, the nature of death disclosed in and through the death of Jesus is division and devastation, rather than all sunny and positive. As the result, Jungel advocates the necessary theological task of “de-Platonizing” a “Platonized Christianity,” especially manifested in the theory of the final decision “which is impressively put forward in Catholic theology” like Boros’.⁹⁵ Jungel thinks that interpreting death as the moment for a final decision is untenable from a biblical point of view, mainly because “Here, self-knowledge and knowledge of death are mediated by Another,”⁹⁶ and not by death *per se*. In Jungel’s opinion, in Christian theology, death should be explicated in such a way that its true mystery is seen and appreciated to be accessible *only* through biblical revelation, through Jesus the Word of God.

Summary: The Enigma of Death should be Deciphered in such a Way that Its True Mystery May Appear Knowable only through the Mediation by Another

Through his theology of death, Jungel wants to guard against those trends of thoughts about death which may potentially cloud the fact that, death actually is incomprehensible from the solely human perspective and experiences. More importantly, Jungel offers incisive critiques regarding the alien anthropology behind some theologies

⁹⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 90.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 54.

of death which portrait embodied life as mainly an existence in bondage, conceive our ultimate destination as pursuit of knowledge, and so look to death *per se* as our first and final liberation.

Michael Simpson, *The Theology of Death and Eternal Life* (1971)⁹⁷

Michael Simpson's theology of death was strongly motivated by the urgent need he felt to expound Christian hope in such way that Christianity can continue to be a lively saving force in today's world of conflicting ideologies. Specifically, Simpson thinks that it must be a hope that can morally inspire and transform people's lives. To this end, Christianity needs to be cleansed of concepts that do not resonate with our moral sensitivity. For example, Simpson thinks that many people can no longer genuinely respond to the usual articulations of "heaven" and "hell" in classic eschatology. One reason is that ultimate human destiny is "made out [in traditional eschatology] to depend upon the observance or failure of observance of a certain code of behavior, which many feel does not accord with their own most deep-felt moral instinct."⁹⁸ Another reason is that, under traditional articulation, the ultimate destiny of humanity is forever split into the "good" and the "wicked," the eternally blessed and the forever damned, while in fact there exists an un-severable connection among all people in terms of mutual responsibilities and emotional bonds. In Simpson's account, our moral conscience calls for a hope with universal relevance; otherwise, it would not be a real hope, but "an

⁹⁷ Michael Simpson, *The Theology of Death and Eternal Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1971).

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

abdication of responsibility, a failure of hope.”⁹⁹ In addition, Christian hope must be one which people can relate to without sacrificing their intellectual honesty. To this end, Christian eschatology needs to discard mythological concepts of the Last Things which can no longer be reconciled with the modern scientific worldview. Consequently, a responsible renewal of Christian eschatological expressions is vital; so that Christian hope may be proclaimed in such a way that, it is both true to the inspiration from Christ and also responsive to our deepest moral instinct.

I identify three unique themes in Simpson’s theology: 1) the eternal self develops through temporality, 2) death and resurrection are different aspects of the same transformation, and 3) heaven, hell, and purgatory denote concepts of transformation at death.

The Eternal Element of the Self is the True Self Which Grounds Its Flow of Actions in Temporality and Develops Itself through Them

Simpson attempts to make the difficult concept of “eternity”—the core notion regarding our eschatological destiny—more intelligible by linking it with our familiar experiences of time, which to him is “the absolute datum” of human life.¹⁰⁰ Simpson states that “Time is a condition of material existence,”¹⁰¹ and so human beings as embodied existence can never escape time. However, the fact that we humans are conscious of temporal duration implies that there is a level of consciousness which arises

⁹⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 65.

above temporality. Thus, human beings cannot be understood entirely as “a temporally extended succession of moments.”¹⁰² In other words, there is an element in the human being that transcends time, and this is the element of the “eternal.” Notably, on Simpson’s account, the eternal is not endless duration in the future, but “that element of human existence whereby man is identified with what is prior to temporal duration, as its ‘ground’ and condition.”¹⁰³ The eternal self of the human being is immanently present within *each* of his actions in the temporal world, and this gives every temporal action its eternal significance. To illuminate this point, Simpson suggests that our experiences of deep personal involvement offers the best model for understanding what is meant by the eternal being present in the temporal human experience.

More importantly, Simpson says that human actions in temporality “are the very means by which that destiny is built up;” what is achieved in the temporal “becomes a part of ones’ true eternal self and helps to constitute one’s eternal destiny.”¹⁰⁴ As Simpson sees it, people who live in the day-to-day should not ignore the eternal, because “It is through the world of time and objects that the true eternal self of man comes to expression and enriches and develops itself.”¹⁰⁵ Notably, Simpson emphasizes that it is the eternal element in the human being that is most closely identified with his true self. Although the human being in the earthly life has no access to his true self except through his participation in the temporal world, and his true self can only be expressed and

¹⁰² Ibid, 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 46.

developed through involvement in the objective world, actions *per se* in the temporal as well as the objective conditions under which these actions are expressed have no eternal significance, and cannot be identified with the eternal in the human being. In Simpson's view, "To attribute an absolute significance to some finite and objective expression is idolatry."¹⁰⁶

Death and Resurrection Are Different Sides of the Same Transformation from the Temporal to the Eternal Mode of Existence

On Simpson's account, human life in the temporal has the eternal immanently within it, and so the eschatological notion of "resurrection" can only be made meaningful and relevant to people by referring to their experience of the eternal in their temporal life. Specifically, Simpson states that "resurrection" conveys the Christian faith inspired by Jesus' resurrection that, even though death destroys the temporal existence of the human person, the eternal element of his existence "will be taken up into a new mode of existence in which his true personal and eternal identity is preserved;" "whatever is of value in man's life, whatever has been achieved ... has an eternal value and significance."¹⁰⁷ Hence, while "death" underscores the destruction of the temporal, "resurrection" spotlights the entry into the eternal; the two concepts describe complementary aspects of the same transformation, which is "the transformation of life

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 55.

under present temporal conditions into life in which the eternal is immediately present.”¹⁰⁸

As far as the transformed existence is concerned, Simpson does not think it necessary to completely rule out temporality there, for even in this life the eternal grounds the temporal in the human being. He only insists that the same conditions in this temporal world of objects will no longer obtain. Furthermore, he thinks that, in the “risen” life, alienations from God, from others and from oneself experienced in this world will at least to some extent be overcome, since time and objects of the world, which are the condition of human growth and development, are also the very root of their alienation.

Another important point of Simpson’s is that “resurrection” does not take place only in the future; rather, this entry from the temporal into the eternal occurs at every moment in life, even though, during our existence in the temporal, this transition does not seem to be a present and continuous event. Notably, Simpson does indicate that “the possibility of further creative achievement ends with death,”¹⁰⁹ because an endless temporal existence with no end of fulfillment is unsatisfactory and gives no hope. The human person is formed and developed through his embodied existence during his life in the objective world of temporality, upon which his eternal destiny at death depends. The finality of death means there is no more possibility of creating one’s identity beyond death.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 56.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 57.

Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory Symbolize Concepts of Transformation at the Moment of Death

On Simpson's account, the transformation from the temporal to the eternal is of varying degrees of success among people at death. To the degree that a human being has come to participate in the eternal life of God through his temporal actions in earthly life, he has acquired an eternal personhood which is indestructible by death. But all that is not grounded in the eternal life of God is subject to the spatio-temporal conditions, and so are destroyed at death—this is “eternal death.” “Heaven” symbolizes eternal life and ultimate success in finding fulfillment; “hell” symbolized eternal death and ultimate failure to find fulfillment. These two opposing possibilities for eternity are present in each temporal moment, in each action of our earthly lives; they are the opposite poles in between which a person's ultimate destiny finds its place. “Hell” is an eternal reality only in the sense of the person's “eternal awareness of non-fulfillment,”¹¹⁰ which is related to those false and illusory values inappropriately attached to during earthly life, and so must be destroyed at death. “Purgatory” is not a place alongside “heaven” and “hell” for the purpose of temporary purgation, but an excruciating process of purging the false self away from the person's true eternal self; “Purgatory is the separation of heaven (the eternal) from hell (the non-eternal) in man's personal existence.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 78.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 79.

Summary: Building the Eternal-Self through the Temporal Existence on Earth

Simpson's theology of death is an effort to shed lights upon crucial eschatological concepts, so that talk about the eternal can be more intelligible for and relatable to people's everyday life. More importantly, it is to inspire people to live out each moment with an eye on their ultimate destiny. His work especially strives to bring out the moral significance of every action for the working out of one's eternal destiny, a significance which he sees as resonating strongly with people's deepest moral instinct. Simpson wants people to understand from his theology of death that the Christian faith proclaims the human being as being preordained to participation in the eternal life of God, and that is the profound meaning and lofty aim of our temporal existence. As Simpson perceives it, his symbolic interpretation of eschatological concepts like heaven and hell helps bring out this ethical message. In contrast, the non-symbolic interpretations of them are morally minimalistic, and they obscure the fact that constructive and moral actions in every aspect of one's life are "the actual means through which man constitutes his destiny."¹¹²

Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City: Life after Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (1974)¹¹³

In the Preface of the book, Russell Aldwinckle observes concernedly that discussions of personal survival of death no long occupy a central position in contemporary Christian thinking. And he thinks that this led to the worrisome neglect of an essential aspect of Christian faith. His book is intended to remind people that the

¹¹² Ibid, 92.

¹¹³ Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City: Life after Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

Christian hope is not confined to this world. Specifically, Aldwinckle points out that both the resurrection event of Jesus and the Pauline epistles clearly affirm personal survival after death, in more than symbolic sense, as a new mode of continuous existence. In addition, the rejection of a literalistic understanding of resurrection in physical terms does not necessitate the rejection of some type of “embodied” existence after death. More importantly, in agreement with Thielicke, Aldwinckle emphasizes the doctrine of God as the indispensable basis for any talk about a life after death.

There are two unique themes in Aldwinckle’s theology of death: 1) an interim period of further human growth is necessitated by God’s divine attribute as Love, and 2) the conceivability of postmortem continuity of personal identity depends on a proper conceptualization of the “body”.

Vindicating God’s Just Love for Us Requires an Interim Period for us for Further Spiritual Growth

To argue for the necessity of an interim period, Aldwinckle reminds the reader of the realistic state of the human beings when they die, saying that “We are not yet perfect and we have not yet attained. To make death the end is to leave us spiritually immature and incomplete, even if we are believers, and condemns many, whose present lives have been mainly frustration and disappointment, to an annihilation which denies them self-fulfillment or realization of their God-given potentialities.”¹¹⁴

But the force of his argument ultimately comes from the Christian doctrine of God as just and loving towards all people. As Aldwinckle describes, people die at all

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 81.

points during a human life span; some have enjoyed longevity, others are still in their prime, and still others have merely lived. Given such huge difference among people during their lives in terms of opportunities they have for coming to repentance and faith, and also that “Most of us at death are simply not yet fit for the rarefied air of the heavenly Himalayas,”¹¹⁵ it seems quite unjust for God to have people’s eternal destiny be determined conclusively at the arbitrary moment of their physical death. Here, Aldwinckle approvingly quotes J. A. T. Robinson’s sharp criticism, saying that to be content with such excessive emphasis on the finality of death “is to betray a sub-Christian view of the Fatherhood of God”¹¹⁶—above all, the view of God as holy love. Aldwinckle also wants to be very clear that, regarding the finality of death, “The Christian does not reject this latter alternative because he does not like it. He rejects it primarily because he believes that God has made Himself known in such a way that we are justified in looking to a future not only in this world, but beyond death and the end of history as we know it.”¹¹⁷

Therefore, Aldwinckle exhorts Christians to “have the courage of our convictions”¹¹⁸ and acknowledge an interim period between death and the final consummation of all God’s creation. It is important that God’s saving grace continues to operate during this period, which allows for “spiritual growth, for deeper repentance and

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 136.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 132.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 145.

faith, for a first acceptance of the gospel by those who have never heard it.”¹¹⁹ On Aldwinckle’s account, this does not mean that people do not experience judgments of God during the interim; it only means that, God’s irrevocable decision on each person genuinely remains open until the ultimate End in future. As Aldwinckle puts it, “before the End, all men will still have their chance to respond to God in Christ. This would be true for all the pre-Christian generations of men, for non-Christians in the Christian era and those who have heard the gospel and for whatever reason have rejected it, and even for backsliding Christians.”¹²⁰

To the objection that knowledge of further chances after death will reduce the sense of urgency for the fundamental decision for God, and also encourage a careless attitude during earthly life, Aldwinckle responds by again emphasizing that “our line of argument depends on the acceptance of the Christian view of God and His purpose for men,”¹²¹ which for him is the primary basis for theologizing eschatologically. And, regarding the alternative speculation which conceives moral transformation taking place at death, Aldwinckle does not want to make any dogmatic statements about the effects of death, especially in terms of how it impacts a person’s knowledge of divine love and his response to that love. However, Aldwinckle does admit that he finds it difficult to understand “why the mere event of dying, which has nothing to do with the essential values of personality, should miraculously turn sinners into saints.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 145.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 138.

¹²¹ Ibid, 136.

¹²² Ibid, 142.

Postmortem Continuity of the Personal Identity and the Concept of the

“Body”

Aldwinckle’s argument for the interim period is made as a matter of principle. As to the details, he chooses to mainly be agnostic. However, one thing he does repeatedly insist is that, for Christians, the interim has to be a reality of “full personal existence in communion with the Lord.”¹²³ Aldwinckle attributes modern people’s unbelief in the survival of death to a materialistic worldview, under which the only permanent and eternal reality is matter—whether it is defined in the classic fashion after the model of billiard-ball, or in a more refined sense as some kind of energy. According to this worldview, “persons are simply temporary ripples upon the surface of an ever-changing energy which is defined as non-mental, non-conscious and non-intelligent.”¹²⁴

In contrast, Aldwinckle proposes “a ‘substantialist’ view of the self” which considers the self to be “an enduring entity of some kind which is more than the sum of the experiences which occur in it and to it;” also, “the ‘I’ of personal identity cannot be reduced to or explained solely by changes in the physical body, however closely it is linked to that body in our present existence.”¹²⁵ To support his position philosophically, Aldwinckle points to spontaneous, universal and persistent awareness of selfhood which undergirds all coherent experiences and the adverse practical implications denying it may have on moral responsibilities. In his view, even if we suppose that the self cannot exist

¹²³ Ibid, 143.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 70.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 76.

with some kind of a body, it does not entail that the self can be reduced to the “body” without any remainder. In other words, the idea of a non-material element in the human makeup is not intrinsically absurd.

To state anything more than that, again, Aldwinckle thinks that it has to be based on revelations regarding God’s character and God’s purpose for us. And so, to him, the key to the debate of immortality and resurrection is religious rather than scientific, because it is concerned “not only about the continuance of that self in being, but about the quality of that existence in moral and spiritual terms;” particularly for Christians, “He is concerned with that spiritual transformation of the self into conformity with the image of Christ which alone gives full meaning to human existence, whether here or beyond death.”¹²⁶

As to the resurrected state, Aldwinckle denies both that it is a purely disembodied kind and that it is in the same earthly body. Moreover, he thinks that to be a real person in communion with Christ entails that the Christian enters a new *embodied* existence at death, and does not wait for that to happen in the End, because “The idea of being in Christ as only half a person does not make sense.”¹²⁷ To reconcile his theory with the doctrine of a general resurrection of the body in the End, Aldwinckle quotes biblical scholar, Dr. James Robinson, which understands the word “body” in the bible as “a symbol for human solidarity and, therefore, for the final communion of persons ... in the

¹²⁶ Ibid, 80.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 144.

corporate reality of the kingdom.”¹²⁸ Hence, “body” represents not that which separates people, but that which mediates and unites them.

Notably, Aldwinckle thinks that in order to maintain the core content of the postmortem reality—that is, a genuine personal existence in the Lord—both concepts of “immortality” and “resurrection” can be defined in a way that are equally effective for that purpose. In his account, biblical studies do not support a stark dichotomy between these two concepts as one being Greek and so objectionable versus the other being Hebrew and so binding for Christians. To Aldwinckle, the fundamental discernment to be made is not between Greek versus Hebrew thoughts, but “What view of the after-life is most consonant with the biblical view of God, the teaching of Jesus and our present knowledge of the nature of man and the mind-body relationship?”¹²⁹ So long as “resurrection” does not mean the persistence of the physical body in its earthly form, and “immortality” does not represent an intrinsic human quality or dissolution of the individual’s personal existence into the divine, Aldwinckle is indifferent as to which concept to use.

Summary: God as Holy Love Entails an Open Horizon of Human Growth

after Death

Aldwinckle’s theology of death mainly points to the centrality of a meaningful Beyond for Christian eschatology to be consistent with its doctrine of God as just and compassionate love for all people. It also tries to broaden people eschatological

¹²⁸ Ibid, 144.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 75.

imagination outside materialistic thinking by demonstrating the reasonableness of a postmortem reality.

Summary and Reflections

Several important insights are generated from this set of theologies of death which, in one way or another, revolve around the concepts of time and eternity. The most salient feature in the three Catholic theologians' works is the *teleological* theme of growth and becoming, which is understood to be both an innate dynamic within the human nature and the God-given purpose of the temporal flow of time. Their similar accent on the final import of death is the corollary of simultaneously upholding both the doctrine which declares death to be the end of the pilgrimage state, and a strong belief in the efficacy of God's will to accomplish its purpose in time. Troisfontaines and Boros' arguments also demonstrate a keen sense of the *universal scope* of God's saving will, which is especially valuable under our pluralistic cultural context today. Moreover, their works reflect an astute awareness of the *necessity of clear knowledge and understanding* for making a decision of eternal significance, and of the reality that such knowledge and understand are *unattainable on earth*. Simpson spotlights for his contemporaries the *intrinsic relation* between the temporal and the eternal. Aldwinckle underlines the logical connection between theology of death and the *doctrine of God*, and the consequent need for an interim period of further growth based on the divine attribute of holy love.

Admittedly, the most salient feature this set of works is known for, i.e., the hypothesis of a final decision, is also its most controversial point. Troisfontaines and Boros, the two best-known proponents of this theory, seem to be aware of this, since they

both try to strike a balance between the importance of the final moment and the significance of the earthly life before that. However, whether their efforts are successful is questionable. For example, Boros' solution to the problem of unbaptized infants, i.e., they receive at death the full faculties of an adult, is marked as "a bit of theological sleight-of-hand."¹³⁰ Others criticize them for putting too much weight on Jesus' death itself, whereas the scripture and the doctrines assign this role to Jesus' resurrection; it is suggested that, Jesus "did not reach the root of the world by his descent into hell, but rather by his exaltation at the right hand of his Father."¹³¹ The validity of this criticism may be seen from the fact that Boros tries to combine Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension as one single salvific occurrence. Furthermore, as discussed above, it seems that upon closer look the "moment" of death played up so much here may not even exist.

Anthropologically speaking, as Jungel points out, the hypothesis of a final decision with its emphasis on the moment death often carries a *derogative attitude* towards the embodied life of human beings, and this is fundamentally at odds with how Christianity understands the fundamental goodness of the material creation. Moreover, as Jungel points out, the frame of reference in these theologies is *noetic* rather than moral, whereas the Christian faith lodges its struggle squarely within the moral drama of sin and salvation. In addition, even though gaining knowledge and understanding are an indispensable part of the process of salvation, religious epistemologies (e.g., by John Newman, Maurice Blondel, etc.) have made clear that, knowledge and understanding in

¹³⁰ George J. Dyer, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Death," in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, ed. Michael J. Taylor (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1973), 138.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

matters of faith are of a unique nature and so must be obtained differently. In my view, this epistemological point helps uncover the inappropriateness of the framework beneath notions such as “freedom,” “decision,” “choice,” etc., commonly found in the theories of a final decision, even though they may be effective at one time under their context of freedom and liberation in 1960s and 70s. Such language seems to explicate salvation more around the dynamism of “conversion,” whereas the Christian understanding of salvation centers on a gradual “transformation” of disposition which entails a significantly different dynamic than portrayed in the hypothesis.

The Question of Postmortem Body

Overview

I present four theologies of death in this section, all of them are related somehow to the body-soul debate. Helmut Thielicke’s *Death and Life* (1946) appears to be the official inauguration of contemporary discourse on death, and it is often quoted as the first prominent work which advocates a “total death” of the human person. Oscar Cullmann’s *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (1959) is widely known for the heated polemic its title sets up. But, in fact, Hans Kung’s book titled *Eternal Life? Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem* (1984) is one that intentionally rejects the body-soul dualism. Last but not the least, Joseph Ratzinger’s *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life* (1977) is a comprehensive defense for the usage of the term “soul.”

Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (1946)¹³²

The book was written during WWII when Helmut Thielicke was removed from his teaching position at the University of Heidelberg by the state and sent to the deep south of Germany in an enforced solitude. The main concern for Thielicke, as stated in his “letter to a soldier about death” at the beginning of the book, is that despite “genuinely apocalyptic encounters with death”¹³³ at this horrific time of war, two misrepresentations of death anesthetized people from much-needed spiritual awakening as the result of such encounters. Thielicke calls these misrepresentations the “two cudgels at hand for jamming into the screaming throat of death.”¹³⁴ One of them depicts human death as merely part of the rhythm of nature, and so ought to be accepted without fuss; the other portrays human being as “an interchangeable specimen of his species,”¹³⁵ as in Nazi’s biological worldview, and so “the most celebrated ideal for the shape of death today is ‘to go down fighting for a cause.’”¹³⁶ With these “two stopgap solutions,” death no longer seems provoking, severe, and objectionable, but is instead “rendered impotent, null, and trivial.”¹³⁷

For Thielicke, these death-despising attempts wrongly conceal “the message that death holds in its bony fingers: that here man, who is forever out of bounds, is finally put

¹³² Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970, c1946).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

back in his limits, that here the wall separating man from God's eternity is being erected, that wall which the rebel in us does not want to acknowledge, and which in frenetic titanic defiance we tear down again and again."¹³⁸ As an effort out of a sense of responsibility to correct the misunderstandings, Thielicke's book is written to fulfill the theologian's duty "to listen to the command of the hour" from God in the midst of the chaos of the War, and so to help people "'interpret' the rustling of God's cloak in our time."¹³⁹

There are four key themes in the book: 1) the true gravity of human death, 2) biological death as the "medium" (not the cause) of human dying, 3) human life is a present-tense bestowal from God, 4) the interim period is a foggy state best described as "being with Christ."

The Gravity of Human Death

In his "letter to a soldier" at the beginning of the book, Thielicke expresses his overarching concern behind the book to be the ridiculously easy attitude people seemed to have toward death during that hazardous juncture of war, which is a stark contrast to the "massive earnestness" with which the scripture treats it.¹⁴⁰ As made too painfully clear by the many soldiers whose young lives were too quickly buried with their broken dreams and unfulfilled ambitions, death to Thielicke is in fact an unnatural disorder, is that which interrupts the rhythm of life, is something that ought not to be. Moreover, each

¹³⁸ Ibid, xxiii-xxiv.

¹³⁹ Ibid, xix.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, xxiii.

human being is more than just a member of a group; s/he is also a unique individual whose life, with its distinct cares and guilt and its unique freedom and responsibility, is nontransferable to others, and so in whose death something real and irreplaceable passes away. As Thieliicke vividly puts it, “what dies in me is not an ‘it’ but an ‘I,’ an ‘I’ for which there is no substitute among all the comrades who march over my grave.”¹⁴¹

Most importantly, the catastrophic nature of human death is truly recognized based on the understanding that, human beings are preordained by God to a life of fellowship with God, and “the more we are aware of the true destiny to which we have been called, the more we know of the dignity and uniqueness of our person, which death strikes down.”¹⁴² On Thieliicke’s account, this is the highest reason why death is so unnatural and objectionable: “that we, these royal people, should die. ... Never has man been so highly spoken of as in the bible. And nowhere else is death—for this very reason—such a serious thing, a matter of supreme and un-attenuated gravity.”¹⁴³

Sin is not the Cause of Biological Death but Biological Death is the Physical “Medium” of God’s Answer to Human’s Rebellious Urge

Even though Thieliicke considers death a disorder, a “fall” from order, he thinks that labeling death as the consequence of the fall into sin is a “distorted doctrine,” a “terribly short-circuited connection.”¹⁴⁴ This is because, such connection turns the biblical view on the relation between sin and death into some type of pseudoscientific

¹⁴¹ Ibid, xxv.

¹⁴² Ibid, xxiv.

¹⁴³ Ibid, xxv.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 122.

worldview, with natural science as its opponent, and so improperly depicts the human being “in a fatalistic subjugation (reminiscent of natural law) to some given that has occurred outside of him.”¹⁴⁵ In contrast, under the biblical view, the human person is always free and responsible. Even though there is a biological side of human death, it is not the only side of it; rather, “Human death transcends biological death ... to the same degree that man as a creature of personhood transcends his own quality as ... a mammal ... in the dimension of man’s history with God.”¹⁴⁶

As to how biological death relates to sin, Thielicke attempts a nuanced articulation, saying that “God uses the medium of the biological to give his answer to man’s rebellious urge.”¹⁴⁷ To illustrate what is meant by the biological being the “medium” used by God, Thielicke uses the example of people giving thanks on Thanksgiving Day, where the farmer’s labor is inseparable from and a medium in which God’s blessing occurs. That said, Thielicke acknowledges the near impossibility to grasp the perplexing relation between sin and biological death, because “every attempt to get behind it necessarily involves ... an assumed causal relationship.”¹⁴⁸ As to biological death in general in the cosmos, Thielicke only cautiously points to how the same natural law of mortality may be experienced differently by humans versus other creatures, and he opts to refrain from any dogmatic statements about it beyond that.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 123.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 186.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 186.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 187.

Eternal Life as a Conquest of Human Death is a Present-tense Bestowal from God

Human death is the boundary that God imposes upon the human being, who is out of bounds against God by committing the sin of hubris. The removal of this barrier between God and human equates the conquest of human death, which brings a living relationship with God. And that leads to eternal life, which is distinct from mere biological vitality. Eternal life is a life lived exclusively under the command of God with obedience and love. Here, Thieliicke particularly wants to emphasize that, what carries the human being through death is not some intrinsic quality or substance within the human person, nor some supernatural extension or elevation of human nature, but an on-going fellowship which leads to participation in God's "alien life."¹⁴⁹ As Thieliicke describes, "such donated life ... is like the breathing process in that the breath is either flowing or can be interrupted;"¹⁵⁰ it is "the creative breath of God who alone controls life, while the creatures apart from this present-tense bestowal possess no independent life at all."¹⁵¹

Thieliicke also clarifies that, the Christian doctrine of resurrection is not simply another form of the secular theories of immortality and survival after death, because the victory won over death is a historical event of Christ rather than a substantive fact of human beings. Moreover, using the Protestant doctrine of justification as an analogy, Thieliicke stresses that a substantive transferal, where the divine quality of eternal life would be passed over to the possession of the human being, never occurs. Because, to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, xxvi.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 106.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 108.

him, this “sets God in analogy to human” and so “is the ultimate refinement of blasphemy.”¹⁵² In Thieliicke’s account, eternal life remains exclusively at God’s disposal; human beings participate in this life, only to the extent of their participation in the on-going fellowship with God through Christ. As he sharply puts it, “I stand with empty hands before God, and remain standing.”¹⁵³ Notably, it is under the intense vigilance against taking death lightly—on account of some “death-proof substance” *within* the human person which bypasses death naturally—that Thieliicke pens the following passage, which is frequently quoted by later authors as advocating a “total” death of the human person: “No, all of me goes down into death. . . . but as a Christian I go down into this death with the complete confidence that I cannot remain therein, since I am one whom God has called by name and therefore I shall be called anew on God’s day. I am under the protection of the Resurrected One, I am not immortal, but await my own resurrection.”¹⁵⁴

The “Dotted Lines” of the Interim State Are Best Described as “Being with Christ”

Perhaps contrary to the popular impressions about his viewpoint, Thieliicke’s stand on the interim state can in fact be described as cautiously agnostic. The most obvious indication of this may be the fact that, Thieliicke does not take up any discussion on the interim period until several-page appendix at the end of his book. In the appendix, on the one hand, he acknowledges that his denial of anything intrinsic to human nature

¹⁵² Ibid, 197.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 199.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 198.

itself which survives death implies that, there is neither a “separation of body and soul” upon death, nor an “interim state” between death and resurrection when God raises people from the dead. And this would mean “a complete extinction of the somatic-psychic I in the nothingness of the night of death. Resurrection then would be a new creation *ex nihilo* on Judgment Day.”¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, he alerts readers of the danger of absolutizing any theologically airtight arguments like that, because it would obscure our view of many other rich revelations in the bible, such as eschatology. Especially regarding the interim period, he thinks that “the relatively frequent recurrence of these dotted lines [in the scripture leading to the interim period] is a sure warning that the reality here indicated cannot just be flatly denied.”¹⁵⁶ In this case, Thielicke admits to be quite willing to “let our thesis be criticized and loosened up by the richer fullness of biblical thought.”¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, after considering all the relevant scripture references to the interim state, Thielicke thinks that they do seem to testify to a certain postmortem state like “being-at-home with Christ,” in contrast to being-far-away from Him (e.g., Phil 1:23). So long as this state is not understood as a form of “immortality based on some energy potential in the soul,” Thielicke thinks that this state can be described as “a state of divesting and waiting,” “best characterized with the words ‘being with Christ,’” which conveys “the notion of an indissoluble communion with Christ.”¹⁵⁸ But, to Thielicke, the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 213.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 215.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 214.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 215.

form and the psychological state of the “I” being with Christ are not a valid object for theological investigation. And he is well aware of the need for “even greater reservation” when considering the state of “those who are separated from Christ.”¹⁵⁹

Summary: Alien Dignity, Alien Life

From the above, it is clear that Thieliicke’s chief concern for writing the book is human hubris that manifested itself in horrendous ways during those epic days of IIWW. To help tame such out-of-bound behaviors of sin, Thieliicke articulates a theology of death which can be summarized as “alien dignity, alien life”—on the one hand, the seriousness of human death is best seen from the precious dignity bestowed upon humans by God; on the other hand, the conquest of human death depends completely upon a continuous fellowship with God. And he accents his theology of death, above all, by vehemently denying prideful human beings the possession of any intrinsically immortal element, e.g., the “soul,” which may embolden their bumptious attempts. In other words, even though Thieliicke does coin the famed expression that “all of me goes into death,” he is not extremely insistent on denying the “soul,” as long as it is not a term used for something intrinsic to the human being which survives death independent from God. What is at stake for Thieliicke is the seriousness of human death, and the sole sovereignty of God in bestowing life to humans through on-going fellowship with Him.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 216.

Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*

The Witness of the New Testament (1955)¹⁶⁰

Given that Cullmann's book is only fifty-pages long, it may be surprising to read his description of the stormy reactions to his book, saying that "No other publication of mine has provoked such enthusiasm or such violent hostility."¹⁶¹ The polemic stirred up by the book, which has lasted till today, derives to a large extent from its combative title, which positions immortality as the opposite to resurrection. In a sense, such blunt contrast is intended by Cullmann, because he detects a "widespread ... mistake of attributing to primitive Christianity the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul"¹⁶² while, to him, their fundamental inspirations completely different. What is more disconcerting to Cullmann is that, linking the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead with the Platonic claim of the immortality of the soul is "not in fact a link at all, but renunciation of one in favor of the other. 1 Corinthians 15 has been sacrificed for the *Phaedo*."¹⁶³

There are four themes in the book: 1) the historical Christ event is the anchor for the Christian belief in resurrection, 2) death is the Last Enemy and not the Liberator, 3) the body's positive role for the soul, and 4) those dead in Christ are in closer proximity to God through the Holy Spirit even though without a body.

¹⁶⁰ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*. Harvard University, Ingersoll lecture, 1955 (London: Epworth, 1958).

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 5.

¹⁶² Ibid, 6.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 8.

Anchoring the Christian Belief in Resurrection in the Historical Christ

Event

For Cullmann, what forms the unbridgeable chasm between the early Christian view and the Greek view is the fact that, the Greek belief in immortality claims something intrinsic to the soul. In contrast, the Christian concept of resurrection is anchored entirely in the revolutionary event of Christ which took place in salvation history; it is rooted “in a real occurrence, in real events which took place in time.”¹⁶⁴ The human soul is not intrinsically immortal; rather, the whole human person dies and then “is recalled to life by a new act of creation by God.”¹⁶⁵ It is Jesus’ resurrection which inaugurated the new “resurrection age” when the power of death has been broken.¹⁶⁶

Death is the Last Enemy Not a Friendly Liberator

Cullmann thinks that the fundamental difference between the Platonic claim of immortality and the Christian belief in resurrection can be best seen from how Socrates and Jesus faced death. For Socrates,

Our body is only an outer garment which, as long as we live, prevents our soul from moving freely and from living in conformity to its proper eternal essence. It imposes upon the soul a law which is not appropriate to it. The soul, confined within the body, belongs to the eternal world. As long as we live, our soul finds itself in a prison, that is, in a body essentially alien to it. Death, in fact, is the great liberator.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 41.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 19-20.

Because of this, Socrates requested his death to be commemorated with a ritual which celebrates healing. Since body and soul are radically different from one another, destruction of the body does not destroy the soul, but sets it free. In direct contrast to Socrates' serene attitude toward death, Jesus was in severe agony when facing his own death. Death for Jesus is not intrinsically friendly but something dreadful, because "it is God's enemy, it separates us from God, who is Life and the Creator of all life."¹⁶⁸ The "sting" of death is removed only as the result of Jesus going through his own excruciating death. And so, for Cullmann, "Whoever paints a pretty death can paint no resurrection."¹⁶⁹

The Complementary rather than Antagonistic Role of the Body for the Soul

According to Cullmann, the Christian belief in resurrection is based on an anthropology which does not consider the body *per se* to be intrinsically bad or debasing, as it is in Platonism, but a creation of God who finds all of His creation "good." The body is not a prison of the soul, but is meant to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is death, rather than the body, which is to be conquered by the Resurrection. Furthermore, as far as its relation to the soul is concerned, the Christian belief in resurrection is based on an anthropology which does not consider the body a hindrance to the soul, as it is in Platonism, but something complementary to it. Body and soul are created by God to belong together. Without the body, the soul does not achieve its full development, as claimed by the Greek, but is in a shadowy existence improper to its nature. The full,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 24.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 27.

genuine life to be attained through resurrection cannot be without body, the new “spiritual body” with which the dead will be clothed.

In addition, New Testament anthropology sees both the body and the soul, or “the outer man” and the “inner man,” as objects of influence by the power of sin and death as well as by the power of the Spirit of Resurrection. According to Cullmann, these two opposing powers of influence affect the outer man and the inner man, albeit the power of sin and death is more closely linked with the body than with the soul; and *both* forces are actively at work. Hence, Christian anthropology conceives deliverance not as a release of the soul from the body, like in Greek anthropology, but a release of both body and soul from the power of sin and death. The soul is the starting-point of the resurrection; but both body and soul can and must be raised by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. The resurrection of the body takes place in the End, when the whole creation will be recreated anew by the Holy Spirit, who transforms matter by delivering it from death and corruptibility.

Those Dead in Christ Are in Closer Proximity to God through the Holy Spirit

As to the interim state between death and resurrection for those dead in Christ, Cullmann describes it as “sleeping;” they “are still in time; they, too are waiting.”¹⁷⁰ Despite the scarcity of detailed speculation in the New Testament, Cullmann nevertheless thinks that the scripture images for the interim state of those dead in Christ present it to be a state of special proximity to God, hence the apostle Paul prefers to depart from the body so as to be “at home with Christ.”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 50.

How can the dead, who are asleep and without a body, be nearer to God?

Cullmann explains it with the scripture passage, where the Apostle Paul gives the notion of “the Spirit as a deposit” put in the believers by God, “guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor 5:5). More specifically, their closer proximity to God comes from their relationship to the Holy Spirit beginning when they are alive. As Cullmann puts it: “If He [the Holy Spirit] is actually within us [when we are alive], He has already transformed our inner man. But ... the Holy Spirit is the power of life. Death can do Him no harm. Therefore, something is indeed changed ... for those who really die in Christ, i.e., in possession of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷¹

During the earthly life, the inner man is adversely affected by the outer man because of the outer man’s higher vulnerability to the influence of the power of sin and death, “which is throughout our life the hindrance to the Holy Spirit’s full development. Death delivers us from this hindrance,” and so allows the previous deposit of Holy Spirit to have fuller control of the inner man.¹⁷²

Notably, Cullmann does acknowledge that, regarding his articulation of the interim state, “There is a sense in which a kind of approximation to the Greek teaching does actually take place, to the extent that the inner man, who has already been transformed by the Spirit (Rom 6:3), and consequently made alive, continues to live with Christ in this transformed state, in the condition of sleep.”¹⁷³ Nonetheless, in his view, the

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 53.

¹⁷² Ibid, 54.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 56.

difference between the Christian belief in resurrection and the Greek claim of immortality remains radical, in that the interim state of disembodied existence is imperfect rather than ideal, death continues to be the enemy albeit in defeat, and the continuous existence of those dead in Christ is not the result of the natural essence of the soul, but the result of divine intervention from outside the human person, i.e., through the Holy Spirit.

Summary: Distinguishing Courageous Christian Hope from Serene Philosophic Expectation.

So, perhaps Cullmann is correct when lamenting in the Preface of his book that, if people are patient enough to read through the book till the end, the impassioned controversy it has provoked would not have occurred. This is because, as we see from the above, Cullmann does not really deny the existence of “soul” as that which continues to exist during the interim state—that, in fact, is a notion he uses interchangeably with the term the “inner man,” who enjoys a closer proximity to God during the interim period than the earthly life. For Cullmann, the real point of contention is to distinguish between “the courageous and joyful primitive Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead and the serene philosophic expectation of the survival of the immortal soul,” because the former is grounded in God’s act of salvation for us in the concrete time of history, whereas the latter has the eye only for the timeless substance of the beyond.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 6.

Hans Kung, *Eternal Life? Life after Death*

as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem (1984)¹⁷⁵

To properly situate his book for the reader, Hans Kung states that “I did not want to produce a long-winded theological treatise on eschatology, but ... to answer the pressing questions of our contemporaries on the basis of present-day theological studies.”¹⁷⁶ These pressing questions of the day have to do with the topic of death and eternal life. And Kung makes it clear that, such questions are most properly investigated via the existential lens. The questions of death and eternal life are existential questions because, here, “the ultimate, the eschaton of man, the absolutely final meaning of his dying and living is at stake.”¹⁷⁷ Therefore, these questions go beyond the narrow domain of mere reason, and lay claim to the whole person who, so long as he exists, is thereby confronted with the existential decision of whether or not to “say yes to a primordial ground and primordial goal of human life and of the whole cosmic process.”¹⁷⁸ Each person inevitably has to answer, by the overall manner of his existence, the question of whether to trust or not to trust the fundamental meaningfulness of his existence.

In addition, Kung stresses that, even though eternal life at its deepest level is a matter of trust, the trust is not blind, but is “an absolutely reasonable trust.”¹⁷⁹ On the one

¹⁷⁵ Hans Kung, *Eternal Life? Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

hand, it is true that, regarding these ultimate questions of reality, the human person as a finite being “has a similarly restricted capacity of perception as the louse, the goose, and the cock or the anthropoid ape have in regard to their transcendental dimensions;”¹⁸⁰ thus, the dimensions of the beyond cannot be deduced or “proven” by human reason. On the other hand, though, belief in eternal life can certainly be justified by reason if it is well founded in human experiences that are accessible to everyone; they function as signs that “point to the advent of a kind of eternal life after all this is over.”¹⁸¹ Therefore, Kung sees his task in the book as conveying critical information to assist this kind of decision-making. More specifically, in his theology of death, concrete experiences of the world are gathered and then “elucidated in their ultimate meaning and at the deepest level in the light of the scriptural history of experience compressed as a message of hope for human beings.”¹⁸²

I identify two key themes in the book: 1) death is a dying into God who assumes the person in death into His eternal life, and 2) “bodily” resurrection conveys the idea that at death our entire personal history is consummated into God.

Death is a Dying into God Who Assumes the Person in Death into His Eternal

Now

Kung thinks that for people today to truly believe some sort of resurrection, it must be clarified that Jesus’ resurrection is an act of God beyond our space and time, and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 223.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, x.

¹⁸² Ibid, 76.

so “a transcendent happening emerging out of human death into the all-embracing dimension of God. Resurrection is related to a wholly new mode of existence in the wholly different dimension of the eternal.”¹⁸³ Moreover, Jesus’ resurrection reveals some important things about the “eternal life” he entered into upon death: negatively put, it is neither a return to nor a continuation of our life in space and time, but a radical transformation into something entirely different from what we experience here now; positively put, it is “a passing into God” offered to the person in death, a passing into the eternal God who is beyond the dimension of the temporal.¹⁸⁴

Given that Kung conceives our death as a dying into God who assumes the person into His eternal Now, he thinks the temporal distance between death and the Last Judgment becomes irrelevant for the dead, and “the question of an intermediate ‘time’ becomes a priori pointless.”¹⁸⁵ The core truth of the Catholic notion of purgatory during the interim period, i.e., purification and cleansing of the person, takes place not after death but in death itself, because the consummation at death into God purifies, cleanses, heals, and completes the person. As to the creedal confession of Jesus’ resurrection “on the third day,” Kung interprets “three” as a sacred number rather than a number of calendar day. Similarly, he explains the gospels’ account of Jesus’ ascension “forty days” after the resurrection to be “like the figure three, also a symbolic figure for a time of grace.”¹⁸⁶ In addition, Kung discounts the Apostle’s Creed which talks about Jesus’

¹⁸³ Ibid, 105.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 113.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 128.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 123.

“descent into hell” in death, because it cannot really be traced back to the apostles themselves.

What Survives Death is not the “Soul” but the Whole Person; “Bodily” Resurrection Conveys the Belief that the Identical Personal Reality with Its Entire History is Consummated into God

Similar like Cullmann, Kung distinguishes the Christian belief of resurrection from the Greek notion of the “immortality of the soul.” He quotes Protestant theologian Paul Althaus’ words that, the Christian faith speaks of immortality not of the soul, but of the relationship, of the “indissolubility of personal relationship with God,” and this “affects man in the totality of his mentally-bodily existence” as a psychosomatic unity.¹⁸⁷ In Kung’s view, body and soul are always simultaneously present, even in dreams. And Kung thinks that “biblical and modern anthropological thinking converse in their conception of man as a body-soul unity.”¹⁸⁸

On Kung’s account, the Christian notion of “resurrection” denotes a total transformation of the *entire* person by the life-giving Spirit of God. As he puts it, “Man is not released then—platonically—from his corporality. He is release *with* and *in* his—now glorified, spiritualized—corporality: a new creation, a new man.”¹⁸⁹ As to the doctrine of “resurrection of the body,” Kung thinks that “body” does not denote the corpse or the physical remains; because what is at stake here is not the continuation of my body as a

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 110.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 111.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 111.

physical entity, and so puzzling questions like the whereabouts of the molecules of my body for resurrection do not arise. In Kung's view, the term "body" is meant to represent "the identical personal reality, the same self with its entire history;"¹⁹⁰ the doctrine is to convey the belief that all the concrete things that help shaped a person's unique identity are not lost to God.

Summary: Death Leads to an Immediate and Total Consummation of the Entire Person into God's Eternity

On my reading of it, a significant factor in Kung's theology of death is the "danger of falling short of the standard now attained in philosophical, theological and scientific thinking."¹⁹¹ Here, Kung is particularly mindful about the modern anthropological understanding of the human person as a psychosomatic unity, a concept which he takes as an established fact for theological articulations of death to catch up with. Hence, instead of picturing death as a separation of the two elements within the human being, which also entails an interim period for the soul before the final consummation, Kung presents death as an immediate consummation of the entire person into God's eternal life.

Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life* (1977)¹⁹²

Ratzinger's book offers a comprehensive delivery of the view which deems the concept of "soul" indispensable for the very coherence of the Christian account of the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 111.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 138.

¹⁹² Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1980, c1977).

postmortem state. As he points out in the Preface of the book, one of the problems in Christian eschatology his book is designed to address is what he calls “the crisis of tradition.” It is a belief which holds that “faith came strictly speaking from the Bible and that tradition could be set aside.”¹⁹³ Ratzinger traces this belief to Martin Luther, who viewed tradition in opposition to authentic Christianity at its origin, and sought to unearth the correct understanding of Christianity solely from the Bible. In Ratzinger’s opinion, this inevitably results in “a fixation on biblical terminology,” a “pure Biblicism” which, without adequate hermeneutics and rational rethinking of the biblical data, cannot get us very far.¹⁹⁴ This is because the Bible utilizes diverse rather than definitive anthropological models, with Christology as the foundation. And this foundation confers on theology the right and the duty to go beyond Biblical language and “draw on its own potential in order to illuminate the anthropological presuppositions and implications contained in the foundation itself.”¹⁹⁵

Another problem that concerns Ratzinger is what he calls “a more virulent reappearance of the anti-Hellenic syndrome.” It is a suspicious attitude towards anything Greek, especially “the fear, reaching almost panic proportions, of any accusation of dualism ... [which is] like a betrayal of the biblical and modern recognition of the unity of man.”¹⁹⁶ To him, the most salient manifestation of this problematic syndrome is the vehement rejection of the notion of the “immortality of the soul” as inconsistent with the

¹⁹³ Ibid, xviii.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 247.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 130.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 250.

Bible and obscuring the sole biblical belief in the resurrection. Ratzinger strives to show that, the Christian concept of soul is a “development thoroughly in line with the precepts of Biblical anthropology.”¹⁹⁷ More importantly, as clarified by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on May 17, 1979 in a “Letter on Certain Questions in Eschatology,” the term “soul” is an indispensable instrument for retaining and conveying a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith, namely, “the continuity and independent existence of the spiritual element in man after death, an element which is ‘endowed with consciousness and will,’ so that the ‘human I’ continues in being.”¹⁹⁸

To establish his theology of death on a solid ground, Ratzinger frames his book as “a strictly theological interpretation (in the sense of what Jesus taught) of our life beyond death.”¹⁹⁹ Here, Ratzinger refers particularly to Jesus’ response to the Sadducees’ denial of resurrection, saying of God “He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” (Mk 12:26) To sum up his point: beyond death “we are alive, in a full sense of life” because of God.²⁰⁰ There are three themes I identity in his book: 1) “soul” signifies the God-given capacity for human beings to relate to Him, 2) resurrection occurs not at death but in the final consummation, and 3) salvation includes the physical body and the rest of the corporeal creation.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, xix.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 245.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, xx.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, xx.

The Christian Concept of “Soul” is Developed thoroughly in Line with Biblical Anthropology, and It Denotes the Foothold in Us for Our God-given Capacity to Relate to God

Regarding the Christian concept of “soul,” first, Ratzinger shows via historical philosophy that the central insight of Platonic anthropology, which posits the authentic human nature as transcending its biology, is that which makes it possible for the philosophical unfolding of Christianity to seize upon it and transform it into novel expressions based on the logic of faith. Moreover, Ratzinger argues that, throughout the gradual process of developing a Christian articulation of the human subject with postmortem continuity, Thomas Aquinas achieves the most success in his formulation of the soul as the form of the body. Aquinas understands the soul as belonging to the body as its form, and yet remains a spirit. Aquinas’ success comes from the fact that, his conceptualization effectively expresses the church’s belief, on the one hand, in the *certainty* of a continuous life with Christ which is indestructible by death and, on the other hand, the *incompleteness* of that interim life before its final resurrection. It not only affirms the unified *totality* of body and soul in the human person as created by God, but also makes the necessary *distinction* within the person between that which abides and that which perishes, while holding open the pathway toward the eventual reunification of the human person.

Ratzinger diagnoses the growing denial of “soul” as originating from a believed “parallel between, on the one hand, the allegedly biblical idea of the absolute indivisibility of man and, on the other hand, a modern anthropology, worked out on the

basis of natural science and identifying the human being with his or her body, without any reminder that might admit a soul distinct from that body.”²⁰¹ First, Ratzinger invokes biblical exegeses to show that, as exemplified in the Pauline epistles, resurrection and intermediate state are not mutually exclusive concepts. In addition, to challenge modern anthropology’s claim of the absolute indivisibility of the human being, Ratzinger speaks about neurophysiologist I. Eccles and philosopher K. Popper. The two thinkers are united in their rejection of a neurophysiological monism and materialism, and they propose a dualistic position instead, which supports “the relative independence of consciousness and its corporeal instrument ... as its physiological substrate” only.²⁰²

In Ratzinger’s view, the broad stroke conclusion that all notions of “a substantively immortal soul” are a quick path to delusionary human self-sufficiency and hubris self-centeredness is unwarranted. This is because, even though Thomas Aquinas understands the soul’s immortality to be substantive, Aquinas sees it as a gift from God; although “it is given to man to be his very own possession,” this creaturely “nature is only possible by virtue of a communication of the Creator’s.”²⁰³ Most importantly, the deepest foundation of the Christian notion of immortality is the doctrine of God, who is the God of the living and calls His creature by name; consequently, this creature cannot be annihilated. As Ratzinger succinctly puts it, “relation makes immortal.”²⁰⁴ And he defines “soul” in Christian anthropology as “that in us which offers a foothold for this

²⁰¹ Ibid, 106.

²⁰² Ibid, 256.

²⁰³ Ibid, 155.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 158.

relation [with God]. Soul is nothing other than man's capacity for relatedness with truth, with love eternal."²⁰⁵

In addition, Ratzinger interrogates the very coherence of the soul-denying view. When discussing the state of the dead during the interim period, he asks those who, like Luther, posit the hypothesis of dormancy but avoid mentioning "soul," if soul does not exist, who is it that is asleep and what is the subject of resurrection, given that the body is rotting away in death? Why should *that* not be called the "soul"? Some may respond by saying that, "sleep" means a temporary suspension of the existence of the person; but that does not solve the problem because, in that case "that human being in his self-identity simply exists no longer. The reawakening of resurrection would be for him a new creation. The man who rises at the resurrection may be like the man who died but he cannot be the same as he—since it necessarily follows that with death the man who was has reached his definitive end."²⁰⁶

Admittedly, the theory of resurrection at death is a new attempt to better rectify this logical incoherence rising from denying the soul and yet believing the resurrection. However, as described in the next two themes, Ratzinger thinks that this theory still does not solve the problem, because it is based on objectionable concepts of the body and of time.

Salvation Must Include the Body and the Rest of the Corporeal Creation

Ratzinger points out that, the proposal of resurrection at death, which is thought to bypass the soul and the interim period, is based on a hidden and troubling assumption

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 259.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 251.

regarding the physical body. Specifically, given that the physical body goes into corruption at death and does not rise, this theory necessarily entails leaving the body behind, as for example in Kung's work discussed above—and yet, the indispensable role of the physical body to the psychosomatic unity of the person is the very reason for the development of the theory. And so, Ratzinger asks: “The indivisibility of man and his boundness to the [physical] body, even when dead, suddenly seems to play no further role, even though it was the point of departure of this whole construction. ... is this not merely a camouflaged return to the doctrine of immortality on philosophically somewhat more adventurous presuppositions?”²⁰⁷

According to Ratzinger's assessment, quite ironically, the theory which aims to stay clear of Platonic notions like the soul ends up in fact being “a case of aggravated Platonism,”²⁰⁸ because it excludes the body from the hope of salvation and it hypostatizes history. It dematerializes resurrection, but “a ‘resurrection’ which concerns neither matter nor the concrete historical world is no resurrection at all” in the proper sense of the term.²⁰⁹ Ratzinger perceives this theory as leaving no room for history or for the material reality in God's promise of salvation, and this leads to the great danger of “a new Docetism.”²¹⁰

Furthermore, from a purely logical point, Ratzinger raises the question that, if the human person cannot be separated from the body, what good does the postmortem

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 108.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 112.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 253.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 273.

abolition of time do, given that the physical body disintegrates at death? And, “how can there really be no dualism if one postulates a post-mortem second body (which one surely must, on this hypothesis), whose origin and mode of existence remain obscure?”²¹¹ As Ratzinger sees it, there is an implied assumption here of continuous authentic reality of the person apart from the body, and that is exactly what “soul” is intended to convey.

On Ratzinger’s account, the Christian faith treats the physical body and the rest of the corporeal reality much more seriously. This is best evinced from “the bodiliness of Christ, who retains a body in eternity;” more specifically, “Since we belong to the body of Christ, we are united to the flesh of the resurrected one, . . . and are in this sense already attached to our future.”²¹² That Christianity takes matter seriously is also shown by the Thomistic anthropology, which understands the soul as having an *essential* ordination to the material world, even after death. In Ratzinger’s words, “the soul itself, in its continuing existence, retain within itself the matter of its life, and therefore tends impatiently towards the risen Christ, towards the new unity of spirit and matter which in him has been opened for it.”²¹³

What’s more, Ratzinger sees the inclusion of the body in God’s salvific plan as being necessitated by the *integral* nature of the Christian hope, which anticipates nothing less than God to be “all in all” in the end. Here, Ratzinger particularly refers to Teilhard de Chardin, who depicts the material universe as in a process of becoming “ever more

²¹¹ Ibid, 253.

²¹² Ibid, xxi.

²¹³ Ibid, 58.

complex unities,”²¹⁴ with the end goal being “a situation in which matter and spirit will belong to each other in a new and definitive fashion.”²¹⁵ According to Teilhard’s theory, the appearance of individual spirits in the material world is a part of this directional process in which “the exigence for unity found in matter is fulfilled precisely by the non-material, by spirit;”²¹⁶ more precisely, by the soul of the human person in the resurrection. Corporeality in the risen state is achieved by “the transfiguration of the transient” into “the abiding.”²¹⁷ When the search of being for unity thus reaches its goal, “matter belongs to spirit in a wholly new and different way, and spirit is utterly one with matter;” only then can it be said that God is all is all.²¹⁸

Resurrection Occurs Not in Death but in the Final Consummation

Ratzinger also points out that, the theory of resurrection at death presupposes a new concept of time (again exemplified in Kung’s work discussed above). Briefly speaking, the theory considers death a crossing from human temporality into God’s eternal timelessness, given the assumption that time is a bodily form of existence and death rids the person of the body. Since death is a departure from time and so outside of time, death is said to be of equal distance to all times, and so “the problem of the ‘intermediate state’ between death and resurrection turns out to be a problem only in the

²¹⁴ Ibid, 58.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 194.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 58.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 158.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 192.

seeming.”²¹⁹ Consequently, there is no need of “soul” as the bearer of human identity during the interim period, because in reality there is no interim period—the person at death enters directly into the Last Day, the Parousia, and also the resurrection of the dead.

Ratzinger critiques this notion of time from three different angles.

His first critique has to do with the concepts of time and eternity. In Ratzinger’s view, it is overly simplistic to assume that exit from earthly time can be directly identified with entrance into sheer eternity. First of all, an “eternity” with a beginning does not seem to be “eternity” in the proper sense of the term. Moreover, strictly speaking, we can speak of “eternity” only in relation to God. As to the human creature, he is preordained to be temporal in terms of the body, but also in terms of the soul—albeit this in a different and deeper way. In order to become “capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints,” it is inwardly necessary that human “existence is achieved decisively in the temporal.”²²⁰ Put it in another way: “Time is not just a physical quality ascribed to man but wholly external to him. Time characterizes man in his humanity, which itself is temporal inasmuch as it is human. Man is temporal as a traveler along the way of knowing and loving, of decaying and maturing.”²²¹

Second, looking at this from the point of history, because the final consummation the person supposedly enters at death represents the fulfillment of entire history, claiming

²¹⁹ Ibid, 108.

²²⁰ Ibid, 109.

²²¹ Ibid, 183.

resurrection at death not only renders the procession of history superfluous, it generates a baffling conundrum that

History is viewed as simultaneously completed and still continuing. What remains unexplained is the relationship between, on the one hand, the ever new beginnings of human life in history, both present and future, and, on the other, the state of fulfillment not only of the individual but of the historical process itself, a state said to be already realized in the world beyond death.²²²

Third, Ratzinger challenges the theory of resurrection at death based on the essential character of relatedness in human nature. Specifically, the Christian idea of immortality is not only grounded in relationship with God, but also mediated by relationship with other human beings. The person “becomes himself only in being with others and being towards others;”²²³ and this inherent interrelatedness of humanity results in “a fabric of shared temporality.”²²⁴ For example, Ratzinger asks if we can really say a person has reached his fulfillments, so long as others on earth are still suffering because of him. In his view, “The guilt which goes on because of me is a part of me. Reaching as it does deep into me, it is part of my permanent abandonment to time.”²²⁵ Looking at it from the opposite perspective, love keeps us open to time just as guilt does, because “Love cannot ... close itself against others or be without them so long as time, and with it suffering, is real. ... a heaven above an earth which is hell would be no heaven at all.”²²⁶ Thus, the Last Day is not something extrinsic and irrelevant to the dead; rather, ““The

²²² Ibid, 111.

²²³ Ibid, 183.

²²⁴ Ibid, 184.

²²⁵ Ibid, 187.

²²⁶ Ibid, 188.

body of Christ' means that all human beings are one organism, the destiny of the whole the proper destiny of each."²²⁷ Even though the decisive outcome of each person's life is settled at end of their earthly existence, their final place in the whole, which affects everyone in the most intrinsic way, cannot be exhaustively determined until the entire history is complete.

Summary: "Relation Makes Immortal"

Ratzinger's work attempts to clarify that, there is a proper way of conceptualizing immortality of the soul, which is rooted in relationship with God as the eternal God of the living. Moreover, some sort of duality such as the body and the soul must be posited for a coherent and intelligible articulation of the Christian belief in the afterlife. Notably, Ratzinger's understanding of the soul's innate ordination towards matter also leads to his insistence on the soul's reunion with the physical body at the final resurrection.

Summary and Reflections

Our investigation of the branch of theologies of death which centers on the body-soul relationship generates some important insights. Thielicke's notion of "total death," though in fact agnostic on the actual ontological debate of body and soul, commands theology of death to place its *primacy upon divine action*, and to hear out God's message given through human death. Cullmann's supposedly controversial treatise, in fact, can quite easily accommodate the notion of an immortal "soul," and is intended to underscore *the cardinal role of history* as the realm for the deployment of God's salvific plan. The recent renunciation of "soul," as typified in Kung's book, may be taken as a receptive reaction to the modern understanding of the *unity and wholeness* of the human person.

²²⁷ Ibid, 190.

However, as Ratzinger's work makes amply clear, *some type of duality* like the "body" and the "soul" which sets the enduring apart from the transient in the make-up of the human person, *must be posited* for a coherent articulation of the Christian belief in the afterlife, and *such duality can be posited without a dualistic disdain towards the corporeal*.

That said, the nature of this duality needs to be further investigated. In my view, the main controversy still needs to be resolved here is *the proper place of the physical body in the divine scheme of salvation*. Specifically, in contrast to Ratzinger's insistence on the inclusion of matter in God's salvation, the view voiced, for example, by G. Greshake and the Dutch Catechism at one time considers that "Matter as such (as atom, molecule, organism ...) cannot be perfected. Matter's only meaning and goal are to be the ecstatic aspect of man's free action. Accordingly, it reaches perfection only as what makes that action concrete."²²⁸ In other words, the goodness and importance of the material world and its history distinctively upheld in the Christian faith are reflected not in their being "resurrected" or transfigured in the consummating End, but in their instrumental purpose being fulfilled in the definitive state that is reached through them. Against this view, Ratzinger protests that, it divides God's creation by a definitive dualism, removes the material sphere from the goal of creation, and thus reduces it to the level of "a secondary reality."²²⁹ And he remarks that, it is unfitting that Christians who confess the resurrection of the flesh should lag behind Marxist thinkers, "who certainly

²²⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 168.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 192.

do expect from a new world a new condition of matter ... from the insight that historical alienation can only be overcome in such a way.”²³⁰

To me, though, the proximity of Ratzinger’s view to the Marxists’ materialism regarding how historical alienation ought to be overcome is precisely an indication of its problem. Specifically, even though I agree with Ratzinger that “it is in the life of the body that God’s creature grows in maturity,”²³¹ I think it is far from clear that this necessarily entails that matter *as such* can and needs to be “saved” through eventual unification with the nonmaterial. Here, it suffices to point out that, Aquinas’ teleological ontology posits a hierarchy of beings, and assigns different forms of beings, such as the corporeal versus the incorporeal, with different *kinds* of “fulfillment”—a view in principle consistent with Greshake’s. Furthermore, even though Ratzinger is correct in saying that, Aquinas’ conceives the “soul” as the form of body and so its inner ordination to matter, Aquinas also holds a more basic assumption that, the human soul’s need of the body is *pedagogical*, i.e., for the purpose of understanding God and understanding itself. He states that “The end of man ... is to arrive at the contemplation of truth. It is for this purpose, then, that the soul is united to the body, ... it is not union with the body that causes the soul to lose knowledge which it had possessed; on the contrary, the soul is united to the body, so that it may acquire knowledge.”²³²

²³⁰ Ibid, 193.

²³¹ Ibid, 159.

²³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book II, Ch 83, #28.

Similarly, before Aquinas, St. Augustine in *De Doctrina* talks about the functional role of the visible world as the path leading to the invisible world of the spiritual. After Aquinas, we have Karl Rahner who, in his *Foundations of the Christian faith*, explains the concrete world of the material functional as the context through which human freedom actualizes itself. In my opinion, the view which insists on the resurrection of the flesh and the salvation of the corporeal derives from an unwitting mixture of characteristics of the corporeal with the incorporeal, which is criticized by some as the “new materialism,”²³³ and so it needs to be further disentangled for a more coherent conceptualization of embodiment.

A Recent Integrative Attempt

Henry Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (2011)²³⁴

In the Preface of the book, Henry Novello attributes his younger brother’s death due to leukemia at an early age with motivating significance for his comprehensive attempt at a contemporary theology of death:

The theology of death formulated in the present book has its earliest beginnings, then, in Jason’s untimely death which prompted in me the need to reflect ever more deeply on the mystery of Christ’s death, and how the death of each and every human being is assumed into his saving death, so that God will be worshiped by all as Creator precisely because God is the One who brings new life out of the midst of death.²³⁵

If Novello’s brother’s untimely death adds a personal relevance to his theological reflection, the current cultural context of postmodern pluralism and religious dialogue

²³³ Hywel David Lewis, *The Elusive Self*, based on the Gifford lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh, 1966-68 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982).

²³⁴ Henry Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

²³⁵ *Ibid*, vii.

adds for him an extra urgency to much more effectively proclaim the fundamental Christian tenet regarding the universal significance of Jesus as the Christ for all people. Novello appeals to the Second Vatican Council's document titled "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" as his support, which states that "since Christ died for *all* and since *all* are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to *all* the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). As Novello sees it, a narrowly conceived hope which leaves out "the realm of nature and excludes the majority of the (non-baptized) human race from the 'good news' of final salvation in the person of Jesus Christ is a bogus hope."²³⁶

Given that the Vatican document has pronounced that *all* are offered the possibility of being made partners of God through the paschal mystery, Novello thinks that contemporary theology of death is charged with the task of reflecting on and articulating how this might happen, in terms of attaining "personal identity, real freedom, and ontological perfection."²³⁷ Furthermore, Novello thinks that the lofty goal of "ontological" perfection especially requires a brand new line of inquiry, particularly given the facts that during the earthly life such perfection eludes Christians and that the majority of human population are not even Christians. As to Novello's own attempt at this new line of inquiry: "[It] hinges on the key principle that not only life, but also death in a *special and privileged* way, is the location of relationship to God through Christ the

²³⁶ Ibid, 221.

²³⁷ Ibid, 4.

Savior. ... It is contended that the saving significance of the life, death and resurrection of Christ is communicated to *all* at death by virtue of our humanity being ontologically joined to the humanity of the Son.”²³⁸

There are four distinct themes in Novello’s theology of death: 1) God’s decision for the human being carries *primacy* over human’s decision for God, 2) grounding theology of death in an “Assumption Christology” which emphasizes *God’s action on our behalf*, 3) human death as a participation in Christ’s death is the *privileged moment of receiving the wondrous exchange of natures*, and 4) the “*integral* salvation” received at death includes regeneration, justification, and sanctification.

God’s Decision Regarding the Human Being Carries Primacy over Human’s Decision Regarding God, and This is Intrinsically Compatible with Human Freewill

Above all, Novello situates his theology of death within the intricate dynamic between divine omnipotence and human freewill. He observes that, regarding the relation between providence and freewill, there is a common perception of “a fundamental tension constituted by the *definitive* conquest of sin and death in the person of Christ—objective redemption—on the one hand, and the need for sinners to *willingly* receive the gracious offer of eschatological salvation in Christ—subjective redemption—on the other.”²³⁹ This fundamental tension appears to be a conundrum, a puzzling bind: for, without the requirement of free consent, salvation has no object, which is none other than human freewill; but, if human consent is a must, hell appears to be a real possibility, which flies in the face of the definitive victory of Christ’s saving work. On this topic,

²³⁸ Ibid, 1.

²³⁹ Ibid, 2.

Novello observes a considerable difference between Catholic and Protestant theologies of death: whereas the former tends to stress the subjective side of salvation and so the role of human freedom to consciously accept God's grace, the latter tends to stress the object side of salvation and so God's sovereign freedom to make or declare sinners to be righteous according to God's superabundant grace. Novello thinks that, since the objective and the subject sides of salvation are intrinsically related to each other, in that God's objective salvation is offered to the human subject as the recipient of divine grace, the crucial question here is how to properly conceive the relation between them.

Novello's own wrestling with this seeming "impasse at the heart of the Christian faith" makes him realize what is most important for resolving this tension—that is, a clear recognition of "the *qualitative* difference between God's decision for us in the crucified and risen Christ and human decision for faith or disbelief."²⁴⁰ More specifically, Novello wants his theology of death to be built upon the efficaciousness of God's grace for all people. Looking at the question this way, Novello considers insufficient those theologies which make the person's eternal destiny dependent upon "a final choice" that person makes regarding God. This is because "the human freedom is presented as the truly 'last thing', not God the Father's unfathomable gift of the Son and the Spirit."²⁴¹ In Novello's view, such absolutizing human freedom can only "restrict Christian hope and render the outlook for universal salvation grim."²⁴² Instead, Novello thinks that "since Jesus Christ

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 5.

²⁴² Ibid, 230.

risen is the eschaton in person, then he is the *truly* last thing;”²⁴³ and so we truly can have “exceedingly abundant hope” (Rom 15:13) of being raised up to the blessed union with God based on the Lord’s resurrection.

That said, Novello wants to be clear that this does not imply God’s grace overpowering human freedom, if we can properly understand the nature, possibilities, and limits of human freedom. Specifically, by its God-given nature, human freedom is “essentially the capacity for God;”²⁴⁴ thus, to be truly free for human beings is to become adopted sons and daughters of God. As the result of this extremely dignified destiny in store for us, human freedom cannot become definitive until the human subject says “yes” to God’s objective grace; “as long as God is rejected freedom fails to attain that finality for which it is destined and toward which it is directed (*imago trinitatis*).”²⁴⁵ In other words, according to its preordained nature by God, human freedom is meant to choose God and it cannot settle into a final equilibrium until it chooses God. In light of all this, Novello proposes a theology of death which underscores “what God in his sovereign freedom has done for us, in order that we might enjoy true freedom as sons and daughters of God in the Son of God.”²⁴⁶ Specifically, he suggests that, *in death* “all the dead attain true freedom as a dynamic ‘moment’ intrinsic to their being drawn up into the admirable exchange of natures in the person of Christ and divinized.”²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Ibid, 230.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 7.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 133.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 7.

Grounding Theology of Death in an “Assumption Christology” Which Emphasizes God’s Action on Our Behalf

Consistent with his emphasis on the efficacy of God’s saving grace, Novello maps out a so-called “Assumption Christology” which elucidates what God has done for us on our behalf in Jesus’ death. “Assumption” here refers to the “assumption of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ,” or Jesus’ *representation* of humanity before God “as a matter of sustained relationship to his rejecters.”²⁴⁸ Specifically, because Jesus willingly accepts the rejection of his opponents, he becomes their Representative before God, representing humanity’s true relational identity before God. This notion of “representation” is based on the model of relatedness by Martin Buber, Frans Jozef van Beeck, etc., according to which being-relatedness is an essential mode of being for human existence. In Novello’s account, Jesus became the Representative of humanity, which is sinful and hostile to him, by the logic that

When I cannot reach the other with my gifts, I can still present myself, excluded as I am, to the other, and in this way *I become the representative* of the other’s relational identity. . . . representation is based on being-related as such, quite *apart* from any demonstrable effects upon the other. To remain faithful to an encounter in which the other refuses to respond means that I freely undertake to suffer vicariously as the representative of the other’s true relational identity.²⁴⁹

Furthermore, the “Assumption Christology” is based on a *progressive* view which sees Jesus’ salvific identity as gradually unfolding throughout concrete historical contexts he encountered, reaching its highest point on Calvary. There are two sides of this acme of Jesus’ earthly life: in his relation to God, it is “the Son’s *perfect* obedience to the Father

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 11.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 45-46.

as a decisive manifestation of personal unity with the Father in unfathomable love;” in his relation to humanity, Jesus “has *completely* assumed in his person the human condition of estrangement or separation from God,”²⁵⁰ as evinced by Jesus’ cry on the cross. In other words, Jesus’ death on the cross is a uniquely salvific event because, on the one hand, Jesus ‘learned’ perfect obedience as the Son, which brought the *union* of his humanity with the Father into perfection; on the other hand, by enduring death on the cross, Jesus “has completely *assumed* the human condition of estrangement from the living God.”²⁵¹

Putting the two sides together, Novello argues that Jesus’ death is uniquely salvific because “our humanity, by virtue of being conjoined to Jesus’ humanity,” which reached its perfect union with God in Jesus’ death, “is now redeemed and comes home to God.”²⁵² Thus, Jesus redeems humanity “conclusively by setting it in relation to the Father in his very own person.”²⁵³ Again, Novello writes: “since the Son is in solidarity with the concrete human condition and the Father identifies with the Crucified One, the sphere of suffering and estranged humanity now appears as the very locus for being addressed by God and ‘beholding’ God.”²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 36.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 202.

²⁵² Ibid, 18.

²⁵³ Ibid, 26.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 40.

*Death is the Privileged Moment of Being Given the “Wondrous Exchange of Natures”
Which Took Place in the Person of Jesus*

In Novello’s account, “the essence of the Christian faith ... should be portrayed as [our] participation in Christ’s divine identity”²⁵⁵—no less than this, and it happens in our death. First, to establish the theme of “exchange of natures” on a solid ground, Novello calls notes to the Second Vatican Council’s statement about all people being called to the same divine destiny “is primarily *ontological* language,” signaling “a significant move of the Council away from excessively juridical and forensic language used in the past.”²⁵⁶ As the Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” indicates, God’s will for us is nothing less than to “become sharers in the divine nature’ (*Dei Verbum* 2). Furthermore, Novello defines the “natures” of God and of human in a dynamic and open sense, saying: “[We should understand] the divine as the ‘*event*’ of inner-Trinitarian love and pure self-giving that encompasses temporality and mutability, and the human as the ‘*event*’ of God’s self-bestowal in grace and thus as an emerging reality that is destined to partake of the glory of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.”²⁵⁷

Accordingly, it is very much in line with the nature of God as the Giver of Life and the nature of humans as the recipient of divine life that such exchange of natures should occur, albeit “in a way which safeguards the distinctiveness of the two realities.”²⁵⁸ Moreover, Novello argues that God’s first self-bestowal in the event of

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 211.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 3.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 6.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 8.

creation already “presupposes a capacity and openness towards the divine on the part of evolving nature.”²⁵⁹ Hence, Christ’s saving work goes far beyond the judicial aspect of forgiving sins; it also encompasses God’s constructive operation upon humanity’s God-given capacity of participating in the divine life, so that human beings are elevated *ontologically* onto a “higher nature.”

On Novello’s account, such elevation of human nature takes place for *all* people at death. And it happens as the result of the “exchange of deaths”—that is, Jesus “has made our death his by taking our humanity as his very own, so that by making his death ours we will share in his glorious resurrection from the death in the power of the Spirit.”²⁶⁰ Putting it in another way, “the divine participates in the human in order that the human might participate in the divine as its final destiny.”²⁶¹ Therefore, by Jesus’ having “assumed our death into his saving death,”²⁶² death has been definitively conquered, in that, Jesus’ genuinely “unique death, which takes the place of all sinful deaths, gives the death of all sinners ‘a changed value’, it gives a ‘totally new value to their dying.’”²⁶³ Human death, an otherwise emptying of life, has now been made “a dying into Christ who is in complete solidarity with the human condition,”²⁶⁴ and so death has become the privileged locus for all people to receive the plenitude of divine life.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 8.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 211.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 14.

²⁶² Ibid, 203.

²⁶³ Ibid, 132.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 199.

Novello especially wants to emphasize that, thanks to what happened *ontologically* in Jesus' death, i.e., humanity being perfectly united to God, human death has now become an *ontologically* transformative event, i.e., it is "our being *ontologically* transferred from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of eternal life."²⁶⁵ Notably, Novello sees his point regarding the *ontological* impact of Jesus' death to be a very crucial counterbalance to theologies of death, such as Rahner's, which focus on that which comes through as the result of human freedom. This is because, what happens *ontologically* is entirely the result of God's freedom, something "objective" to human freedom, something human freedom is not capable and thus is only the passive recipient of it. Here, heavily referencing Von Balthazar's theology of the Holy Saturday, Novello argues that given the utterly unparalleled uniqueness of the death of the Son, it is not at all sufficient to interpret the significance of Jesus' death in merely legal, symbolic or psychological terms. Rather, "the wondrous exchange of places" (*commercium*) of Jesus with us sinners takes place on the ontological level; because of it, "we are *ontologically* transferred (cf. Col 1:13) and expropriated (1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 5:15; Rom 14:7)."²⁶⁶

In addition, Novello indicates that, since the change of value in human death—from an event of emptying to receiving life abundantly—took place *objectively* by God's action through Jesus' death, the thus-determined "soteriological significance of our death as a dying into the Dead One is *not* dependent upon our condition at death."²⁶⁷ Here,

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 199.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 131.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 132.

Novello especially appeals to Jungel's strong insistence on God's "*inalienable* determination of human being in the person of Christ."²⁶⁸ As Novello puts it,

The upshot of this for Jungel is that the humanity of Christ is ontologically definitive for all humans. Even if the ontic actuality of human works [human actions] does not provide much empirical evidence of the fruits of justification, nonetheless the 'truth of personhood' is ontologically defined in the event of the justification in the cross of Christ. The reality of sin, while it has ontological status in Jungel's anthropology, is not seen as entering into the definition of the human being, for ultimately we cannot not be what God has determined us to be in the person of Christ. ... the truth of human existence is located at a deeper level than that of human.²⁶⁹

The "Integral Salvation" We Receive through Death Consists of Physical "Regeneration," Relational "Justification," and Moral "Sanctification"

In Novello's account, the "exchange of natures" taking place at death is in essence an integral salvation, affecting the whole person in the physical, relational, and freedom dimensions. First, the *physical* aspect of our "integral salvation" in Christ entails God's gift of regeneration of the dead, "which conveys the sense of a transformed *bodily* existence or 'spiritual body' ... that is incorruptible and imperishable."²⁷⁰ Here, Novello's presumption is that "all human activity is grounded in 'bodiliness' which is the common matrix in and through which individual persons are related to humanity and the cosmos as a whole."²⁷¹ With the death of the earthly body, activity of the human is forced into a halt unless there will be "the creation of a newly embodied self that is fitted for the new

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 147.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 146.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 212.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 202.

conditions of life in the hereafter.”²⁷² This may be called our “physical redemption,” which refers to “a new mode-of-being-in-the-world,” an incorruptible nature.²⁷³

Second, on Novello’s account, there is also a *relational* aspect of the integral salvation. Death takes the person out of the old web of relations with God, humanity and the world, and elevates the person into a new one. As far as relation to humanity and to the world is concerned, death removes the person from ambiguities, sin, suffering, and all the other limitations in this pilgrim life, “all of which wreak havoc in respect of continual development of the self towards complete personal integrity.”²⁷⁴ More importantly, as far as relation to God is concerned, death is the gateway through which the full benefit of “justification” is received, whereby the sinner is declared righteous and set in the right relationship to God. Why and how is the full reality of what justification entails established only in our death? To explain it, Novello simultaneously invokes two fundamental Christian tenets, i.e., humans suffer death as the “wages of sin,” and the forgiveness of sins is through the death of Jesus. That is to say, on the one hand, since death is the wages of sin, when it actually takes place, it means the wages have now been paid out in full; on the other hand, “Christ shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins, then in death as a dying into Christ our personal sins are unconditionally forgiven and we receive the gift of an original identity [of the image of God]” before God.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Ibid, 202.

²⁷³ Ibid, 204.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 211.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 210.

Third, the integral salvation we receive in death includes a new mode of *freedom* with its basic orientation pointed definitively toward God. Novello defines “true freedom” of human beings as “to become what we humans ought to be” by the will of God, with the help of God’s grace.²⁷⁶ More precisely, as mentioned before, it is a God-given capacity to enter into communion and fellowship with Him. Therefore, we are “to think of *real* freedom as having personal identity in the crucified and risen Christ as its *determinate* content.”²⁷⁷ In death, what happens to human freedom is that “God himself creates the final conditions wherein the original identity of the human person [as the image of God] is *definitively* established as pure gift.”²⁷⁸ On Novello’s account, the reason why death can be such a deeply salvific event is because it is an unmediated encounter with Christ, where the person’s original identity as being created in the image and likeness of God is *immanently* unveiled to the person. To him, this is “tantamount to asserting that death is the privilege locus for the definitive *conversion* of the old, sinful self.”²⁷⁹ Hence, what happens at death to human freedom is not a receipt of the capacity to totally dispose of ourselves in a final decision regarding God which, as the final decision theorists assert, can be a decision either for or against God; what happens in death is a transformation of the person into a brand new mode of being, and so freedom receives its definite orientation *for* God.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 209.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 207.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 210.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 207.

Notably, on Novello's account, there is *no* possibility of saying "no" to God when a person goes through the portal of death onto a higher ontological plain, because "The saying 'yes' to God's salvation in Christ ... is to be thought of as *intrinsic* or *internal* to the qualitatively new ontological reality that presents itself when the dead person is drawn up into the wondrous exchange of natures in the person of Christ, and Christ's freedom *becomes* the freedom of the newly embodied person."²⁸⁰

In Novell's view, that in death human freedom cannot say "no" to God does not mean that it is inoperative in this salvific event, but only that it operates correctly—now having its orientation anchored in God as Jesus' freedom does. He argues that, for the state beyond death, "we are required to think of human freedom as having personal identity in the crucified, buried and risen Son as its *determinate* content."²⁸¹ To him, our death as a dying into the death of Jesus entails for us the "establishment of real freedom in being drawn up into Christ's *perfect* self-surrender to the Father."²⁸²

Neither is this to claim that all the dead enjoy exactly the same degree of beatitude. For Novello, "it is possible to conceive of the risen ones as displaying *different* degrees of beatitude depending on their intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual state at death."²⁸³ Specifically, he draws a distinction between the "essential beatitude" which is enjoyed by all the risen ones during the interim state, and the "accidental beatitude"

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 216.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 210.

²⁸² Ibid, 210.

²⁸³ Ibid, 217.

which shows that the risen ones are still “*ever more* perfectible in heaven.”²⁸⁴ Notably, even though Novello endorses the theory of resurrection at death, he does insist that the reality of heaven should be conceived “as not only dynamic ... in the sense that the risen ones continue to make *progress* in their love for God, but also as in ‘*process*’ inasmuch as the space of heaven is progressively transforming this cosmic world into the ‘new creation.’”²⁸⁵ And so Novello agrees with Rahner, who rejects resurrection at death, that because of the interrelatedness of all God’s creations, the risen ones during the interim period “cannot attain the perfection of personal integrity of being until cosmic time enters into Christ’s time” in the final consummation.²⁸⁶

Summary: Death is the Privileged Moment for Receiving Our Integral Salvation in Jesus Christ

Taken together, Novello’s theology of death appears to be a comprehensive effort under today’s pluralistic context to explicate how Jesus is the Saviour of all people. According to this theology of death, the universal human event, i.e., death, is where the impact of salvation in Jesus becomes *universally available* to all people. Thanks to Jesus’ saving death, all human deaths are now the privileged moment of transformation where we receive fully God’s integral salvation for us in Christ.

Summary and Reflections

Needless to say, as the latest extensive attempt to build a contemporary theology of death on the basis of previous works, to the extent that Novello’s book adopts themes

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 217.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 218.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 218.

from previous works, such as resurrection at death, the universal scope of salvation in Christ, etc., the same comments on earlier works apply to his theology of death as well. But there are also some unique features here, for example, in terms of his repeated emphasis on *the qualitative primacy of divine providence*, his explicit clarification on *the intrinsic compatibility between divine providence and human freewill*, and his keen insight on *the necessity of raising soteriological discourses onto the ontological plane*.

Based on my reading of the book, the most important point Novello wants to get across seems to be the “unstablensness” of the state of damnation, and so the *efficaciousness* of God’s universal salvific will for *all* people through Christ. However, I think the “Assumption Christology” and the “integral salvation” he so painstakingly lays out are a bit too heavy-handed in assigning human death such an instantaneous and conclusive significance. What’s more, these concepts seem to overstate the case he really wants to make after all because, as shown from his description of the “progressive” and “processive” character of the postmortem state, Novello does not really claim that the human person achieves full perfection through death, but stakes his theology on the possibility of salvation *after* death.

Related Developments in Eschatology

In this section, I introduce related works from eschatology literature generated since 1980s when sustained investigations in the theology of death, for whatever reason, seem to have come to a halt until Henry Novello’s work in 2012. I shall begin with two lines of criticism brought directly against themes in the theologies of death reviewed: the hypothesis of a final decision, and the denial of an interim period. After that, I report five

distinct developments in eschatology which help shed lights on the future direction for constructing theology of death. They are: 1) reconciliations of the concepts of “time” and “eternity,” 2) further protests to the finality of death, 3) fresh explications of the interim period, 4) reconceptualization of the resurrection, and 5) the hermeneutics of love as the lens for theology of the Last Things.

Direct Comments from Eschatology on the Theology of Death Literature

One group of direct comments has to do with the thesis of a final decision. When discussing individual eschatology, Zachary Hayes realizes that “the thesis appears as an attempt to deal with the traditional conviction that death is the irreversible end of each individual, personal history.”²⁸⁷ But he thinks that the thesis needs to be revised, particularly with regard to its claim of unbaptized infants being given adult faculties at death. Hayes argues that “By treating the death of an infant in essentially the same way as it treats the death of an adult, this theory runs the risk of denying any real significance to the human existence of growing to maturity through the experience of history.”²⁸⁸ In other words, it seems unattainable to keep both the prime spot for death and the indispensable role of life, “for it seems to claim that a mature, human decision is possible in the absence of any historical experience.”²⁸⁹ Hayes comments that,

If this is, indeed, the case, what is the point of undergoing a human history with all the ambiguity, pain and agony that is the common lot of human beings? Would not the fate of infant-death be far preferable to a long life? ... One cannot escape the feeling that, after all that has been said concerning the religion of life and

²⁸⁷ Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 108.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 120.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 122.

death, ...[t]he intrinsic relation of life to death on which the major premise of the theory stands has been relativized in a disastrous way.²⁹⁰

Regarding this hypothesis, Dermot Lane also reminds the reader that, even though Boros was a student of Rahner and sees his own work as an extension of Rahner's work, Rahner expressed dissatisfaction with Boros' theory as "neither probable nor necessary," and Rahner himself prefers to focus on the "fundamental option" in life rather than the "final option" at death.²⁹¹ Similarly, Paul O'Callaghan expresses his discontent with the hypothesis' crushing the entire eschatological horizon into the moment of death.²⁹² To him, this not only betrays a somewhat Pelagian view of salvation as well as a Platonic rendering of anthropology vis-à-vis the corporeal, it also severs the critical link between the temporal and the eternal life. As he puts it, "After all, eternity is not gained or lost in a single moment, no matter how lucid and important it may be, but on the basis of a lifetime of repeated actions, for we die as we have lived."²⁹³ In addition, on O'Callaghan's account, the coincidence of distinct events, such as death and resurrection, is only possible for God for whom time is not relevant; for finite humans, their acts necessarily succeed one after another. What's more, he thinks that it is inappropriate to draw a parallel between the death of Jesus and our own, given that Jesus after all is the Christ.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 121.

²⁹¹ Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

²⁹² Paul O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology* (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

²⁹³ Ibid, 269.

Another group of comments has to do with the denial of an interim period, together with the claim that death is an immediate entrance to eternity. For example, Candido Pozo remarks that

If we take seriously the notion of eternity such as it has been understood since the time of Boethius, that is, that it includes not only the idea of interminable life (in the fullest sense of the term, that is, without beginning and end), but also that of a *fully simultaneous* and *perfect* possession of life, then it is impossible to think that a being that does not have infinite perfection, or what is the same thing, a created being, would be capable of such an absolute possession.²⁹⁴

In Pozo's view, even though beyond death the earthly frame of time no longer applies, some notion of time is still unavoidable, because "a created being can possess its life, including at the level of consciousness, only by means of a succession of acts; but wherever there is a succession of acts, one can point to a before and an after, which is equivalent to introducing a certain notion of time."²⁹⁵ To Pozo, a purely psychological sense of instantaneity on the part of the dead is unacceptable also, since the scripture clearly indicates a state of eager waiting by the dead for the arrival of the final consummation (cf. Rv 6:9-10). Instead, Pozo demands a more balanced view which both values the moment of death and the further significance of the eventual consummation.

²⁹⁴ Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's, 2009), 205.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

Five Related Advancements in the Eschatology Literature

Drawing Closer the Concepts of “Time” and “Eternity”

Walter Kasper (1994): Eternity does not abolish time but elevates it²⁹⁶

Walter Kasper disapproves two frequent tendencies when thinking about the relationship between time and eternity: one is a denial of any distinction between time and eternity; the other is a denial of any congruency between them. The latter is particularly seen in popular thinking, where “eternity is commonly conceived of as timelessness, as an abolition, rejection or interruption of time.”²⁹⁷ Kasper points out that, both understandings are incompatible with the Christian faith. From the Christian point of view, since the eternal God created the temporal world, “The relationship between time and eternity is that of an analogy; ... Eternity does not simply abolish time, but it elevates and consummates it.”²⁹⁸ To Kasper, the implication of this understanding for the postmortem state is that, such state cannot be conceived of as being “eternal” in the sense of timelessness, not the least because time is a constituent element of human existence. Moreover, if the dead have entered into a state which excludes time, the Christian beliefs in the “communion of saints,” praying for the dead, and requesting their intercession for us do not make sense.

²⁹⁶ Walter Kasper, “Individual Salvation and Eschatological Consummation,” in *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology*, ed. John P. Galvin (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 7-24.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 18.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

Brian Hebblethwaite (2010): Thinking of the “eternity” of God and the “eternal” life we are called to in essentially temporal terms²⁹⁹

Brian Hebblethwaite begins his investigation of this topic with an analysis of Karl Rahner’s notions of time and eternity. Hebblethwaite writes that Rahner understands “eternal life” to be completely beyond time; this is because, to Rahner, only a total discontinuity with time would make “eternal life” the definitive fulfillment and validation of the temporal life, and not an endless repetition of what had gone on before. And he points out regarding Rahner’s view that “Not only is it a question of the classical restriction of temporality to this world in its present state; it is also one of a conviction of the lasting significance of this life, the finality of death, and the impossibility of further cycles of failure, repentance, or renewal in the consummated beyond.”³⁰⁰ Hebblethwaite observes that, intriguingly, Rahner himself seems to have second thoughts on this in his short article on “Purgatory.” There, Rahner muses about the idea of “a post-mortal history of freedom” for Christians and non-Christians alike, and suggests that such “history,” even though not a further phase of earthly time, may be thought of as something analogous to it.

However, Hebblethwaite argues that, theologically speaking, “it is both unnecessary and unintelligible to locate God wholly outside time, ... [because] a living, purposive, and active God of love must be thought of, at least analogously, in temporal

²⁹⁹ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

terms.”³⁰¹ He recounts that, even in philosophy, there is an increasing conviction among analytical philosophers who are sympathetic to theism that the concept of God can no longer be coherently presented in purely non-temporal terms. If so, Hebblethwaite thinks that it encourages us to reconsider the traditional stand of the “finality” of death as the stopping of time; moreover, we should think of the “eternity” of God and the “eternal” life to which creatures are called in essentially temporal terms. To Hebblethwaite, not only is temporality an essential part of the life after death, even the final consummation of all things cannot be thought of in entirely non-temporal terms—in his own words, “That state of ultimate perfection must itself involve an endlessly dynamic movement of experience, ecstasy, exploration, and activity (although one hopes for some rest as well!).”³⁰²

Anthony Thiselton (2012): Physical time is a small part of the ontologically real time we call “eternity”³⁰³

Perhaps a farther step in this discourse, Brian Thiselton proposes an intriguing definition of “eternity” as a multi-dimensional reality including different “planes” of time. As he puts it, “time is not one thing” but “depends decisively upon the context.”³⁰⁴

Correspondingly, “‘eternity’ denotes neither endless duration, nor timelessness, and not

³⁰¹ Ibid, 205.

³⁰² Ibid, 206.

³⁰³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012).

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 142.

even simultaneity, but time as this may be experienced in a new dimension.”³⁰⁵

Moreover, Thiselton refers to David Wilkinson in saying that “God has both eternal and temporal poles to his nature ... We need to see time as a fundamental part of eternity.”³⁰⁶

To illustrate his fascinating vision about the multiple dimensions of time and how God in “eternity” interacts with us in “time,” Thiselton gives an example of multiple dimensions of space. He says,

It is easy to imagine a two-dimensional world in spatial terms, like *Flatland*, in which a visitor arrives from a three-dimensional world, unlimited in the way that two-dimensional creatures have been limited. He sees and understands more than they do. ... If we now extend the analogy, we can think of a one-dimensional world in time, with an irreversible and one-directional flow. Now let us imagine a world in which a visitor from a reality with two or more dimensions in time enters the one-dimensional temporal world. The visitor’s interaction with that world ‘could be both describable but inexplicable to the inhabitants. ... Our experience of time in the physical universe is a small and limited part of an ontologically real time that we might call eternity.’ God, Wilkinson asserts, inhabits these higher dimensions of time.³⁰⁷

Thiselton thinks that, the fact that certain models for quantum gravity require ten or even more dimensions for the physical universe provides support for his theory.

Further Challenging the “Finality” of Death

Donald Bloesch (2014): “A theology of divine perseverance”³⁰⁸

In addition to the typical protests against the finality of death, such as those based on the vastly unfinished state of our earthly life and on the divine attributes of justice and

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 205.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 143. The exact words come from David Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

³⁰⁷ Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology*, 143.

³⁰⁸ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

love, Donald Bloesch proposes what he calls “a theology of divine perseverance,”³⁰⁹ which holds that our existence after death is not beyond the reach of God’s saving grace. Bloesch explores the possibility of postmortem salvation based on the conviction that the grave cannot limit God, who perseveres in His pursuit to save fallen humanity until the victorious End.

Brian Hebblethwaite (2010): Developing “par-eschatology” within the doctrine of sanctification³¹⁰

Along the same line, Brian Hebblethwaite points to the important bearing of the notion of “reincarnation” on twentieth-century Christian eschatology under the context of religious pluralism, the reason being that

Indian belief in reincarnation is closely bound up with a way of dealing with the whole problem of evil that presents such a stumbling block to traditional Christian faith. It rests on the profound religious conviction that a single human life on earth, liable to being thwarted or cut short at any moment, cannot be the one and only opportunity for a human being to find salvation and eternal blessedness.³¹¹

Hebblethwaite strongly agrees with John Hick’s view in *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) that “a single life span on earth cannot possess the absolute significance that the mainstream Christian tradition has accorded it.”³¹² Hebblethwaite also introduces theologians like Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Schleiermacher, H. B. Wilson, F. W. Farrar, Nicolas Berdyaev, etc., as supporters for the view that God does present people further chances after death for repentance and further spiritual growth. And he calls to attention

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 15.

³¹⁰ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹¹ Ibid, 176.

³¹² Ibid, 177.

the fact that, even Karl Rahner, who is known for his belief in the “finality” of death in his early theology, admits later in his major work that the Indian belief in reincarnation has substantive similarities with the Christian doctrine of purgatory.³¹³

Hebblethwaite himself welcomes the contemporary development of “par-eschatology,” or discussion of the “next to last things,” as in John Hick’s *Death and Eternal Life* (1976), which extends the traditional concern with purgatory “to include the whole next phase of the creative process.”³¹⁴ To Hebblethwaite, positing such a postmortem period of growth is not at all in conflict with the doctrine of “justification,” because this period has to do with the doctrine of “sanctification” something which “takes effect gradually through experience and growth in spirituality, both this side of the grave and beyond it.”³¹⁵ Hebblethwaite also thinks that it is reasonable to not limit the opportunity of further growth and sanctification to Christians only, but to extend it to all people.

Jürgen Moltmann (1996): Allowing each person to become what God intended them to be³¹⁶

Jürgen Moltmann presents some passionate pleas for the possibility of postmortem growth. As he puts it,

³¹³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 442.

³¹⁴ Hebblethwaite, *Christian Hope*, 217.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 218.

³¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

We die with the unanswered question which we ourselves have been, our whole life long. However we imagine eternal life, it cannot be the externalization of our beginnings, our attempts at life and life's abrupt endings, experienced or willed. Can resurrection into the life of the future world really already take place at death, as Luther and the modern Catholic theologians we have cited believe? It would then seem as if with death this earthly, fragmentary life would be broken off, and would be absorbed into a different, divine life. But we should then still not have coped successfully with this life.³¹⁷

In Moltmann's view, because of the countless dissatisfactions and unfinished businesses life leaves us, we cannot help but ruminate about an on-going history after death, so that our lives as we *have* lived them may be properly dealt with, such that by God's power and grace we may be able to "put right what has gone awry, finish what was begun, pick up what was neglected, forgive the trespasses, heal the hurts, and be permitted to gather up the moments of happiness and to transform mourning into joy."³¹⁸ In Moltmann's view, this is not some karmatic return or endless repetition, neither is it to finish up the "tasks" left uncompleted, but "is being given the chance to become the persons God meant us to be," because "If everyone is a unique idea on God's part, as we like to say, then God will think it important for this idea to find its *own* proper realization, and its successful and completed form."³¹⁹ Here, Moltmann is particularly mindful about the huge number of people whose lives are cut short. And he asks "if their life has no meaning, has ours?" Moltmann laments that the notion of "natural death" is too rosy a concept from "the life-insured denizens of the affluent society" for an eschatology of

³¹⁷ Ibid, 116.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 117.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 118.

genuine hope to be based upon.³²⁰ Looking expectantly into the future, Moltmann writes that

I would think that eternal life gives the broken and the impaired and those whose lives have been destroyed space and time and strength to live the life which they were intended for, and for which they were born. I think this, not for selfish reasons, for the sake of my personal completion, and not morally, for the sake of some kind of purification; I think it for the sake of the justice which I believe is *God's* concern and *his* first option.³²¹

Further Explicating the Intermediate State

Jürgen Moltmann (1996): “Time” of fellowship with Christ and “space” of growth in the Spirit³²²

Jürgen Moltmann advocates a theology of the afterlife, or “*the eschatological proviso*,” which takes Jesus “the Way” as its point of departure. According to it, Christ is “the Way;” moreover, “Christ is *on the way* to God’s kingdom.”³²³ The “provisional” element in Moltmann’s theology of the interim has to do the fact that, even though Christ has been raised from the dead, the final consummation is yet to come. Thus, even though a Protestant theologian, Moltmann fully endorses the “interim time,” which to him is “the time between Christ’s resurrection and the general resurrection of the dead ... filled by the lordship of Christ over the dead and the living, and by the experience of the Spirit, who is the life-giver.”³²⁴

³²⁰ Ibid, 118.

³²¹ Ibid, 118.

³²² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*.

³²³ Ibid, 104.

³²⁴ Ibid, 104.

Specifically, during this interim “the dead are dead and not yet risen, but they are already ‘in Christ’ and are with him *on the way* to his future;” Christ the Risen One “takes them with him on his way to the consummation of God’s kingdom.”³²⁵ Moltmann terms this postmortem “being with Christ” a “time” with Christ. Here, “time” is to be understood relationally, “as God’s time *for* creation and as Christ’s time *for* human beings, ... the dead too have ‘time’ in Christ, because Christ ‘has time’ for them.”³²⁶ Based on the First Epistle of Peter (4.6), Moltmann envisions Christ preaching the gospel to the dead in his descent to the hell, and “through his solidarity with the dead, Christ *avails* himself of his salvific possibilities for them, and thus brings the dead hope. In that world, the gospel also has *retrospective* power. Those who died earlier can also arrive at faith, because Christ has come to them.”³²⁷

In Moltmann’s view, death can impose no limit to the Risen Lord who makes divine possibilities available to the dead. Moltmann calls the postmortem “time” with Christ “the fellowship of Christ;” it is “Christ’s time, and that is the time of love, the accepting, the transfiguring, the rectifying love that leads to eternal life.”³²⁸ This, to him, is the element of truth contained in the doctrine of purgatory.

Furthermore, on Moltmann’s account, there is also postmortem “space.” First, “space” conveys the sense of community of the living and the dead, both of which are in the fellowship with Christ. It is an enduring and indestructible communion of hope and

³²⁵ Ibid, 105.

³²⁶ Ibid, 105.

³²⁷ Ibid, 106.

³²⁸ Ibid, 106.

love, under Christ's lordship, which embraces the living and the dead. Second, "space" refers to "the Spirit of eternal life" who "is first of all a further *space for living*."³²⁹ Even during our restricted earthly existence, the eternal Spirit is experienced as "the well of life" bestowing people with new life and filling it again and again with fresh energies. Beyond death, the Spirit will further enliven human lives impaired, cut short, or even destroyed during their earthly span, so that they can develop fully in the end. Moltmann writes,

To every space for living which is an invitation to an unfolding and to movement, there belongs a time for living which allows growth and completion. Even before death we experience the Spirit of life as the power of the divine hope which leaves us time, because it gives us future. And how much more will this be so after the end of this restricted time, however short or long it may be.³³⁰

Donald Bloesch (2004): *The four worlds beyond*³³¹

Donald Bloesch firmly believes in an interim state for both the saved and the unsaved. He thinks that "The gulf between heaven and hell (the final destiny of the saved and the lost respectively) is irrevocable and final *only* from the human side."³³² Specifically, Bloesch proposes the "four worlds beyond," which include "hell," "heaven," "hades," and "paradise." "Hell" and "heaven" denote, respectively, the *future* states of the damned and the saved in the final consummation. "Hades" and "paradise," on the other hand, are *present* realities during the interim, which are provisional rather than

³²⁹ Ibid, 108.

³³⁰ Ibid, 118.

³³¹ Bloesch, *Last Things*.

³³² Ibid, 36.

everlasting. They are, in a sense, “interim hell” and “interim heaven,” and they will be merged into hell and heaven eventually.

Paradise is the interim state of the blessed. Paradise is blessed, in that it is a place of newly embodied life of resurrection, “a spiritual corporeality.”³³³ It is where the beatific vision begins. And yet, “paradise” is only an interim place, in that the saints there will be further clothed and will have perfect beatitude at Christ’s Second Coming.

Bloesch approves the notion of continuous progress in paradise, for “[e]ven in a state of perfect sanctification one is still able to grow ‘in wisdom and in stature,’ as did Jesus himself (Lk 2:52). Scripture speaks of *degrees* of glory (1 Cor 3:18), the lowest levels beginning in this life (cf. Heb 12:23).”³³⁴ Words like “sleep” or “rest” in the scripture for describing the dead convey the meaning of rest only from worldly labors, analogous to the Sabbath rest; in fact, the saints “are now engaged in the new world of intercession in which they rest neither day nor night (Rv 4:8).” Furthermore, in paradise, their fellowship with all the children of God is not yet perfect, because the church militant is still fighting the good fight on earth. Therefore, the saints in paradise are in a state of expectancy for the eschaton like us on earth, for “Apart from us they shall not be made perfect (Heb 11:40). Their happiness is dependent upon our redemption.”³³⁵

Hades, in comparison, is the interim state for the great majority of people who are not saved when they die, and it will be cast into the lake of fire after giving up its dead in

³³³ Ibid, 139.

³³⁴ Ibid, 141.

³³⁵ Ibid, 142.

the final consummation (Rv 20:13-14). Here, Bloesch alludes to the fact that, a fair number of church fathers in the early period held out the possibility of redemption in hades, and he thinks that they are on solid scriptural ground.

Bloesch contends that, change of heart can still happen after death, as in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man where the latter shows some change of heart. Furthermore, even though a great chasm exists between the saved and the unsaved in the world beyond, God can bridge this chasm, as indicated in Ephesians 4:8-9, “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’ What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?” Nothing can separate us from God’s saving love. Bloesch states that “I believe it is more in keeping with the tradition of the church catholic to view the descent as opening the door to the salvation of those who are not yet in the family of God.”³³⁶ He argues that the risen Lord himself tells us that he has the keys to death and to hades (Rv 1:18), and he assured Peter that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the advance of God’s saving power (Mt 16:18).

Therefore, Bloesch believes that the final condemnation is not yet pronounced upon those who are not saved at death, the final and irrevocable separation of the blessed and the damned has not occurred—both for the living and for the dead. He agrees with Luther that “‘God forbid that I should limit the acquiring faith to the present life. In the depth of divine mercy there may be opportunity to win it in the future.’” And he quotes Peter T. Forsyth in saying that, there may be more conversions on the other side of death

³³⁶ Ibid, 147.

than on this side. Bloesch thinks that, he is not claiming here a “doctrine of a second chance,” but rather “the universality of opportunity for salvation. In this context, it is best not to speak of chance but of universal Providence.”³³⁷

Re-conceptualizing “Resurrection”

When discussing resurrection and the interim state, Zachary Hayes insightfully points out that, recent discourse on these topics “re-opens issues on the nature of material reality and its relation to spirit, as well as the issue of time and its relation to eternity.”³³⁸ Notably, the five authors’ works I review below all wrestle, in one way or another, with these two central motifs regarding the afterlife.

Jürgen Moltmann (1996): Resurrection as healing the lived life³³⁹

Jürgen Moltmann envisages resurrection as “gathering” and “healing” the *lived* life on earth, which is always fragmentary, transient, and isolated in nature. Notably, the *lived* life in its entirety is how Moltmann understands contemporary emphasis on the “wholeness” of a human being—in life, in death and in resurrection. As he defines it, “The whole is the form in which the different parts of an organism coalesce and cooperate. ... a new quality compared with the quantifiable sum of the parts.”³⁴⁰ Even though the sum of the parts disintegrates in death, the person’s total configuration or *Gestalt* as the outcome of a lived life remains what it is before God—because of God. Furthermore, death is not the separation of the soul from the body; what really happens through death

³³⁷ Ibid, 146.

³³⁸ Hayes, *Visions*, 164.

³³⁹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 75.

is the whole person's lived Gestalt being *transformed* from the restricted earthly life into a form of existence that is no longer temporally or spatially restricted. Resurrection "means that a person finds healing, reconciliation and completion," while the *particularity* of each life as actually *lived* is also maintained.³⁴¹ Moltmann thinks that "The resurrection of the body' means the metamorphosis of *this* transient creation into the eternal kingdom of God, and of *this* mortal life into eternal life."³⁴² Nothings will be lost through the transfiguration; all the marks left on the mortal life will be carried into the eternal life, albeit as reconciled, rectified, healed, and completed. Otherwise, we will not be able to recognize ourselves in eternal life.

Dermot Lane (1996): A synthesized theory of resurrection in stages³⁴³

Dermot Lane proposes a synthesized view of resurrection which has three stages. It is "synthesized," in that Lane situates resurrection as the "focal point" of the entire divine drama of creation, redemption, and consummation. In his words,

The God who created the human out of love is the same God who recreates the human in death into a New Creation. The first creation is a *creatio ex nihilo*. The second creation is a multilayered process of recreation influenced by the grace of historical existence, shaped by the second grace of the gift of redemption in Christ, and completed by the third grace of the love of God's creativity expressed paradoxically in death itself.³⁴⁴

It is "staged," in that Lane sets out three degrees of resurrection: during life, at death, and in the final consummation. Lane argues that, his theory of resurrection in degrees is an

³⁴¹ Ibid, 70.

³⁴² Ibid, 77.

³⁴³ Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive*.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 136.

effective way for avoiding, on the one hand, the metaphysical dualism of spirit and matter in classical eschatology, which locates resurrection at the final consummation and, on the other hand, the neglect of the crucial import of the Parousia by the alternative theory, which locates resurrection at the death. In Lane's view, what is at stake here is both to maintain a sound anthropology in terms of the body-soul relation, and to be attentive to the collective aspect of eschatology as captured in the concept of general resurrection. And he asks, "Is there any way around ... which offers a meaningful account of individual salvation after death and at the same time safeguards the social significance of the second coming of Christ?"³⁴⁵ To this end, Lane himself suggests that "individual resurrection—as distinct from general resurrection—takes place after death, and that this individual resurrection is finally completed and perfected at the end of time in the general resurrection symbolized in the doctrine of the second coming of Christ."³⁴⁶

To support his theory, Lane appeals to both the scripture and documents issued by the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, Lane's scriptural evidence comes from the Pauline corpus. For example, he argues that that "According to Paul, resurrection for the individual begins in the present life and comes to some kind of climax in death" when individual resurrection takes place.³⁴⁷ For Lane, the clearest evidence of Paul's belief in individual resurrection *in death* is found in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, where he says, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 153.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 154.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 155.

from God, an eternal house in heaven.”(2 Cor 5:1) Regarding this verse, Lane relates that, “Most commentators suggest that in this text the earthly tent symbolizes the physical body and the heavenly dwelling represents the new risen body given by God to the individual in death.”³⁴⁸ Another favorite piece of evidence Lane uses is the Pauline imagery of a seed, which “does not come to life unless it dies.” Lane explains that “Here, Paul is appealing to the analogy of the seed, also used by Jesus, to explain what happens in death. The seed falls into the ground and dies, and what comes up is a transformed stalk of wheat. For Paul something similar happens to the Christian in death: ‘So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor 15: 42-44).’³⁴⁹

In Lane’s view, the image of a seed is a particularly effective symbol of the individual resurrection which takes place in death, because it well captures both the element of continuity and the element of transformation and fulfillment in the resurrection. Notably, we recall that Lane sees the individual resurrection at death as still incomplete, in the sense that a part in isolation from the whole is incomplete. “The Christian who undergoes individual resurrection in death continues to retain a relationship with the pilgrimage people of God on earth and indeed with creation itself. It is this underlying relationship which is completed and transformed in the general resurrection of the dead at the end of time in the *Parousia*.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 156.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 156.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 159.

Donald Bloesch (2004): “Resurrection of the spirit” in death and “resurrection of the body” in the Parousia³⁵¹

Similarly, Donald Bloesch also makes the distinction between the individual and the general resurrection, which begins with faith and repentance during earthly life. But for Bloesch, the accent falls more upon the distinction between “resurrection of the spirit” which occurs in death and “resurrection of the body” which occurs in the Parousia. More specifically, Bloesch differentiates the “flesh” from the “body” and, quoting C. H. Dodd’s biblical scholarship, he defines the “body” as the following: “Paul does not mean by ‘body’ anything material, but ‘the *organic principle* which makes a man a self-identical individual, persisting through all changes in the ‘substance’ through which he realizes himself, whether material or non-material.’”³⁵²

On Bloesch’s account, resurrection has to do with the “body” and not the “flesh,” which is destroyed at death. Even though, during earthly life, the new birth of the person brings renewal to the fleshly physical body, the renewal is temporary, for the physical body only serves as a *vehicle* for the new, spiritual body. Thus, the inner person which persists after death has both the bodily and the spiritual elements. Bloesch sees the “body,” which is the organic principle, being linked to the “soul” in such a way that “the soul always seeks and needs some kind of bodily form. Soul and body are therefore

³⁵¹ Bloesch, *Last Things*.

³⁵² *Ibid*, 123.

inseparable. The body is necessary for a restored humanity as a means of fellowship, communication and identification.”³⁵³

As to the new body we receive in resurrection at death, Bloesch observes in Jesus’ case that, the resurrection body is not only spiritual, but also “steadily became *more* spiritualized in his postmortem encounters with his disciples,”³⁵⁴ for it manifested more and more characteristics that the fleshly physical body does not have. He thinks that

only Christ has the perfectly developed spiritual body. After our deaths as sinful mortals, the soul is not in nakedness, but there is a lack of completeness of wholeness in the spiritual body as it exists. For a perfect and complete spiritual corporeality, we must wait for the eschatological fulfillment of all things in the risen and ascended Christ who will then be all in all.³⁵⁵

On Bloesch’s account, the resurrection body we receive at death does not have a material identity, but a formal identity with the earthly body. To offer more details about the resurrection body, Bloesch speculates further that “at death the soma (body) of the believer is changed from sarx (flesh), which by its very essence decays, into doxa (glory)—the divine element. The new body will be characterized by *solidity, denseness* and *substantiality*.”³⁵⁶

Bloesch identifies two resurrections: “The first resurrection is the *spiritual* resurrection [in death] of the dead through faith [which begins in this life]. The second is the *physical* or bodily resurrection at the consummation of world history.”³⁵⁷ Comparing

³⁵³ Ibid, 123.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 123.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 124.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 129.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 130.

our resurrection in death with the final resurrection in the End, Bloesch states that “At the moment of death, we are clothed with an *incorruptible* body. When Christ comes again, we will be re-clothed with a *glorified* body that is eternal.” Moreover, “The general resurrection involves a transformation of *matter* itself. ... We look forward not only to a heavenly eternity but to a new heavenly earth in which the material will be taken up into the spiritual.”³⁵⁸ In addition, “We can say that in the general resurrection what is now hidden will be made public. There will be a materialization or making visible of what is now invisible.”³⁵⁹

Brian Hebblethwaite (2010): Resurrection as dematerialization³⁶⁰

Brian Hebblethwaite discusses resurrection in a way to try to retain the theological intuitions behind both “immortality of the soul” and “resurrection of the body.” According to Hebblethwaite’s understanding, “immortality of the soul” conveys the insight that, if a person survives death, there must be an element within the person to ensure *continuity* of the same individual before and after death, and this element is not the physical body which disintegrates upon death. As he puts it, “Continuity must rather be ensured by means of the person who has come into existence, admittedly in and through a particular physical organism, but who already transcends that material base on virtue of his or her rational, spiritual, capacities.”³⁶¹ “Resurrection of the body,” on the other hand, focuses on the role of the “body” as the indispensable *means* of human individuation,

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 131.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 131.

³⁶⁰ Hebblethwaite, *Christian Hope*.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 210.

relation, and action. But he wants to clarify that resurrection should not be understood as a transformation of the *physical* body into something permanent and incorruptible. He defends his view by saying that

It is really a question of *intelligibility* in the light of modern scientific understanding of matter. A physical body is a particular, complex, configuration of atoms and molecules in continual exchange with an ever-changing physical environment. Although the particles or quanta of energy and the forces that constitute the basic stuff of the world out of which all material objects are made do not themselves appear to be perishable, nevertheless all organized matter is *inherently* perishable, and it is not clear what could possibly be meant by saying that matter will be raised and transformed into something incorruptible in heaven.³⁶²

According to Hebblethwaite, the material medium and environment are replaced by non-material ones in the postmortem existence. Moreover, “the material creation is a *temporary* phase and destined to be left behind, presumably annihilated (perhaps after the heat-death of the universe), when its function in the whole creative process is complete and the last new creaturely person has been taken up and transformed into the conditions of eternity.”³⁶³ So, he thinks that it is more accurate to compare the material creation to the chrysalis than to the caterpillar vis-à-vis the butterfly. Notably, Hebblethwaite endorses the theory of individual resurrection immediately after death; he thinks that “general resurrection” should be used only as a symbol to convey that all will be raised and there will be a final consummation. And he agrees that there is a temporal gap between individual resurrection and final consummation: “For one thing, the history of the world goes on and new generations continue to be born and to die. For another thing,

³⁶² Ibid, 210-211.

³⁶³ Ibid, 211.

there must be time for the love of God to work upon the risen soul, perhaps even to win it, purify it, and enhance it, time for the risen person to repent, to grow and change, and to mature.”³⁶⁴

Anthony Thiselton (2012): The “spiritual” body is that type of body animated by the Holy Spirit³⁶⁵

Anthony Thiselton explicates the “spiritual body” upon resurrection by its relation to the Holy Spirit. Specifically, Thiselton argues that in the scripture “the adjective spiritual (Greek, *pneumatikos*) nearly always denotes the quality of being animated, led, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”³⁶⁶ And so, he questions the usual translation “It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body.” This is because, here, the ideal model to be contrasted with is not the immaterial, but that which is animated and motivated by the Holy Spirit. To him, “the notion of a ‘*spiritual body*,’ or better, ‘*Spiritual body*’ ... may or may not be ‘immaterial’.”³⁶⁷ As to the nature of the spiritual body, Thiselton thinks that we should try to understand it through the nature of the Holy Spirit, who is the animating power of the resurrection. Specifically, quoting Ernst Kasemann’s work, Thiselton defines the earthly “body” as a person’s “ability to communicate ... the reality of our being in the world.’ Hence, the earthly body provides ‘visible expression’ and ‘personal shape to the Christian’s living out of obedience to Christ as Lord.”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 211-212.

³⁶⁵ Thiselton, *Life after Death*.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 112.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 112.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 125.

Correspondingly, the “spiritual body” is a transformed counterpart of that after resurrection, and it “constitutes a mode of existence characterized by the Holy Spirit ... ongoing, moving ahead, dynamic, and on-the-move. It will be more like a flowing stream or river than a lake or a canal.”³⁶⁹

Love as the Hermeneutical Lens for Eschatology

Gerald O’Collins encourages an eschatology which is developed through the hermeneutical lens of love.³⁷⁰ He recalls Pope John Paul II’s theme in his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis* of 1979, which spotlights the unique insights God’s love alone can furnish for our understanding of the human being. Extending this theme to the study of death and life after death, O’Collins states that “As they move toward their end, human beings cannot live without love. As they travel toward their own individual deaths and the consummation of all things, they remain incomprehensible to themselves and their world remains senseless unless that love is revealed which can illuminate their personal end and the end of the universe.”³⁷¹

And so, O’Collins conducts a tentative exercise of “love seeking eschatological understanding.”³⁷² Looking at the eschaton through the eyes of love, O’Collins tries to find out how the theme of love may help us better comprehend and interpret the Last Things, just as it did for Dante, where love allowed him “to explore imaginatively the last

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 128.

³⁷⁰ Gerald O’Collins, “In the End, Love,” in *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology*, ed. John P. Galvin (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 25-42.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 25.

³⁷² Ibid, 26.

things—right through to the end and his vision of the divine love which ‘moves the sun and the other stars.’”³⁷³

O’Collins begins by describing some of the major characteristics of love, based on general as well as Christian faith experiences. These characteristics include: love is creative; love transcends mere logical reasoning; love accepts and affirms the existence of the beloved; love heals, redeems, sets free, and transforms; love means self-revelation orientated toward the other; love unites; love brings joy; and love has intrinsic connection with beauty. Based on these characteristics of love, O’Collins then speculates on how they may manifest eschatologically. For example, love as the key to the New Creation of all things in the End; God’s affirmative love bestows us creatures with eternal life; God’s salvific self-disclosure will reach its completion at the end, etc.

O’Collins acknowledges that, much work remains to be done in spelling out what the hermeneutics of love may entail for particular topics of individual eschatology, such as death, purgatory, and bodily resurrection. Thought-provokingly, he also remarks that given the amazing discoveries made nowadays about the material reality, cosmology, etc., “it is at our peril that we bypass the questions arising at the interface between science and theology.”³⁷⁴ O’Collins even eagerly suggest that, since God the Creator is best characterized by love, “love just might provide the answer to the grand unified

³⁷³ Ibid, 27.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 37.

theory or GUT, the holy grail for which many contemporary scientists search,” the key to unlock the most fundamental mystery of all created realities.³⁷⁵

Summary and Reflections

Even though the topic of death occupies only a portion of the eschatological probing, and so discussions of it in the eschatology literature are in a sporadic fashion, exciting breakthroughs have been made as the result of these efforts, all of which contribute to better understandings of the pivotal concepts of temporality, body, and postmortem growth for furthering theology of death.

First, we see the stringent dichotomy between time and eternity according to the Greek philosophy being loosened based on Christian understandings of God and on modern discoveries about time and space. Moreover, the so-called “finality” of death is furthered challenged based on beliefs in the efficacy of divine perseverance and universal providence. Along this line, investigation of the “next to last things,” or “par-eschatology,” has been taken up by some within the doctrine of sanctification. Also, deliberations over the interim state give rise to intriguing par-eschatological notions such as fellowship “time” with Christ in the “space” of the Holy Spirit, and the “four worlds beyond.” All of them express the intuition of the progressive, processive, rather than static or dormant nature of the postmortem existence.

Furthermore, we see new articulations of the doctrine of resurrection: some particularly want to make explicit its relation to the life lived on earth, others parse it out in gradual stages, still others try to elucidate it via its connections with the corporeal or the Holy Spirit. Again, we hear an increasingly salient expression of the intuition of

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 39.

gradual growth and development in the afterlife coming through. There are also further thoughts on the nature of the “body” and the role it serves in the life of the spirit. Last but not the least, the theme of love is attracting more and more attention in eschatological explications, for example, related to the divine purpose for postmortem purgation or person-making. Here, we reviewed the most enthusiastic proposal on it, which calls for a *hermeneutic of love* for revealing unique insights about our eschatological future.

Main Findings and Open Questions

Regarding Postmortem Time

One major result of these studies is a crystalizing appreciation of temporality as a *constitutive* element of human existence, both for life on earth and for life beyond. More importantly, there stands out the Christian understanding of time as a *teleological* process of becoming the Image of God. As Brian Hebblethwaite points out, “it is probably the case that, of all scientific notions, evolutionary theory has had the most pervasive effect in making Christian theology rethink its fundamental conception of God’s world.”³⁷⁶ The evolutionary picture has been found to hold true from the small world of microbiology to the vast domain of cosmology. That is to say, the successive process of becoming seems to be such a universal feature which characterizes the underlying mechanism of our reality “that Christian theology had now to think in terms of a more or less gradual process from small beginnings right up to a perfected consummation in the future is beyond question or doubt.”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*, 169.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

In addition, time is understood to be part and parcel for playing out the drama of *salvation*. For example, Donald Bloesch underscores that, to the extent that the Christian faith is thoroughly soteriological, soteriology carries an overriding significance for eschatology, and so eschatological explorations should be housed within soteriology.³⁷⁸

This soteriology may be expressed as the following:

Christians believe primarily that through his Son Jesus Christ God has offered humanity salvation: salvation from sin, salvation leading toward eternal, loving communion with the Trinity. But salvation from sin is a gradual, laborious, lifelong process. And perfect, conscious union with God, though entirely dependent on grace, involves a drawn-out, arduous purification.³⁷⁹

Time's indispensable role in our salvation can be appreciated from the Christian anthropology which considers the human being a being of history, of becoming through concrete unfolding over time. That is why Christian faith is a "historical" faith, believing in a God who saves through history. Joseph Ratzinger tries to make evident the crucial role of time in salvation by saying that:

salvation cannot simply be given to people in an external way, as one might hand over a sum of money. Rather does it claim the entire personal subject who receives it. ... the interval between midpoint and end [in salvation history] becomes intelligible when seen from this angle. Man with his ambiguous story of acceptance and rejection of grace is an acting subject in God's saving plan, and it is on this basis that he inhabits time.³⁸⁰

Considering temporality from the perspectives of Christian anthropology and soteriology, one cannot help but hesitating to call death, the end of our earthly time, "final." For, what is "three scores and ten" compared to eternity? It may be telling that, among the eleven

³⁷⁸ Bloesch, *Last Things*.

³⁷⁹ O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, vii.

³⁸⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 65-66.

theologians reviewed above, six of them hold a certain version of a progressive and processive view of human existence after death; and it is the majority viewpoint in related eschatology literatures we reviewed. Among those who claim “instantaneous” holiness at death, they often hold other eschatological beliefs, such as multiple “perfections” defined according to stages, or heaven with “space” for further growth, which betray that their claim of “instantaneous holiness” is in fact in substantive agreement with the non-finality of death. In Chapter Four, I present recent soteriological literatures to argue for the processive nature of postmortem existence.

Regarding Postmortem Body

Given that death is nothing if not bodily, numerous thoughts have been given to the role of “body” in death and the beyond. However, as we know from the above, viewpoints here are not nearly as homogenous as in the discourse on time. Some insists on resurrecting the earthly body (e.g., Ratzinger); other thinks the physical body has no part in the eternal, and it is idolatrous to treat such things as absolute (e.g., Simpson); still other understands the body through its functional role as the medium and the context of human interaction (e.g., Aldwinckle). In my opinion, the diversity of opinions regarding the body is a direct consequence of the heavy fog that surrounds “matter” itself.

A major manifestation of this difficulty is the frequent mixing of the material and the spiritual in the theologies of death reviewed. Recall, on the one hand, we see things related to the spirit being portrayed as if they were literally physical, the most striking examples of which may be found in Rahner and Boros’ Christologies, even though all the authors we viewed would probably reject a physicalist’s conception of the essence of the

human being. Boros even goes so far as claiming that “One of the most important results we owe to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s efforts in the world of thought is the opening up for Christian spirituality of the Christo-logical dimension of our *essential belonging* to the [physical] world.”³⁸¹

On the other hand, we see theological discussions based on features given to material things that they do not actually possess. As Russell Aldwinckle points out in length,

the word “matter” is sometimes very loosely used. If such language is used as that matter has in it the potential to become mind, the result often is to attribute to matter so-called qualities and capacities which we *only* know as belonging to self-conscious mental activity. This, however, is cheating, since matter does not now mean that which is defined as non-mental, nor is it the matter which physics is concerned. Matter then becomes a mysterious source or process from which emerge ever-increasingly complex levels of existence, including mind. ... It is doubtful whether this should be called a consistent materialism, for it allows for the emergence of new levels of activity, such as the mental, which are not reducible to the physical factors investigated by the physics today.³⁸²

Various notions of “salvation” of matter, for example, from transience, from corruption, or to “elasticity” to the spirit, are particularly hazy. In my view, even though the matter-inclusive impulse behind these notions is quite laudable, the notions themselves lack intelligibility, and so they render the Christian hope less than credible. What’s more, they seem to treat matter as something it is not, and so assign it a salvation it needs not, while obscuring the salvation *we* really need. For example, in what sense is it better for matter to be permanent rather than transient, except from the human point of

³⁸¹ Boros, *The Mystery*, 154-155.

³⁸² Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City*, 70-71.

view? Also, does the root of the disharmony between matter and spirit reside in the matter, or in the spirit?

The most telling example of our jumbled understanding of “matter” may be the interpretation of the doctrine of resurrection in terms of the “flesh.” Besides those awkward maneuvers required to make sense of the cannibalism situation with the flesh, the most fundamental problem here, as Candido Pozo came to realize, is the need to “explain exactly how the material body can contribute to a more intense possession of God”—given that God in essence is *Spirit*.³⁸³ To this end, I agree with Hebblethwaite’s comment when discussing the context for twentieth century theology that “Twentieth-century cosmology and elementary particle physics also compelled theologians to re-examine what they said about the basic material creation and its potentialities for future transformation.”³⁸⁴

Notably, all the theologians we encountered above likely hold a substantive dualism view of matter versus spirit. However, as Charles Taliaferro acknowledges, the main challenge to substantive dualism is the “problem of interaction,” given that interaction seems to require that the interacting parties are in the same category or kind.³⁸⁵ The common theological defense of dualism by referring to the immaterial God creating and interacting with the material world seems to beg the question. The fact that the concept of the “psychosomatic unity” of the person drew much sympathy from

³⁸³ Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 315.

³⁸⁴ Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*, 170.

³⁸⁵ Charles Taliaferro, “Human Nature, Personal Identity, and Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 534-547.

contemporary authors may be indicative of the deeper intuition of the *substantive oneness* of reality as a whole. In Chapter Five, I propose George Berkeley's Idealism which takes the material reality seriously, as emphasized by the Christian faith, but also properly, according to its ontological nature.

Regarding the Ontological Connection
between Sin and Death and Righteousness and Life

A third important finding from previous works comes from various efforts to understand the exact nature of the connection between sin and death. As discussed in previous sections, not upholding the Christian claim of sin being the most fundamental human peril can lead to tacit Gnosticism, where salvation comes from gaining knowledge of the objective reality rather than gaining a holy disposition, and so death is hailed as enlightenment; it can also lead to tacit Platonism, where the physical world is where human beings need to be saved from rather than saved through, and so death is welcomed as liberation.

As Oscar Cullmann points out, the deepest contrast between Christianity and Platonism is Christianity's insistence on the causal connection between sin and death. Cullmann observes that "The belief in the resurrection presupposes the Jewish connection between death and sin. ... *Death can be conquered only to the extent that sin is removed.*"³⁸⁶ He recalls the saying of Jesus in Matthew 10:28: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Therefore, in a sense, the soul can be killed and destroyed by

³⁸⁶ Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 28.

sin—albeit not in a physical way. Along the same line, Troisfontaines sees the deadly destruction associated with sin as its “immanent sanction;” just like the burn suffered from touching a hot iron, it has a *natural* connection with the offense, since “this particular act implies its own punishment.”³⁸⁷ Similarly, based on some New Testament scriptures, Bloesch comments about the connection between sin and death, righteousness and life, saying that “We need to gain a victory over sin *before* we gain assurance of life beyond the grave. ‘From sin to righteousness’ *proceeds* ‘from death to life’.”³⁸⁸ Notably, as seen from our review above, discussions on the relation between sin and death in theologies of death have increasingly steered away from a simplistic interpretation of the original sin as the cause of physical death.

In Chapter Six, following Henry Novello’s suggestion of conducting theology of death on the ontological level, I will study the ontological relation between sin and death, righteousness and life, in terms of the formation of human being, the attainment of a higher nature. The gist of that chapter may be captured by this verse, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.” (1 Jn 3:14).

³⁸⁷ Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die*, 202.

³⁸⁸ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 121.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN HICK'S THEOLOGY OF DEATH IN *DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE* (1976)¹

An Overview of John Hick's Method

In the previous chapter, I reviewed contemporary theologies of death as well as some recent literatures in eschatology. In this chapter, I first introduce the theological method and the main contents of John Hick's *Death and Eternal Life* (1976). This is to gain a broad glance at Hick's overall project in the book. After that, I focus on his theology of death, which I capture with four questions: the *why* of human temporality, the *how* of human temporality, the *why* of human embodiment, and the *how* of human embodiment. In the last part of this chapter, I report comments and critiques regarding Hick's theology of death, Hick and his supporters' clarifications and responses, and my own comments and reflections on Hick's theology of death.

Before describing the method Hick adopts, it is helpful to introduce a distinction Hick makes when explicating his theology of death, namely, between eschatology and "par-eschatology." According to Hick's definition, eschatology has to do with the Doctrines of the Last Things, the ultimate state of humanity, whereas par-eschatology has to do with what happens between death and that ultimate state. In other words, par-

¹ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

eschatology is concerned with “the doctrine of the next to last things, and thus of the human future between the present life and man’s ultimate state.”² Notably, Hick’s main focus in the book is par-eschatology, even though he does go into eschatology in the last chapter. Relatedly, Hick defines “par-eschaton” as “the sphere or spheres, life or lives through which humankind moves toward that end.”³ Therefore, to the extent that par-eschaton is conceived primarily as the state(s) of existence instrumental for arriving at the final eschaton, it is better for us to understand Hick’s theology of death under the category of soteriology rather than eschatology.

Due to the profound obscurity of the topic, the first principle of method Hick stipulates for his theology of death is “to spell out possibilities rather than to deal in alleged certainties.”⁴ Hick wants to be clear that his discussion is intended to be exploratory rather than dogmatic; it is a probe into different possibilities under varying degrees of certainty. Despite this explicit acknowledgement of uncertainty, Hick thinks that this speculative endeavor is worthwhile, because without it we would have to live with vagueness, which is either an empty form of words or a covert adoption of crucial assumptions with little examination. Moreover, he thinks that this effort of sorting out rival theories is not a mere shot in the dark but feasible, because personal survival presupposes certain continuity between the earthly life and the afterlife, and so significant

² Ibid, 22.

³ Ibid, 15.

⁴ Ibid, 22.

analogies must hold between the two, especially for those more immediate postmortem phases, and that supplies an approximate basis for appraisal. As Hick envisions it, the first stage of the investigative process would be “a preliminary winnowing of theories” by evaluating their consistency, coherence, extensiveness, and success for making sense of all the relevant and accepted data we have.⁵ The next stage would be a drawing out of the religious and metaphysical implications of the theories that stood the first round of tests, and then use these implications as factors for further assessing these theories from the standpoint of wider systems of belief.

The second principle of method Hick lays down is “the principle of openness to all data,” again necessitated by the obscurity and also the importance of the topic. In Hick’s view, the universality of the phenomenon of death warrants that we do not restrict our investigation of it to sources of insights of our own cultural heritage, but consult experiences and reflections of all faiths and cultures on the topic mortality. For this reason, Hick names his theology of death “a global theology” of death. It is developed out of a comparison of theological affirmations of different religions, which are taken as “partial accounts, from different angles, of the more complex ultimate reality or process.”⁶ It is a synthesizing attempt at a religious theory regarding the nature of the Ultimate Reality which utilizes attestations from all religions as its data. Notably, such a “global” attempt presupposes a view of human religiosity which, as far as Hick can see, is as paradigm-shifting as the Copernican Revolution. Specifically, it shifts from the old

⁵ Ibid, 25.

⁶ Ibid, 30.

perspective that sees human religious life as centering upon and culminating in one's own religion, to the new perspective that sees various religions as varyingly conditioned responses to the same Ultimate Reality. Each religion points beyond its own official dogmas and converges with others upon some common themes.

An Outline of Key Contents of the Book

The core of *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) is unmistakably processive and teleological. The gist of it may be best told with Hick's own words:

[I]t seems to me that the claim of the religions that this life is part of the much larger existence that transcends our lifespan as animal organisms, whether through the continuation of individual consciousness or through participation in the greater transpersonal life, is very likely to be true. I shall argue that this is not ruled out by established scientific findings or by any agreed philosophical agreements. Both the survival of the mind without a body, and also the reconstitution or "resurrection" of the psychophysical person in another spatial environment are—I shall argue—realistically conceivable. ... Human survival is thus not impossible; and I shall further demonstrate that any religious understanding of human existence—not merely of one's own existence but of the life of humanity as a whole—positively requires some kind of immortality belief and would be radically incoherent without it.⁷

In other words, what Hick attempts to establish through the book is two-layered: first, the considerable possibility of survival beyond death, albeit under a number of very different conceptions which, to Hick, are somewhat equally viable in theory; second, the indispensability of some kind of belief in human survival in order to have a cogent religious understanding of human existence. Notably, this second theme—the necessity of belief in survival—is known as the Irenaean argument in Theodicy, and is expounded in great detail in Hick's other works, especially *Evil and the God of Love* (1978).⁸ My

⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁸ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978).

overview here of *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) will focus instead on the first theme—the very possibility of survival, since it is more germane to my investigation. Also, my overview of the book will be very brief when it comes to those points that will be analyzed in depth in later sections of this chapter where I specifically look into Hick’s theology of death.

Section I: Introductory

There are three chapters in Section I of his book to set the stage up for Hick’s entire project. Chapter One presents Hick’s theological method. Chapter Two makes known Hick’s theological anthropology, which conceptualizes the human being as an embodied consciousness in the making. Chapter Three introduces historical studies of the origin of human beliefs in immortality and the afterlife. Hick wants to show that, contrary to the popular Freudian notion which claims wishful-thinking to be the origin of these beliefs, research discovers that: on the one hand, some kind of afterlife belief was universal and taken for granted in ancient times; on the other hand, the idea of a *positive* and *desirable* immortality did not arise until the emergence of the sense of the self, and “as a correlate of faith in a higher reality which was the source of value.”⁹

Section II: The Contemporary Situation

Section II depicts the main features of the contemporary terrain against which Hick’s theology of death is to be deployed. There are five chapters in this section. Chapter Four describes the wide array of attitudes towards death in today’s society. At the end of the chapter, Hick voices his discontent about how Christian theologians have

⁹ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 73.

thus far failed to raise to the occasion, responding to the question of death with either stern dogmatism, or outdated clichés, or even compromising suppressions. His theology of death is an effort to fill this void. Chapter Five reviews the topic of death in contemporary philosophy and it focuses on works by Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, and D. Z. Philips. A common naturalistic slant among these thinkers is noted. Chapter Six goes through the Mind-Brain Debate to argue for mind-brain Dualism. This obviously is a crucial topic for considering survival after bodily death, and I will discuss it in detail later. Chapter Seven introduces studies of parapsychology, especially trance mediumship, as the evidence for afterlife, but it ends with an open and uncertain conclusion. Chapter Eight presents criticisms against the naturalist's claim of bodily death as the end of human existence, a logical implication of the naturalist's conception of the human person as entirely physical. Hick's arguments here include the innate human pursuit of meaning and purpose as well as the rampant occurrences of evil and suffering during our earthly existence. It is in this chapter where Hick presents the "basic religious argument for immortality" from the point of Theodicy, i.e., the theological question of why evil exists given that God is both loving and powerful.

Section III: Christian Approaches

Section III discusses various Christian views of life after death. There are again five chapters in this section. Chapter Nine reviews afterlife beliefs in the New Testament and among the early Christians. It argues that Jesus' resurrection is not the very first source for the Christian belief in life after death; rather, it is likely that Jesus' postmortem manifestation to his disciples came to be known as resurrection because the notion was

already an accepted category of religious thinking at that time. For the same reason, the topic of afterlife came up in Jesus' own teaching only sporadically and usually in connection with other more urgent matters; consequently, the recorded teachings of Jesus in and of themselves do not supply us enough information to form any definitive impression of the afterlife. In Hick's view, all that we can say with certainty is that Jesus affirmed the individual's continuous existence after death, the future resurrection, and the judgment of the dead. After these important clarifications, the chapter spotlights a fundamental tension among diverse views of the afterlife held by early Christians—that is, between a more earthly and physical conception versus a more heavenly and spiritual conception of the resurrection body and of the resurrection world.

While Chapter Nine focuses on the Christian views regarding human *physicality* in the afterlife, Chapter Ten discusses the historical contours of Christian thought on human *temporality* before and after death. Hick raises several theological objections to the conception of hell as “eternal” torment. More importantly, Hick affirms the theological insight behind the Doctrine of Purgatory, i.e., the necessity of a further growth period between this life and the ultimate state so that the dispositional gap between the individual's imperfection at the end of this life and the perfect heavenly state in which he is to participate in the eschaton may be adequately bridged. However, Hick suggests that “this function of purgatory is frustrated in official Catholic thought by the accompanying dogma of the final decision at the moment of death, and needs to be expanded into the idea of a continued person-making process in other spheres beyond this

world.”¹⁰ Here, Hick traces the unfortunate change of tempo in theology over the history where, as concerns for the Last Day faded into the distant future, worries about the “hour of death” carried increasingly decisive weight in the Christian imagination of the destiny of the individual—so much so that, as evinced by “the art of dying” in medieval times, the focus of attention was no longer upon living rightly but upon “dying well.”

Chapter Eleven critiques contemporary Protestant views on death, as expressed in the works by Jurgen Moltmann, Paul Tillich, Charles Hartshorne, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Hick names their views “recapitulation theories,” which basically understand human immortality as “the eternal presence of his earthly life within the divine memory.”¹¹ In Hick’s opinion, this concept of immortality is not really an expression of the Doctrine of Eternal Life, because

to live in any ordinary sense of the word is not only to be remembered, but also to be capable of remembering, and of creating fresh and different material for memory. ... the fact that the divine mind contains a full record of your life or mine no more involves your or my immortality than the population records in the national computer bank give life to the millions of people in the past to whom these records refer.¹²

By denying continued active existence of the living human personality after bodily death, this type of views holds a pale eschatological vision, because it foresees only “a static, frozen immortality” in which “[t]he last page of the book of life has been filled and all

¹⁰ Ibid, 202.

¹¹ Ibid, 215.

¹² Ibid, 219.

that happens subsequently is that the completed volume is preserved forever unchanged and unchangeable.”¹³

Chapter Twelve critiques contemporary Catholic views on death, as expressed in the works by Karl Rahner and Ladislaus Boros. Notably, I have reviewed both Catholic theologians’ works in Chapter Two of my dissertation, and so it might be helpful for the reader to revisit related sections in that chapter to be reminded of the details. Hick’s comment on Rahner’s work focuses on Rahner’s claim of the soul becoming pan-cosmic upon death vis-à-vis the entire physical universe. Hick thinks that if the afterlife is continuous of the earthly life, Rahner’s notion of the postmortem soul being a “pan-cosmic” consciousness is incompatible with our understanding of human beings as finite consciousness whose very identities are established by boundaries. Hick also thinks that Rahner’s speculation on the pan-cosmic soul’s causal influence upon the corporeal universe, especially in the pinnacle case of Jesus’ soul, is too vague to either convey the precise nature of such influence or avail itself for empirical verification.

Hick’s direct remark on Boros’ work is brief, and it focuses on Boros’ unusual definition of death as a *non*-temporal moment in which a decision—a human action which takes time—nevertheless occurs. Hick questions whether Boros’ elaboration of this puzzling concept has at all succeeded in securing a coherent and intelligible starting point for his theory of the “final decision.” Notably, my own analyses in the previous chapter of Rahner’s and Boros’ works overlap significantly with Hick’s comments. Lastly,

¹³ Ibid, 220.

Chapter Thirteen argues for universal salvation on the basis of the omnipotent will of God to save all people.

Section IV: Western and Eastern Par-eschatologies

Section IV recounts major par-eschatologies from the East and the West. Chapter Fourteen describes H. H. Price's theory of the survival of the disembodied mind, and raises a theological objection against it based on the "person-making" purpose of human existence (which I will discuss more later). Chapter Fifteen offers Hick's "replica" theory. It is a contested attempt to make the Christian Doctrine of Resurrection intelligible within the modern physicalistic conceptualization of the human person as a psychosomatic unity (which I will discuss more later). Chapter Sixteen presents the basic concept of reincarnation. Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen put forward, respectively, the Vedantic theory of reincarnation and the Buddhist concept of rebirths.

Chapter Nineteen provides Hick's overall assessment of the concepts of reincarnation he presented in the previous chapters. Hick concludes that the Vedantist teaching may be true that "an eternal 'soul' or 'higher self' lies behind a long series of incarnations, and that in the consciousness of that 'real self' all these incarnations are linked together in a way which is not evident to any of the temporary persons who form the series—one of whom I now am;" alternatively, the Buddhist teaching may be true that "units or 'packages' of karma (as distinguished from 'higher selves') produce a series of persons, one of whom is me."¹⁴ In contrast, Hick thinks that the more popular pictures of reincarnation "according to which I—the conscious self now writing these sentences—have

¹⁴ Ibid, 391.

lived before and shall live again and am in the course of my present life, reaping what I have sown in the past and sowing what I shall reap in the future” lack sufficient empirical evidence to convince those outside the eastern culture and those with a modern frame of mind.¹⁵

Section V: A Possible Human Destiny

Section V speculates on human destiny. Chapter Twenty presents John Hick’s own trademark par-eschatology, described as “many lives in many worlds” (which I will discuss more later). Chapter Twenty-one lays out side by side the Hindu understanding of Moksha, the Buddhist understanding of nirvana, and the Christian mysticism understanding of the unitive state. It is meant to show that these eschatologies from three different world religions are essentially open-ended pointers; what’s more, they each seem to point beyond the present human experience and toward the same direction. Finally, Chapter Twenty-two offers Hick’s tentative eschatology, which ventures to describe that ultimate human destiny toward which these converging arrows point. In the most general terms, the ultimate human state is one which the self-centered “egohood is finally transcended in the state of human unity which can be characterized, on the Trinitarian model, as one in many and many in one.”¹⁶

In the following four sections, I will sketch out in detail John Hick’s theology of death by tracing the shape of his thought on the “why” and the “how” questions of human temporality and the “why” and the “how” questions of human embodiedness. Given that

¹⁵ Ibid, 392.

¹⁶ Ibid, 203.

temporality and embodiedness are the two constitutive features of human existence, I think that these two motifs together not only form a facilitative meeting place for dialogues between Hick's theology of death and the theologies of death I reviewed in the previous chapter, they also offer two revealing windows for a complete capture of Hick's view on the topic.

The "Why" Question of Human Temporality

The Broad Picture: "Man in the Making"

According to John Hick's anthropological outlook, temporal existence "is a soul making process"¹⁷ and "our life in time ... a movement towards a goal."¹⁸ Notably, this teleological take on the human existence has its root running from the early Hellenistic Fathers, to strands of Eastern Christianity, to thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher in the Enlightenment Era. In comparison with the anthropology behind the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, the focal point of this type of theological anthropology is not the first origin but the final end of human beings. Instead of reading the Genesis story literally, it holds that humanity did not commit a historically disastrous "fall" from a perfect state into our current state of sin and guilt, with bodily death as its punishment, "but was initially brought to being as an immature creature who was only at the beginning of a long process of growth and development."¹⁹ Accordingly, "our present mortal embodied

¹⁷ Ibid, 408.

¹⁸ Ibid, 407.

¹⁹ Ibid, 209.

earthly life is not a penal condition, but a time of soul making.”²⁰ Hick explains the purpose for human existence in time as follows:

[T]he proper function of our earthly existence, with its baffling mixture of good and evil, is to be an environment in which moral and spiritual responses are called for, and in which men and women are being formed in relationship to one another within a common world. This theology prompts an understanding of the meaning of life as a divinely intended opportunity, given to us both individually and as a race, to grow towards the realization of the potentialities of our own nature and so to become fully human.²¹

Notably, under this processive and teleological account of temporal existence, bodily death is understood not as punitive but “as the end of one stage of that pilgrimage and ... a passing on to another stage,”²² as the person’s arduous journey of growth and development extends far beyond the earthly existence.

But why? Why does human development have to occur through such a gradual process over time? Hick’s answer seems to be that it is necessitated by the perfection of a freedom which is *finite*. Specifically, in order for the finite human beings to reach their creaturely perfection, it takes many trials and errors to learn to *freely* make the right choice, hence we need time. The fact that temporal existence offers the human being with opportunities for genuinely free interactions and genuinely free decisions—in short, opportunities suitable for the finite human being to grow and develop—is alluded to by Hick when discussing the reason behind human embeddedness in an evolving world:

[M]an’s existence as part of the natural [evolutionary] order ensures his status as a relatively free being over against the infinite Creator. ... to know and worship

²⁰ Ibid, 210.

²¹ Ibid, 210.

²² Ibid, 208.

God because his embeddedness in [an evolving world of] nature has initially set him at an epistemic distance from the divine being. Thus the processes by which men and women are formed may be understood, theologically, as an aspect of the self-governing natural order on which depends man's cognitive freedom in relation to his Creator. God wills to exist an autonomous physical universe, structured towards the production of rational and personal life. ... A [evolutionary] law governing realm which however includes randomness and unpredictability in its details; and as such it constitutes an environment within which we may grow as free beings towards that fullness of personal life, in conscious relationship to God, which represents the divine purpose for us.²³

More Specifically: Growing from Collective Unconsciousness to
Collective Consciousness of the Atman

Before describing the specific route Hick draws for the grand process of “person-making,” it helps to introduce some key terms he uses to mark the key milestones in this journey. Specifically, it is a threefold vocabulary

which in its Western version is body-soul-spirit and its eastern version body-mind-Atman. Each body is an individual physical organism occupying a separate volume of space. The mind or soul is closely related to the body, been known to us as embodied mind, an aspect of a psychophysical individual. But the mind is also related to spirit or Atman, which is super-individual, the presently unconscious unity of humanity or perhaps even of created life as a whole.²⁴

Furthermore, Hick depicts two polar aspects of the embodied mind: while “ego” refers to “the embodied mind as the self-enclosed individual over against others in seeking its own preservation and enhancement,” “person” refers to “the embodied mind in its relationship to other embodied minds and interacting with them in a society of persons.”²⁵ Defined as such, the “ego” represents the inherently self-centeredness of the human being, with a

²³ Ibid, 49.

²⁴ Ibid, 450.

²⁵ Ibid, 450.

distorted sense of reality and values according to its egocentric perspective. In contrast, the “personal” aspect of the human being is “inherently self-giving ... and inherently loving,” given that it is essentially relational and interpersonal and “seeks its full realization in a society of selves each wholly open to the others in a perfect mutuality in which egoity has been transcended.”²⁶ In addition, Hick borrows the Hindu term “atman” and defines it differently to mean the deeper dimension of individual consciousness as a part of humanity as a whole. As Hick specifies,

‘atman’ refers to the ideal state of human consciousness which waits to be realized through negating of individual egoity. ... the atman is an eschatological concept. ... I shall later be using the word ‘atman’ in this sense, a sense which leaves open the issue between the view that the atman is an undifferentiated unity and the view of it as a many-in-one and one-in-many. This use of the term likewise leaves open the more ultimate theological question of the relation between the atman, as eschatological humanity, and God.²⁷

Taken all these together, Hick draws a grand picture of human Odyssey through temporality “in which mental life emerges in the increasing complexification of the evolutionary process, and develops through semi-individuality within a collective consciousness such as we glimpse in the close-knit communal life of primitive tribes, into the plurality of fully differentiated selves which we now experience.”²⁸ Notably, according to this picture, the current stage of human development is for the ego selves—now awakened to its freedom as well as its responsibility—to voluntarily transcend egoity, and so achieve the goal of returning to unity at a higher level. It is “a movement from

²⁶ Ibid, 51.

²⁷ Ibid, 52.

²⁸ Ibid, 52.

pre-individualized unity through separate egoity to a supra individual unity. ... a movement from the collective unconscious, through the self-negating of the ego ... to the fully realized collective consciousness of the atman.”²⁹

Objections against the “Finality” of Death

Hick’s critique of Ladislaus Boros’ “final decision” hypothesis laid out in Chapter Twelve of his book further reveals his understanding of the purpose for human existence in time. On the one hand, Hick acknowledges an important element of truth in Boros’ theory, and this is the insight that “it must be possible for man eventually to arrive at a final, permanent and irreversible state in which he has confronted reality and found his eternal home within it. ... We have to posit an arrival as well as a journey—or else the journey is not a genuine journey.”³⁰ On the other hand, though, Hick finds Boros’ “final decision” theory severely undermining the significance of earthly life, in spite of Boros’ original intention to give import to it. This is because, despite of Boros’ repeatedly emphasizing the value of decisions made during life as a preparation for the “final decision,” in the end, these decisions made during life do not add up to the “final decision” in death, which is assigned such weight by Boros that death-bed repentance or lapse overturns a whole lifetime of evil or good. Hick detects the essential *insignificance* of the earthly life implied by Boros’ theory especially from Boros’ delineation of the case of unbaptized infants—who are said to enjoy in death the same opportunity of choice for God as adults do. Hick finds fault in Boros’ theory, because

²⁹ Ibid, 53.

³⁰ Ibid, 236.

The pilgrimage of decades is concentrated into a single metaphysical “moment” of spiritual decision. In by-passing existence *in via*, the pilgrimage of responsible life in time, the unborn or newly born infant thus misses nothing in his relationship to God. But surely such a doctrine empties the present life of its religious significance. Indeed, it even suggests that those who die in the womb are more fortunate than those who survive to face the trials and temptations of life—an implication which surely generates far greater problem than it solves. We cannot be content with a theory which gives meaning to death by depriving this life of its meaning.³¹

Consequently, Hick thinks that “the notion of a final decision at the moment of death determining the individual’s eternal destiny must be *emphatically* rejected.”³² This, to Hick, will help draw proper attention to par-eschatology, which avails Christian theology the much needed possibility of dealing with the important topic of universal salvation.

Extending from his criticisms of Boros’ theory, Hick advocates further that we reject “any doctrine which freezes our relationship with God at the point of bodily death, ... the doctrine that there can be no ‘second chance’ of salvation beyond this life, no new and different moral decisions, and no further personal growth or development in response to further experiences.”³³ Why? Because, considering the great disparity in life circumstances which hugely impact the outcome of this life, it would be injustice “at an intolerable maximum” if a person’s *enteral* fate were to depend entirely on the state he reached through a single earthly life.³⁴ Furthermore, moral reality around us clearly shows that much more time beyond the earthly sojourn needs to be granted “if a divine

³¹ Ibid, 238.

³² Ibid, 240.

³³ Ibid, 238.

³⁴ Ibid, 239.

purpose of person-making through the human being's free responses is to continue to its completion."³⁵ Notably, Hick is aware of the hypothesis of "instantaneous transformation" of the person in death into moral perfection, something like what Henry Novello proposes in *Death as Transformation* (2011) I reviewed in Chapter Two.³⁶ But Hick objects that, by such sudden change of the person X in death,

God would have de-created X and created a new and very different person in his place. And if he can do this consistently with his creative purpose, he can presumably do it equally in the case of individuals who die in old age, in middle age, in youth, in infancy, at birth, or in the womb. But in that case the experience of temporal existence serves no necessary purpose, and this life loses its significance as a sphere in which the divine intention is at work.³⁷

The "How" Question of Human Temporality

A Two-Stage Conception of God's Creation of Human Beings

The first way Hick describes the "how" aspect of our temporal existence is a two-stage process of creation. Here, he adopts the classic distinction made by St. Irenaeus between "the image of God" and "the likeness of God." As Hick stipulates, "the image of God is man's nature as rational, personal and moral animal;"³⁸ it is the end product of the long process of biological evolution, the first stage of creation. Using the "raw material" from the first stage, the second stage of creation is to generate "the likeness of God," which "represents the fulfillment of the potentialities of our human nature, the completed

³⁵ Ibid, 239.

³⁶ Henry Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

³⁷ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 240.

³⁸ Ibid, 47.

humanization of man in a society of mutual love.”³⁹ Notably, Hick underscores a crucial difference between the first and the second stage of creation, namely, the role human freedom plays:

Whereas the first stage of creation is an exercise of divine power, the second stage is of a different kind; for the creatures who have been brought into existence in God’s image are endowed with a real though limited freedom, and their further growth into the finite divine likeness has to take place through their own free responses within the world in which they find themselves.⁴⁰

The second stage of human creation—primarily through exercising human freedom—is currently under way through the earthly existence. But this stage stretches far beyond the earthly time in order to arrive at its eventual completion. It encompasses a long afterlife that is structurally dynamic and progressive

in which the person continues as a living center of consciousness, receiving new impressions, making fresh choices and decisions, interacting with a new environment and continuing to move, as a free creature in a divinely ruled universe, towards the perfect fulfillment of his own nature in the kingdom of God.⁴¹

Temporal Existence as “a Spiritual Project” with a Series of Phases

The second way Hick describes the “how” of human existence in time is “a spiritual project” unfolding in phases. We find this in Chapter Twenty of *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) where Hick offers his tentative par-eschatology. Notably, even though Hick’s speculation there specifically has to do with time after death, the rationale behind it shall apply also to our earthly time, which is understood as the beginning of this

³⁹ Ibid, 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁴¹ Ibid, 220.

grand Project. The bases of Hick's speculation include materials produced by trance mediumship and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*; they are critiqued according to certain philosophical and theological understandings of human nature that Hick holds true.

Before going into the details, it helps to introduce first the important distinction Hick makes between "objective identity" and "subjective identity": "objective" or "metaphysical identity" is "from the point of view of a hypothetical external observer," in terms of which we are able to conceive of a person in the postmortem state retaining the same bodily form or even the same "spiritual substance" throughout eternity; in contrast, "subjective identity" is "from the point of view of the consciousness in question."⁴² Just to be clear, Hick's depiction of the "spiritual project" relates primarily to the identity from the *subjective* viewpoint, which is a consciousness constrained by cognitive finitude.

The "spiritual project" Hick refers to comes from the Hindu religion. Hick thinks that "the human being fits rather well the Vedantic conception of him as a basic spiritual project." More specifically, it is "the religious project of liberation from sin and illusion into a perfect relationship with or within the Ultimate Reality."⁴³ This grand project of ours transcends any particular phases of the world; and yet, it has to be accomplished by our living through a series of limited phases of the world, since we ourselves are finite

⁴² Ibid, 410.

⁴³ Ibid, 412.

and limited.⁴⁴ Just as the ways of learning math are as numerous as math exercises are, “the ways of becoming and being human are as numerous as man’s cultures.”⁴⁵

And so, Hick sees the entire panorama of a human being’s temporal existence as consisting of a series of limited existence, each lived out within finite situations, under which manageably concrete goals are possible. Hick’s rationale here is this. Personal growth occurs through purpose-driven existence. Given that humans have only limited mental capacities (e.g., memory, cognition, etc.), meaningfully concrete purposes are formable only under finite settings. An infinite existential setting would be too overwhelming for the human mind to comprehend and operate effectively. Therefore, actual human growth seems to be better accommodated under this *episodic* outlook than the one with a single and endlessly prolonged subjective identity.

“Many Lives in Many Worlds”

In other words, Hick envisions a person’s postmortem existence in terms of many lives in many worlds. It is an existence divided by periodic death, just like the earthly existence is divided by periodic sleep. However, rather than repeated rebirths in this world, which Hick calls “horizontal reincarnation,” it will be repeated rebirths in ever *higher* spheres beyond this world, which he calls “vertical reincarnation.”⁴⁶ Hick explains

⁴⁴ An analogy would be a case scenario invented to help the student learn a lesson: there is only so much information that can be included in the case, beyond which it becomes too cognitively overwhelming for the student to really learn from it.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 412.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 414.

his own vision as follows by comparing it to those typically known in the East and the West:

I have argued for yet a third possibility, other than eternal-heaven-or-hell or repeated earthly incarnations, namely that a series of lives, each bounded by something analogous to birth and death, lived in other worlds in spaces other than that in which we now are. This hypothesis accepts both the insistence upon the need for life to be lived within temporal limits and the conviction that the soul can only make progress in the incarnate state towards its final goal. But it differs from the western tradition in postulating many lives instead of only one, and from the eastern tradition in postulating many spheres of incarnate existence instead of earthly one.⁴⁷

According to Hick's theory, it is possible for a person to achieve self-transcending perfection by the time the person dies. However, that will not be the case for the great majority of people, who then continue on as individual egos and go into the immediate postmortem existence in a *disembodied* subjective state, similar like H. H. Price has theorized (which I will discuss more later). This immediate postmortem state is primarily a revelatory experience during which one finds out what one has become through choices made in life. It is only a transitional phase. The person sooner or later feels the need for something more active and fulfilling. This is when a further transition occurs from the disembodied subjective state into another embodiment in another world. Regarding the next world, Hick deliberates in principle that

it will be a real spatiotemporal environment, functioning in accordance with its own laws, within which there will be real personal life-world with its own concrete character, its own history, its own absorbing and urgent concerns, its own crises, perils, achievements, sacrifices, and its own terminus giving shape and meaning to existence within it. For moral and spiritual growth as we know it depends upon interaction with other people within a common environment.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid, 456.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 418.

And then, in due course, there shall presumably be another death, another subjective state immediately after, and then another transition into yet another embodiment in yet another world. The number and the nature of these successive embodiments arguably should depend on what is needed for the person in order to eventually attain the ultimate state of human perfection. The overall picture of human temporal existence under the purpose of person-making would then be “a plurality of lives in a plurality of worlds; ... each stage will have the relative autonomy which makes it a real life, with its own exigencies and tasks and its own possibilities of success and failure.”⁴⁹

The “Why” Question of Human Embodiedness

To see how John Hick understands the purpose for human embodiedness, we may take a look at how he evaluates the imaginative scenario of the survival of the *disembodied* mind in Chapter Fourteen of the book. Specifically, in the first part of that chapter, Hick presents H. H. Price’s novel theory on the survival of the disembodied mind.⁵⁰ According to Hick’s reading of Price’s article, “Survival and the Idea of Another World,”⁵¹ there are three key elements in Price’s theory. First, postmortem perceptions are *mind-dependent*, similar like those in dreams, formed out of images acquired during

⁴⁹ Ibid, 419.

⁵⁰ My introduction of this part of the chapter is neither for the purpose of introducing Price’s theory, nor for the purpose of assessing the accuracy of Hick’s representation of Price, but to help understand Hick’s critique of Price in the latter part of the chapter, which substantively demonstrates what Hick considers to be the purpose of human embodiment.

⁵¹ H. H. Price, “Survival and the Idea of ‘Another World,’” in *Immortality* (Basic Problems in Philosophy Series), ed. Terence Penelhum (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1974), 21-47.

one's earthly life. From the experiencer's viewpoint, though, these images (which include one's own body as well as a surrounding environment) "will be the conception of a 'real' and solid world in which he exists as a bodily being."⁵² Second, there may be real *communication and interaction* between minds in the postmortem world by means of "extra sensory perception" such as telepathy, despite the mind-dependent nature of this world. As the result, in that realm, "There may in fact be a coherent three dimensional world which we inhabit jointly with other persons."⁵³ Third, the postmortem world will be fashioned by *human desires*, albeit not necessarily always pleasant ones, since the fashioning is according to the real character of our desires some of which are repugnant to our better nature. Furthermore, it is conceivable that more than one such world may exist, formed by different communities of minds with common memories as well as similar desires and interests; and these multiple worlds can be described as "higher" or "lower" from moral and aesthetic points of view. Sooner or later, one may be drawn by desire to move onto other and better worlds.

Hick's criticisms of Price's theory all have to do with the "wish fulfillment principle" for the postmortem world. For example, when assessing the extreme scenario where the whole postmortem reality is constituted by private mental worlds, each created by the individual's *own* desires, Hick questions whether its inhabitants "would indeed in a significant sense be alive," given that each of them exists merely as "a windowless

⁵² Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 265.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 266.

monad” without genuine interaction with realities external to his mind.⁵⁴ Tellingly, the key criterion Hick uses here for “being alive” is whether a certain state of existence permits continuous growth and development of the self. Only if there are possibilities of genuinely free moral choices and so also the possibility of moral growth may that state be counted as “survival” in a real sense. John Hick’s own understanding of the “why” question for human embodiment is centrally disclosed when he lays down a theological consideration against envisaging the postmortem world as being malleable by human desires—either individual or corporate. Specifically, Hick reasons from our earthly life of embodiedness that

the purpose of our earthly existence is that man should develop morally and spiritually from the state of intelligent social animals towards a quality of being which represents the perfecting of our human nature; and this world is intended to be an environment in which such growth can take place. Now, it is essential to this person-making process that the world should not be plastic to our human wishes but should constitute a given natural order with its own stable character and “laws” in terms of which we must learn to live. For it is by grappling with the demands of an objective environment of which we are ourselves a part, presenting us with works to be done, problems to be solved, difficulties to be met and hardships to be endured, that human intelligence and character have developed. Again, it is through man’s needs and claims in relation to one another as they face the disciplines and hazards of their natural environment that morality has developed.⁵⁵

In other words, embodiment in the corporeal world places the human being under the external context required for the person-making process to take place, since valuable human qualities are developed only through wrestling with a set of *fixed* externalities. Hick reasons further that, in order for this person-making process to accomplish its goal,

⁵⁴ Ibid, 269.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 273.

it must continue beyond the earthly life, which entails that human existence after death ought to continuously be a formative process similar to the earthly existence. And this entails that the postmortem world also has its own established laws and structures *independent* from human wishes and desires and to which humans have to learn to adapt themselves.

At the end of the chapter, by way of conclusion, Hick spells out even more plainly the *necessity* of embodiedness for human existence. In commenting on Price's theory, Hick observes that embodiment seems inevitable after all, since in Price's conception of a disembodied survival, the disembodied mind nevertheless conjures up a "dream" body in a "dream" world that is as real to the experiencer as the physical body in the physical world. And so, Price's idea of the survival of the disembodied mind is not really a radically different alternative to the idea of an embodied postmortem existence, but a special form of the latter. To Hick, the unintelligibility of Rahner's notion of a "pan-cosmic" soul made it clear that genuine existence of finite human beings under the purpose of person-making must be embodied—it has to be *delimited* rather than "pan," and this is done through embodiment. As Hick explains it, "continued personal identity would seem to require the continuation of the finite consciousness, aware of the environment from a *particular* perspective within it, and able to exercise volition in relation to that environment."⁵⁶ Furthermore, the fact that human growth occurs only through wrestling within *concrete settings* seems to demand space as well as space-filling objects, or "bodies." As Hick puts it, "The very notion of an environment seems to presuppose

⁵⁶ Ibid, 276.

space, filled with a variety of objects, and interaction with the environment seems to presuppose that we are embodied as one of the space-filling objects.”⁵⁷

Interestingly, even though Hick prefers to conceive the postmortem world as embodied, he acknowledges that a disembodied, mind-dependent postmortem existence can nevertheless be compatible with the “person-making” purpose of human existence, as long as it is conceived “in a way which allows the phenomenal world to be *objective* in relation to the minds which are conscious of it.”⁵⁸ In other words, Hick thinks that a “mind-dependent” world can nevertheless be a formative existential context, so long as this world is objective to the finite minds living in it and not a subjective product of these minds, as they are in Price’s imaginary scenario.

How can a world be *both* “mind-dependent” and mind-forming? A good example of this kind of world is depicted by George Berkeley’s sacramental Idealism, according to which the material world we perceive are in fact collections of ideas created for our finite minds and presented to us by God. This world made by ideas is “mind-dependent,” because it is especially created *for* the mind, not because it is created *by* the mind. Consequently, Hick considers it to be an advantage of Berkeley’s Idealism that, unlike H. H. Price’s theory, it does not restrict the formative principle and the content of the postmortem world merely to images and desires of the earthly life, but locates the Divine consciousness as their source. Under Berkeley’s conception, our existential possibilities postmortem would be a lot more open-ended than the earthly parameters, which “can

⁵⁷ Ibid, 276.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 274.

then accommodate the religious sense that there are vast depths of reality totally beyond our present range of experience.”⁵⁹

Just to be clear, Hick does not want to press Berkeley’s Idealism for the present world. What Hick does want to argue is for at least a *prima facie* case to expect the metaphysical status of the present world and the next to be alike—Berkeley’s version or not. Moreover, regarding the functional status of the present world and the next, Hick thinks that since both worlds exist through the same creative will of God, “If God has created our present world to be ... a place of soul-making, perhaps he also creates another world or worlds for the continuation of the same process.”⁶⁰

The “How” Question of Human Embodiment

Hick’s Own View: Mind-Body Dualism

Based on the clarifications Hick made in the Preface of *Death and Eternal Life* (1976), we know that Chapter Six of the book titled “Mind and body” offers the closest representation of his own philosophical stand on the ontological nature of human embodiedness, namely, mind-brain Dualism. Specifically, in Chapter Six, Hick builds his entire case for mind-brain Dualism gradually, one step at a time. First, he pulls apart the mind-brain identity theory, which claims “mind” and “brain” to be two concepts referring to the same entity. In Hick’s view, the mind-brain identity theory has the least *a priori* plausibility among rival theories, because

prima facie, thoughts on the one hand, and electrical chemical events in the physical brain on the other, seem to be realities of quite different kinds. ... The

⁵⁹ Ibid, 275.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 275.

theory that my consciousness ... is identically a set of physical changes in grey matter is thus paradoxical in the extreme. ... The *prima facie* state of affairs remains one of distinction, and indeed radical distinction, rather than of identity.⁶¹

Consequently, in order for the mind-brain identity theorists to establish their claim that these two apparently very different things in kind are in fact one and the same, exclusively and without remainder, they need to present positive arguments for it.

Identity theorists' favorite argument—namely, brain mappings in neurological research link specific brain activities with certain mental activities—merely supplies evidence of mind-brain *correlation*; it is not a positive evidence for mind-brain *identity*. What's more, it seems doubtful that positive evidence for mind-brain identity can *ever* be found. As Hick points out,

how could we possibly locate a mental event in space, other than by simply begging the question at issue and assuming that in locating the brain event we have thereby located a mental event? ... Not only is there no such evidence, but it seems impossible to conceive what such evidence might consist of. ... No one has any notion of what it would mean to test the occurrence of the thoughts inside my skull independently of testing for brain process. The idea of such a test is not intelligible.⁶²

Hick observes that the fact that there *is* no and there *can* be no empirical evidence for mind-brain identity is often unrecognized, likely the result of how mind-brain identity theorists defend their case. Usually, they would point to brain mapping experiments in neurology and claim that our mental perceptions of, say, seeing the stars or hearing the music are nothing but brain waves moving in certain patterns. And yet, their “explanations” by way of these scenarios “are, inevitably, examples of the physical entity

⁶¹ Ibid, 114.

⁶² Ibid, 115.

or process being identified by two different names [one physical, the other non-physical],” and so these “explanations” tacitly *assume* what has yet to be proven, namely, brain activities and mental events are *in fact* identical.⁶³

If there is no and there can be no possible evidence for the theory that the brain and the mind are identical, as Hick argues, how are the two different? Next, Hick moves on to dualistic accounts of the mind-body relationship—all of which describe the mind and the brain as fundamentally distinct entities, but account for their differences differently. Hick argues particularly against the dualistic account of “epiphenomenalism,” which is “the view that while consciousness is different from the physical activity of the brain it is nevertheless generated by the activity and has no independent existence of causality. According to this theory consciousness is the mere epiphenomenon, mirroring in the mysteriously different medium what goes on in the brain.”⁶⁴

Notably, while Hick’s argument against the mind-brain identity theory above is that there is and there can be no positive evidence for it, his argument against epiphenomenalism is that it cannot be rationally argued for. Specifically, Hick locates the “Achilles heel” of the epiphenomenalism in its entailment of determinism. He argues that if the mind is a mere phenomenon of the brain, it has to be completely determined by the physical brain, which in turn is an integral part of the physical world. Given our understanding that the entire physical world is a nexus of temporal continuum of cause

⁶³ Ibid, 116. Notably, the Physicalist’s claim of mind-brain identity is the only monistic option Hick considers; Hick does not address the other monistic option, i.e., Idealism.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 116.

and effect, like domino chains, the physical world is causally determined completely, and so also the mind is causally determined completely through the physical brain. As a mere epiphenomenon of the physical brain completely determined by the brain, the mind would not be able to exercise any causal power of its own.

The point Hick tries to make here is “not that total determinism may not be true, nor that there may not be sound arguments or even proofs of its truth, but that if it is true we can never rationally believe that it is true. Therefore, in discussing the matter we can only assume that we’re not wholly determined; and hence that our thought processes are not mere epiphenomena of the physical brain.”⁶⁵ Why not? Hick explains that any *argument* for total determinism as a rational belief is logically contradictory and self-refuting. This is because the notion of rational belief presupposes intellectual freedom, a mind capable of “freely judging, recognizing logical relations, assessing relevance and considering reasons;”⁶⁶ but a mind which is completely determined cannot be said to *rationaly* believe in anything, because its “belief” does not arise from the rationality and the soundness of the argument, but from being causally determined to “believe” so. Putting it another way, “Rational argumentation cannot conclude that there is no such thing as rational argumentation.”⁶⁷

As a recent update, David Cheetham refined Hick’s argument against epiphenomenalism, which was based on the outdated Laplacian/Newtonian model of a

⁶⁵ Ibid, 119.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 117.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 119.

completely determined physical universe.⁶⁸ Cheetham points out that even though discoveries of modern physics at the quantum level may seem to have changed the picture of total determinism into one of indeterminism, Hick's disfavor of epiphenomenalism on the basis of meaning and rationality still holds true. This is because

it is far from clear that the ambiguous and indeterministic model of quantum physics provides an attractive alternative [to determinism]. ... That is, if physical events were wholly erratic and unpredictable we would have no control over our actions. ... Finding myself unable to control actions due to indeterminism means that my 'choices' are meaningless and inconsequential.⁶⁹

Finally, following this process of elimination, Hick presents his positive argument for another dualistic view, i.e., mind-brain Dualism. It is a view which sees the mind and the brain as two substantively different and ontologically independent entities with (admittedly mysterious) reciprocal causality between them. As far as Hick can see, evidences for the mind's independence from the brain are overwhelming. They have been routinely generated from studies of extrasensory perception (ESP), a phenomenon well validated through experimental data. Evidences are particularly abundant with regard to "telepathy," defined as "the occasional influence of mind upon mind, without any normal means of communication between them;" and also "clairvoyance," defined as "the occasional awareness of physical states of affairs at a distance, in the absence of sense perception of them."⁷⁰ The third type of experimental evidence Hick evokes to show the mind's independence from the brain relates to pre-cognition. After going through a few

⁶⁸ David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 71.

⁷⁰ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 121.

classic instances of ESP, Hick remarks that even if there is only one instance that is true among the hundreds of thousands collected, it is sufficient to disapprove any theory which completely rules out the possibility for one mind to influence another *without* going through any chain of physical cause and effect. Hick concludes that it is extremely probable that ESP is not physically based, and so it delivers a strong support for the mind being an independent reality from the brain, and so also for mind-brain Dualism.

Hick's Reconciling Attempt with Physicalism:

The "Replica" Theory of Resurrection

The "replica" theory proposed in Chapter Fifteen, "The resurrection of the person," is Hick's controversial attempt to explicate a well-known Christian doctrine on survival, i.e., the Doctrine of Resurrection, within the framework of Physicalism, which conceives the human being as "an indissoluble psycho-physical *unity*" rather than a dualistic body-soul composite.⁷¹ Notably, Hick's endeavor here is motivated by his inclusive impulse to reach out to all parties on different or even opposing sides of an issue. Thus, strictly speaking, the theory does not represent Hick's own stand on the nature of postmortem embodiment. Nonetheless, I decide to conduct close analyses of Hick's "replica" theory, not only because it has attracted the most protests regarding Hick's theology of death, but also because sorting out the disputes surrounding it helps uncover an underlying anthropological principle crucial for a coherent view of the afterlife.

⁷¹ Ibid, 278.

As a heads-up, I think that the valuable insight gained from the polemic is this: in order to have a genuine survival of the *human* person, that aspect of the human being inapplicable to a pure physical being—as an *irreplaceable subject* of nontransferable experience—must be preserved. Unfortunately, this crucial aspect of being human is precisely what is denied in Physicalism, since Physicalism conceives the human person to be physical without remainder. As the result, despite the honorable intention behind Hick’s laborious effort to bridge the Great Divide, agreement between the Physicalists and the Dualists is unattainable on the ground of principles deemed nonnegotiable by both parties.

The chapter opens with the following portrayal of “resurrection of the body,” which Hick sees as consistent with the Physicalist view of the person as a psycho-physical unity:

When someone has died he is, apart from any special divine action, extinct. A human being is by nature mortal and subject to annihilation at death. But in fact God, by an act of sovereign power, either sometimes or always resurrects or reconstitute or re-creates him—not however as the identical physical organism that he was before death, but as ... a “spiritual body” embodying the dispositional characteristics and memory traces of the deceased physical organism, and inhabiting an environment with which the spiritual body is continuous as our present bodies are continuous with our present world.⁷²

Notably, words like “extinct,” “annihilation,” “reconstitution,” and “physical organism” are worthy of our attention here because, as we will discuss in the following section, they

⁷² Ibid, 279.

are the main targets of Hick's critics.⁷³ In short, what Hick's "replica" theory of resurrection suggests is this: resurrection means "the divine re-creation of the individual after his earthly death as a total psycho-physical 'replica' in another space."⁷⁴ Notably, "in another space" intends to stipulate that the resurrection world is spatially unrelated to and so inaccessible from our world; it is a space where "nothing in it is at any distance or in any direction from where I now am. In other words, from my point of view the other space is nowhere and therefore does not exist."⁷⁵ To help readers appreciate the logical possibility of his "replica" theory for conceiving resurrection, Hick presents a series of three cases expanding our imagination one step at a time. Notably, the key challenge Hick tries to tackle is: is it possible to envision the person to survive death—and so to maintain "postmortem identity" before and after death—within the parameters of Physicalism? Hick's "spearhead" scenario for establishing his eventual claim of postmortem identity is as follows:

We begin with the idea of someone suddenly ceasing to exist at a certain place in this world and the next instance coming into existence at another place which is not contiguous with the first. He has not moved from A to B by making a path through the intervening space, but has disappeared at A and reappeared at B. ... The person who appears ... is exactly similar, as to both bodily and mental characteristics, to the person disappears. ... There is continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features, including fingerprints, hair and eye coloration and stomach contents, and also of beliefs, habits, and mental

⁷³ Admittedly, this way of understanding death and resurrection as extinction and reconstitution can be found in certain strands of Christian theology, for example, as a way of guarding against the sinful pride of human beings. But, as reviewed in my previous chapter regarding the body-soul relationship in the theology of death literature, it is questionable whether this picture has any sturdy ground in either the scripture or the tradition. Furthermore, as Joseph Ratzinger points out in *Eschatology* (1977), the picture itself may not even be logically coherent.

⁷⁴ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 293.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 279.

propensities. In fact, there is everything that would lead us to identify the one who appeared with the one who disappeared, except continuous occupancy of space.⁷⁶

Hick suggests that this scenario is imaginable, say, as the result of changes in the behavior of matter. The person in the scenario would be conscious of himself being the same person, given that there is exact similarity and continuity of both bodily as well as mental characteristics and propensities; and so, despite of his lack of continuous occupancy of space, people who knew the person before his disappearance feel obliged to recognize him to be whom he claims himself to be. In case some people may not be so quick to agree with his suggestion of continuous “identity” here, Hick submits two additional points.

The first is cyberneticist Norbert Wiener’s “insistence that psycho-physical individuality does not depend upon the numerical identity of the ultimate physical constituents of the body, but upon the pattern or ‘code’ which is exemplified. So long as the same code operates, different particles of matter can be used, and those particles can be in different places.”⁷⁷ Wiener’s point basically is “the *non*-dependence of human bodily identity through time upon the identity of the physical matter momentarily composing the body;”⁷⁸ it is a claim that bodily identity can be maintained through time even though the particles made up of the body are different at different moments. Wiener claims that “the living human body is not a static entity but a pattern of change. ... The

⁷⁶ Ibid, 280.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 283.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 281.

pattern of the body can be regarded as a message that is in principle capable of being coded, transmitted, and then translated back into its original form, as sight and sound patterns may be transmitted by radio and translated back to sound and picture.”⁷⁹

As we can see from this statement, Weiner’s theory denies any qualitative distinction between transmitting a telegraph from one location to another and transmitting the “encoded pattern” of a living human being. And so, based on Weiner’s notion of the “information identity” (rather than the numerical identity) of a psychophysical individuality, Hick suggests that it seems more appropriate than not to speak of the psychophysical individual re-constituted at the end of this process as being the same person as the one encoded at the beginning. Even though, by leaving the old body behind, he is not composed by numerically the same particles, the particles which now compose his body “embodies exactly the same ‘information.’”⁸⁰

The second buffering Hick offers is a restricted definition of the term *replica*, which he always puts in quotation marks to indicate that the replication occurs under the specific situation where “a living person ceases to exist at a certain location, and a being exactly similar to him in all respects subsequently comes into existence at another location.”⁸¹ Through such stipulations, Hick intends to make sure that in his theoretical scenario: 1) the original and the “replica” do *not* exist simultaneously, and 2) there can only be *one* “replica” of the same original.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 282.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 282.

⁸¹ Ibid, 283.

The second imaginary case is a step closer to the idea of resurrection than the first by the additional supposition of sudden death. Hick postulates that “at the moment when the individual dies a ‘replica’ of him as he was at the moment before his death, and complete memory up to that instance, comes into existence.”⁸² He thinks that the situation of sudden death of the original and sudden appearance of the “replica” immediately after warrants us to conclude that the person who died has been recreated. The third imaginary case, which is meant to give content to the notion of resurrection, adds to the second by supposing replication in an entirely different space. Specifically, “after my death, someone comes into existence in another space who is physically and psychologically indistinguishable from me.”⁸³ The original Mr. X and his “replica” “have everything in common that they could possibly have, given that they exist successively in different spaces;”⁸⁴ “they are physically alike in every particular; psychological alike in every particular; and that Mr. X’s stream of consciousness, memory, emotion and volition continues in ‘replica’ Mr. X where it left off at the death of earthly Mr. X.”⁸⁵ Hick acknowledges that the situation outlined presents a new scenario which would require modification of the usual concept of “same person” in order for the situation to be included. But he states that if we knew it to be a regular law of nature that a “replica”

⁸² Ibid, 284.

⁸³ Ibid, 287.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 287.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 288.

comes into existence in space two upon the death of the original in space one “it would ... be wantonly paradoxical to rule that they are not the same person.”⁸⁶

At the end of the chapter, Hick addresses some objections against his theory. The one raised by J. J. Clark—which poses the challenging scenario of two or more identical replications of the original—hits the heart of the matter, namely, human uniqueness. Hick recounts Clark’s objection as follows:

If it makes sense to suppose that God might create a second space replication of Mr. X, then it makes sense to suppose that he might create two or more such second space reproductions. ... However, since X2 and X3 would then each be the same person as X1, they would both be the same person; which is absurd. Thus the existence of X3 would prohibit us from identifying X2 as being the same person as X1. Further, it has been argued by J. J. Clark that the bare logical possibility of X3 has the same effect.⁸⁷

Hick responds to Clark by first acknowledging that “A person by definition is unique. There cannot be two people who are exactly the same in every respect, including their consciousness and memories. That is to say, if there were a situation satisfying this description, our present concept of ‘person’ would utterly break down under the strain.”⁸⁸ However, Hick reemphasizes that, in the particular scenario he proposes, one and only one “replica” exists; the fact that other logical possibilities of more than one replica exist does not make the particular scenario the “replica” theory postulates impossible.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 288.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 290.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 292.

Critiques of Hick's Theology of Death

Regarding the "Replica" Theory

David Cheetham rightly observes that the aspect of Hick's theology of death which attracted the greatest amount of attention is his "replica" theory.⁸⁹ Interestingly, even though objections came from both the Physicalists and the Dualists, their criticisms have similarly focused on the issue of postmortem identity, albeit based on different reasons. In addition to this issue of identity, the Dualists also disapprove Hick's theory for failing to capture human uniqueness.

Objection from the Physicalists: Hick's Theory Operates on a Disguised

Dualism

Even though Hick's theory is intended to appeal for the case of resurrection *within* the framework of Physicalism, the Physicalists deny that the "resurrected" person Hick describes is the same as the one just died, mainly because the two cannot and do not have the same physical *body*. Since the human being is understood by Physicalists as a psychophysical unity, bodily death marks the end of the physical aspect of the human being, and so also the end of the whole human being. Notably, for the Physicalists, the usual criterion of continuous identity is *spatiotemporal continuity*, whereas Hick's "replica" theory of resurrection specifically posits *spatiotemporal discontinuity*—such positing is inevitable in order for his theory to accommodate the empirical fact that the physical body ceases to be at the moment of death.

⁸⁹ Cheetham, *John Hick*, 77.

Robert Audi protests against Hick's theory for its collapsing "numerical identity" with "exact similarity" without adequate reason.⁹⁰ Audi reiterates Hick's scenario that the "replica" X is created *after* the original X's ceasing of existence upon death, and he comments that "surely a person who comes into existence later than X does is not the very same person as X, however much like X he is. Nor will it help to say he is the same in an extended sense. We should then have to say that a perfect replica of, say, a statue is the same statue in an extended sense."⁹¹

Audi questions the rationale behind Hick's collapsing "exact similarity" with "numerical identity." Given that all the parameters in Hick's scenarios are readily explainable by the duplication hypothesis—which, to Audi, is both logically and scientifically possible—Audi finds no reason why we should extend the sense of the term "same person" to accommodate new facts, as Hick advocated. In other words, given the facts provided in Hick's scenarios, the Physicalists would see no reason for dropping their default theory of duplication and *discontinuity*, which to them is a more acceptable interpretation all things considered. Audi thinks that even though the spatiotemporal-continuity requirement for continuous identity is not entirely unshakable, Hick needs to provide positive arguments against it in order for his "replica" theory to overwrite the usual criterion and assert continuous personal identity beyond death. Audi suspects that the reason why the alternative explanation of "duplication" does not occur to Hick is because Hick often already assumes that the "replica" is the same as the original—likely

⁹⁰ Robert Audi, "Eschatological Verification and Personal Identity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 4 (1976): 391-408.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 398.

because an unchecked Dualist notion of a disembodied soul is operating beneath Hick's attempt at a Physicalist articulation of resurrection. As far as Audi can see, that Dualism notion seems to be the readiest answer to allow Hick's scenarios to maintain personal identity after death.

Similarly, Gerard Loughlin thinks that Hick's "replica" theory fails "to take seriously a fully materialist concept of the human person, consonant with a modern scientific anthropology."⁹² According to Loughlin's blunt diagnosis of the theory, "the incipient malaise is dualism or idealism."⁹³ This is because, if a human being is deemed strictly physically to be an "indissoluble psycho-physical unity," then as "a material object which persists through time, a person's identity will consist in ... spatiotemporal continuity."⁹⁴ Since Hick posits spatial discontinuity, the two cannot be identified as the same person under the Physicalist's term. Even perfect copies of the original are *not* the same entities as their original; as shown in Audi's demonstration via the case of copying a statue, two material objects exemplifying the exact same pattern are *still* different material objects. Furthermore, subjective consciousness of personal continuity like what Hick posits cannot be used as a support for continuity, but is based upon it if such consciousness is objectively correct. In addition, Loughlin challenges the concept of the human being as a "pattern of change" independent from and transmittable among the matter exemplifying it. He points out that under the Physicalist's definition of a

⁹² Gerard Loughlin, "Persons and Replicas," *Modern Theology* 1, no. 4 (July 1985): 304.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 316.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 307.

psychophysical unity “pattern of change” cannot really function as the persistent locus of personal identity. This is because, at the however brief moment when the person is only an *un*-exemplified pattern, namely, right after the original dies and right before the “replica” is created,

it must be taken, as we should commonly take any non-exemplified or non-realized pattern, as an abstraction or fiction. ... the pattern of arrangement, conceived apart from its realization, is an abstraction of thought. ... Thus, a person cannot merely be a pattern apart from some changing thing. For such a person would merely be a conceptual object, conceived in some mind or minds, or encoded in some material form.⁹⁵

As far as Loughlin can see, the only alternative under which the person as a pattern of change may be more than fictitious (and has in fact continued existing) is to posit such “pattern” as an ontological reality, existent in its *own* right. And this implies ontological Dualism, which fundamentally contradicts the Physicalists’ assumption of the human being as a psychophysical unity.

Objection from the Dualists: The “Replica” in Hick’s Theory does not Preserve the Real Human Person

While the Physicalists deny “postmortem identity” in Hick’s scenario because of spatiotemporal discontinuity, the Dualists deny “postmortem identity” because of the existential gap between the original and the “replica” as well as the irreplaceability of any human subject. J. J. Lipner criticizes Hick’s theory on the basis of what the postulated existential gap implies.⁹⁶ First, Lipner detects an “existential gap” between the original

⁹⁵ Ibid, 309.

⁹⁶ J. J. Lipner, “Hick’s Resurrection,” *Sophia* 18 (1979): 22-34.

and the “replica” based on Hick’s words like “de-creating” and “re-creating” for elucidating his “replica” theory of death and resurrection. Lipner asks that, since in Hick’s case not only is there no *bodily* continuity between the original and the “replica,” there seems to be not even *existential* continuity between the two—given that they never exist simultaneously—“How then can we speak of an ‘on-going’ self-consciousness and genuine ‘memory’ experiences in any intelligible manner?”⁹⁷ Lipner argues that it would be deceptive on God’s part to reconstitute the “replica” with the self-awareness and the memories of the original and make the “replica” think that it *is* the original; it also seems morally reprehensible for God to burden the “replica” with the memories of the original.

Similarly, John Yates rejects the idea that human beings can be existentially gap-inclusive entities.⁹⁸ He notes a widespread agreement on the requirement of *some sort* of continuity for the maintenance of “postmortem identity,” such as an immortal soul in classical Christian philosophy, or spatiotemporal continuity in modern philosophy. Without any form of actual continuity bridging across the abyss of death, the person does not really survive, and the one emerges on the other side is no longer the same person. Yates thinks that Hick’s claim of “sameness” based on the argument that “it would be simpler all round to regard the ‘replica’ as identical with a post mortem individual identical in all respects to it” is done out of convenience, and is not a legitimate reason for claiming postmortem continuity of personal identity.⁹⁹ More importantly, Yates think

⁹⁷ Ibid, 28.

⁹⁸ John C. Yates, “Survival as Replication,” *Sophia* 27, no. 2 (1988): 2-9.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 4.

that since people could all be misled, Hick's suggestion "contradicts our intuition that there must be objective reasons for ascribing identity. The fact that the 'replica' has matching memories to some pre-mortem individual and is accepted by others in the resurrection world as identical with this individual proves nothing."¹⁰⁰ Some *objective* criterion needs to be given in order for a new convention for the meaning of "same person" to be accepted.

In addition, Yates raises a serious objection based on common understandings of the human person—that is, unlikely a purely physical being, a human being is by nature irreplaceable. He observes that "For Hick it is the continuity of a code rather than physical continuity which makes the 'replica' identical with the original."¹⁰¹ And yet, there are significant differences between encoding, transmitting and interpreting sequences of, say, a telegraph versus the identity of a person. This is because, in the former case all that really matters is the accuracy of the information being transmitted, whereas in the latter what is at stake is the survival of a conscious self-reflecting *subject*. Yates unpacks the *non-transferability* of the subjective human experience as follows:

What is lacking in these impersonal examples and which cannot be intelligibly applied to them is the concept of experience. ... Does it make sense to say that the assembled individual shares with the original person his experiences, that he may claim these previous experiences as his own? It seems not, for it was the original instantiation of the code who had these experiences, not the code 'per se', which at the time of the experiences did not exist.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 5.

¹⁰² Ibid, 6.

Consequently, it is wrong for the “replica” to claim the experiences and memories of the original as its *own*, because the “replica” comes into existence only when the original ceases to exist; and vice versa. Considering this, it seems highly doubtful that God would wish to create “replicas,” again due to the element of deception implied here, at least an element of self-deception on God’s part in treating the “replica” as the original. What’s more, “a divine decision to treat one person as another person no more makes two persons identical than would a human decision of this kind.”¹⁰³

One other important objection against the “replica” theory is based on the foreseeable scenario of *multiple* “replicas.” Objections raised on the basis of this scenario play out what the “replica” theory implies in principle—namely, a human being is replaceable and the human subjective experience is transferrable—so as to demonstrate its flaws. For example, Loughlin rejects the “replica” theory’s central contention that identity of patterns—either bodily or mental—is sufficient to establish the claim of “postmortem identity.” This is because more than one “replicas” can have patterns identical to the original, and that contradicts our common understanding of the uniqueness of the human person. For Loughlin and others, Hick’s “attempt to ward off the implications of the concept of replication by suggesting that we may be in the sort of universe in which only one ‘replica’ of each person will in fact occur ... is an arbitrary and woeful ‘*replica ex machina*’.”¹⁰⁴ As another example, J. J. Clarke unpacks the scenario where a second “replica” H3 is created after the first “replica” H2 is created—

¹⁰³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Loughlin, “Persons and Replicas,” 311.

which is logically permissible under Hick's theory, but again contradicts the uniqueness of the human person.¹⁰⁵ Clarke reasons that, in this case, "one would have to say that for a while H2 could conceivably have been H1, but then on H3's arrival in the resurrection world this identification ceased to be possible. This is incoherent."¹⁰⁶

Notably, as David Cheetham rightly points out, what Clarke and Lipner alike complain about is not what God does or does not do under any particular scenario, as Hick assumes when trying to shore up his case; their complaint is that Hick's theory is built upon an improper anthropology which inevitably *allows* multiplicity. And, "If the full conceptual implications of the meaning of replication cause an inevitable logical possibility of multiplicity, then Hick's replica theory is inadequate [on the ground of its underlying principle]."¹⁰⁷ Upon reflection, I think the "replica" theory does *in principle* permit multiplicity, and even Hick himself acknowledges this. For Hick's theory critically relies on cyberneticist Norbert Wiener's anthropological outlook, which equates a human person to an *impersonal* pattern of information and thus considers pattern identity sufficient for *personal* identity. Unfortunately, as Hick's critics point out, more than one impersonal object can bare exactly the same pattern; and yet, no person is really duplicable.

In contrast, a non-Physicalist anthropology considers a person to be more than information, but a "carrier" of information, a subject with a view. The reason why a

¹⁰⁵ J. J. Clarke, "John Hick's Resurrection," *Sophia* 10 (1971): 18-22.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Cheetham, *John Hick*, 82.

human subject is “unique” and so not re-creatable is *not* because there is *only one* of it, as Hick seems to think by nuancing his definition of the “replica;” for even a piece of rock is unique in this sense, and an omnipotent God can recreate it. Rather, a human being is “unique” in that, as a subject, its own subjective perspective is *by nature* irreplaceable.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the human being is a subject with a “view,” a subjective perspective; its *experiences* are by nature nontransferable between the original and the “replica.” Even though it is possible for the omnipotent God to re-create the memory and the self-awareness of a subject, the product of such re-creation cannot be identified with the original despite of its exact sameness, because as an “I” the human identity is not existentially gap-inclusive.¹⁰⁹ A subject is by nature not re-creatable once “de-created”—not even by an omnipotent God. Hick’s argument from the state of dreamless sleep and anesthesia does not help because, as critics point out, in all these cases existential continuity is always already tacitly presupposed.

Last but not the least, Yates raises a weight objection that conceptualizing the human person as a “psychosomatic unity” is not biblical. Yates states that “Contrary to the opinion of Hick ... the New Testament does not teach that man is an indissoluble psychosomatic unity who perishes at death.”¹¹⁰ To substantiate this point, Yates offers some passages from the teachings of Jesus and some verses from the letters of Paul and

¹⁰⁸ Recall that Helmut Thielicke emphasizes this point in *Death and Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), which I reviewed in Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁹ Recall that Joseph Ratzinger argues for this point in *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), which I reviewed in Chapter Two.

¹¹⁰ Yates, “Survival as Replication,” 3.

James. He summarizes that “There are many other passages in the New Testament which indicate that the early Christians accepted unreflectively a form of dualism and anticipated a disembodied existence immediately after death.”¹¹¹

Regarding Hick’s Soteriology

The second type of criticism regarding Hick’s theology of death is brief but just as important; it has to do with the soteriology implied by his par-eschatology. For example, Keith Schmitt observes that, in comparison with Karl Barth’s theology, Hick’s theology acknowledges a much smaller role for God.¹¹² God is merely a passive object for theological reflections; the human being alone determines what he will believe. Especially with regard to Hick’s par-eschatology, Schmitt notices that “Hick, for example, makes no reference to the Spirit or a parallel religious phenomenon aiding and guiding man, this due largely to the accent he places upon the initiative of man itself.”¹¹³ God’s involvement in human growth seems to be little more than creating the environment as a structure for such growth. In Hick’s theology, God is so far removed from humanity and the current course of events in the world that Schmitt thinks that it would not be inaccurate to describe Hick as a deist. Furthermore, Schmitt faults Hick’s par-eschatology for its eclipsing the role of grace and singularly stressing human efforts

¹¹¹ Ibid, 4.

¹¹² Keith Randall Schmitt, *Death and After-life in the Theologies of Karl Barth and John Hick: A Comparative Study* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985).

¹¹³ Ibid, 161.

in human growth and development. He comments that “One might note in Hick a new sort of law which suggests that man must earn and/or merit his salvation.”¹¹⁴

Similarly, Stephen Davis voices his concern under the name of Pelagianism.¹¹⁵ Davis states that “one of my central worries about Hick’s thought is that I think it has become increasingly Pelagian in recent years.”¹¹⁶ Davis recognizes a soteriology in Hick’s theology of death which understands the attainment of salvation and liberation as primarily our own human achievement within the spiritual environment God set up for us. Davis opposes this soteriological outlook on the ground that all forms of Pelagianism lose touch with the moral reality keenly understood in the Christian faith—that is “the firm grip that evil has on us and our inability to save ourselves.”¹¹⁷ Remarkably, Hick’s own words like the following seem to reveal the soundness of his critiques’ observations:

[M]an as he has emerged from the slow evolution of the forms of life exists as a rational and personal creature in the image of God. But he is still only the raw material for a further stage of the creative process by which man, the intelligent animal, is being brought through his *own* free responses to his environment to that perfection of this nature which is his finite likeness to God.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 161.

¹¹⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Critical Response: Hick and Dilley on Life after Death,” in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Harold Hewitt Jr. (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 156-159.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 158.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 158.

¹¹⁸ John Hick, “Reply,” in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Harold Hewitt Jr. (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 210.

Responses and Clarifications

Responses and clarifications by Hick and his supporters are all related to criticisms of the “replica” theory. Unfortunately, they all seem to miss the point behind these criticisms. For example, Houston Craighead argues back for Hick that, practically speaking, the Physicalist’s criterion of bodily continuity for identification is just as problem-laden as Hick’s mental-physical-character method; and so, the term “same person” may as well be extended to Hick’s case on the basis of his stipulation of continuous memory and single instantiation.¹¹⁹ But the center of the debate is precisely the question of whether the “replica’s” subjective perception of continuity with the original is consistent with the objective reality of who he really is; and single instantiation *per se* does not seem to be an admissible evidence for this question.

As another example, Stephen Davis defends Hick’s theory by evoking God’s omnipotent power for solving the identity problem.¹²⁰ Along the same line of reasoning, David Cheetham reminds the reader that Hick is operating within a theistic context, and so when in doubt “we might seek to guarantee identity by bringing in the notion of divine will, or intention;” any ambiguity around personal identity may be clarified by appealing to God’s intending the “replica” to be the same person as the original.¹²¹ However, as Hick’s critics point out, given the existential gap in Hick’s scenario, identification by fiat insinuates at least God’s self-deception if not also God’s deceiving the “replica” as well.

¹¹⁹ Houston Craighead, “Audi’s Critique of Hick: An Evaluation,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 1 (1979): 51-60.

¹²⁰ Davis, “Critical Response.”

¹²¹ Cheetham, *John Hick*, 83.

What's more, God's dictation of "identification" still does not turn the "replica" into the same person as the original, because even an omnipotent God cannot contradict bare logic.

Frank Dilley may be the one who supplied the most extensive defense for the "replica" theory.¹²² As discussed above, Hick himself attempts to guard against the possibility of multiple "replicas" by stipulating that there is one and only one "replica" of the original in his particular scenario. Dilley realizes that Hick's solution does not work, because "It cannot be right to give, as an answer to a point about logical possibility, a merely factual answer."¹²³ The issue here is whether Hicks' theory is correct as evinced through its anthropological implications, and that is precisely where the problem is. However, Dilley's solution betrays the same misunderstanding of human uniqueness as Hick's theory does and, contrary to Dilley's intention, reveals even more clearly the pitfalls of the "replica" theory. Specifically, Dilley acknowledges that Hick's endorsement of Wiener's information pattern model of selfhood compels him to accept *all* multiple "replicas" as genuine—for, aren't all renditions of Beethoven's Symphony #9 genuine "replicas" of the original? Isn't it possible to imprint two blocks of matter with the same pattern? And Dilley's suggestion is that Hick should just accept them all! These identical "replicas" are instantiations of the same pattern in numerically different bodies and, in Dilley's view, such diverse instantiations of the original serve well God's purpose

¹²² Frank B. Dilley, "Resurrection and the 'Replica Objection'," *Religious Studies* 19, no. 4 (December 1983): 459-474. Also, he reiterates some of his earlier points in "John Hick on the Self and Resurrection," in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Harold Hewitt Jr. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991): 138-155.

¹²³ Dilley, "Resurrection," 468.

of best perfecting various traits in the pattern of the original. Understandably, critics of Dilley cry out that his proposal for Hick sounds more like a business plan to perfect a company's product lines than God building up perfect human *persons*.

John Hick's own responses in 1991 help clarify that his view of the human being has in fact always been that of Dualism.¹²⁴ Admittedly, Hick's suggestion in Chapter Two of *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) to use the term "soul" only as a "value word" could have given people the impression that he was a Physicalist, but that statement should be heard within its proper context. Contrary to what some might have assumed, Hick does not deny the existence of some kind of immaterial, spiritual substance *per se* within the human being. Notably, this may be best seen through his enthusiastic defense in the book for mind-body Dualism. As to the "replica" theory, Hick explained that "In spelling out the replica concept, I was trying to show that the Christian doctrine of resurrection is not ruled out by ... the more recent mind-brain identity theory."¹²⁵ Unfortunately, Hick's reply then still did not seem to show an awareness of the force of his critics' arguments, and it defended his theory by once again stipulating that there is only one "replica" in *his* particular scenario. He stated that taking exception to it on the basis of other logically *possible* scenarios "only creates needless conundrums" by mixing them together, since they are fundamentally different universes operating under fundamentally different sets of laws.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Hick, "Reply."

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 160.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 161.

Concluding Comments

Stephen Pattison describes *Death and Eternal life* (1976) as “typical of Hick’s Enlightenment approach to religion and philosophy of religion,” which is guided by Hick’s favorite assumption that “there is a substantive, universally accessible reality there to be rationally discerned, theorized and measured, and reason is autonomous.”¹²⁷ Unfortunately, as clearly demonstrated by the “replica” controversy, many others disagree. And the reason for this failure is succinctly articulated by Sydney Shoemaker, who says that “what sort of criteria we use in making judgments about the identity of objects of a certain kind is to say something ... about the nature (essence, or concept) of that sort of objects.”¹²⁸ In other words, insofar as the Physicalists and the Dualists hold different views of the human *nature*—which they do, in fundamental ways—they cannot agree on the criterion of continuous *identity* after death. Consequently, a theory of “postmortem identity” that aims to satisfy both parties seems unattainable on the ground of principles.

More related to my own investigation, though, Hick’s theory of death does have its distinct merits in comparison to the theologies of death reviewed in Chapter Two. Specifically, Hick’s theology brings to light much more clearly the *formative* purpose of temporality and embodiment in human existence. Hick’s insight about human embodiment as the means of delimitation, externality, and the medium of interaction makes a lot of sense. His insight about temporality as necessary for perfecting finite

¹²⁷ Stephen Pattison, “Re-review: Death and Eternal Life by John Hick,” *Modern Believing* 35, no. 2 (April 1994): 33.

¹²⁸ Sydney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 5.

freedom is thought-provoking. What I plan to do in the following chapters is both to further develop the insights and to better avoid the oversights in Hick's theology of death. More specifically, in Chapter Four, drawing from recent developments in theology, I will deploy a wide spectrum of new supports for Hick's insistence on more *time* after death for the sake of "person-making." Then, in Chapter Five, I will present arguments against the mind-brain Dualism Hick endorses for envisioning the postmortem *body*; I will argue instead that George Berkeley's sacramental Idealism seems to provide a more coherent framework for thinking about postmortem embodiment.

Interestingly enough, there have been comments made during the "replica" debate which allude to the need for a reconsideration of Dualism in general. For example, Hilary Putnam observes perplexingly that "to say that something can consist of two substances as different as mind and matter are supposed to be and still be an essential unity, is ... very obscure."¹²⁹ Similarly, Robert Audi wants Hick to spell out more the foggy notion of "spiritual bodies" or bodies in the resurrection world which are said to be composed of material *other than* physical matter, since "the 'spiritual' is usually contrasted with the 'bodily,' and 'spiritual' seems to take away with one hand what 'body' gives with the other."¹³⁰ In addition, Keith Schmitt makes the tantalizing remarks that

Hick's review of H. H. Price as well as his "replica" theory both point to a proximity between the physical and non-physical even after life. ... Furthermore, the indefinite character of what Hick intends by terming soul "a valuing name for the self" leaves open the possibility that the physical may entail much of what has traditionally been attributed to a non-physical realm of man.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Hilary Putnam, *Reasons, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 77.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹³¹ Schmitt, *Death and After-life*, 94.

Again, even though John Hick as a mind-brain Dualist does not intend to defend Berkeley's Idealism, Hick does consider Berkeley's theory to be compatible with the teleological core of his theology, especially the "person-making" purpose he emphasizes for human existence. In Chapter Five of my dissertation, hopefully it will be made clear that Hick's "person-making" emphasis is in fact much more effectively and much more coherently articulated within Berkeley's sacramental Idealism. Finally, in Chapter Six, the constructive chapter of my dissertation, I will follow the lead of Hick's critics regarding his soteriology, and show how his "person-making" soteriology may be strengthened by a metaphysic of sanctification.

CHAPTER FOUR
POSTMORTEM PURGATION—A THEOLOGICAL COROLLARY OF THE
CENTRALITY OF SANCTIFICATION IN
THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION

A Review of Chapters Two and Three and an Overview of the Current Chapter

To build my chapter on the basis of related insights above, recall that, in Chapter Two, to first lay down the landscape in which John Hick’s theology of death is situated, I reviewed contemporary theologies of death and related eschatological works. Particularly remarkable there is Michael Simpson’s call for a responsible renewal of eschatology by cleansing away concepts that do not resonate with our deepest moral instinct. Simpson underscores the necessity to proclaim the Christian hope in a way that is morally inspiring and life transforming, so that Christianity may continue to be a lively saving force in society today. It is reasonable to say that, the eschatological notion of the finality of death seems to be such a concept for theological cleansing, because it impinges on the justice of God and it overwrites the seriousness of moral transformation. In fact, among the authors we encountered in Chapter Two, there exists a significant minority voice arguing for the non-finality of death.

For example, Brian Hebblethwaite observes that, people’s increasing interest today in the eastern notion of reincarnation “rests on the profound religious conviction that a single human life on earth, liable to being thwarted or cut short at any moment,

cannot be the one and only opportunity for a human being to find salvation and eternal blessedness.”¹ And so, he encourages the discussion of the “next to last things,” or par-eschatology in John Hick’s term, which extends the traditional concern with purgatory “to include the whole next phrase of the creative process.”² Similarly, Russell Aldwinckle reminds us of the realistic state of human beings when they die, saying that “We are not yet perfect and we have not yet attained. To make death the end is to leave us spiritually immature and incomplete, even if we are believers, and condemns many, whose present lives have been mainly frustration and disappointment, to an annihilation which denies them self-fulfillment or realization of their God-given potentialities.”³

Joseph Ratzinger gets to the root of the problematic claim of finality by pointing out temporality as a constitutive element of the human nature. In his words, “Time characterizes man in his humanity, which itself is temporal inasmuch as it is human.”⁴ This is because human being is created to become the Image of God, “capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints.”⁵ And moral becoming requires time. As Ratzinger vividly explains, “salvation cannot simply be given to people in an external way, as one might hand over a sum of money. Rather

¹ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176.

² *Ibid.*, 217.

³ Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City: Life after Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 81.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 183.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

does it claim the entire personal subject who receives it. ... the interval between midpoint and end [of salvation history] becomes intelligible when seen from this angle. Man with his ambiguous story of acceptance and rejection of grace is an acting subject in God's saving plan, and it is on this basis that he inhabits time."⁶ And this is precisely the reason why the Christian faith is a "historical" faith, believing God's salvific work operates in none other than the flow of historical time, as epitomized by the Christ event. Similarly, Brian Hebblethwaite points out the processive nature and the teleological purpose of the entire created reality, saying that "it is probably the case that, of all scientific notions, evolutionary theory has had the most pervasive effect in making Christian theology rethink its fundamental conception of God's world." Hebblethwaite thinks that, "Christian theology had now to think in terms of a more or less gradual process from small beginnings right up to a perfected consummation in the future is beyond question or doubt."⁷

On a more fundamental level, some authors argue against the finality of death on the ground of divine attributes. For example, Donald Bloesch proposes "a theology of divine perseverance." Jürgen Moltmann believes that allowing each person to become what God intended them to be through continuous growth after death is above all "God's concern and his first option."⁸ Russell Aldwinckle especially emphasizes the Christian

⁶ Ibid, 65-66.

⁷ Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*, 170.

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 118.

view of God and His purpose for the human person as the primary basis for theologizing eschatologically. He observes that, “Most of us at death are simply not yet fit for the rarefied air of the heavenly Himalayas,” and so, he agrees with J. A. T. Robinson’s stinging claim that, to be content with such excessive emphasis on the finality of death “is to betray a sub-Christian view of the Fatherhood of God.”⁹ Aldwinckle stresses that “The Christian does not reject this latter alternative [of the finality of death] because he does not like it. He rejects it primarily because he believes that God has made Himself known in such a way that we are justified in looking to a future not only in this world, but beyond death and the end of history as we know it.”¹⁰

The hypothesis of final decision proposed decades ago is an attempt to preserve the justice of God and the possibility of moral sanctification while maintaining the traditional claim of the finality of death. However, as many have pointed out, this hypothesis directly threatens the significance of human existence in time and history, which is the very avenue deemed indispensable for salvation by Christian faith. Logically speaking, it is impossible to give the moment of death the primal spot for salvation and to accord adequate significance to historical existence. Encouragingly, as I recounted near the end of Chapter Two, there have been recent attempts made in (par)eschatology which do not allow death to rob life our attention.

For example, when contemplating the proper relationship between “time” and “eternity,” Walter Kasper suggests that eternity does not abolish time but elevates it,

⁹ Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City*, 136.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 132.

which implies for the postmortem state that it cannot be conceived of as being “eternal” in the sense of timelessness. Similarly, Brian Hebblethwaite suggests considering the “eternity” of God and the “eternal” life we are destined to in essentially temporal terms. To him, the final “state of ultimate perfection must itself involve an endlessly dynamic movement of experience, ecstasy, exploration, and activity.”¹¹ In addition, Anthony Thiselton offers the intriguing concept that, physical time is a small part of the ontologically real time we call “eternity,” which is a multi-dimensional reality including different “planes” of time. In his view, “time is not one [universal] thing,” but “depends decisively upon the context.”¹² He thinks that, the fact that certain models for quantum gravity require ten or even more dimensions for the physical universe gives support to his theory.

As another example, there are also those who directly addressed the intermediate state. Jürgen Moltmann conceptualizes postmortem “time” as fellowship with Christ and postmortem “space” as growth in the Spirit. Donald Bloesch depicts “the four worlds beyond,” with “Hell” and “heaven” as the future states of the damned and the saved in the final consummation, “Hades” and “paradise” as present realities during the interim. He believes that the final condemnation is not yet pronounced upon those who are not saved at death, the final and irrevocable separation of the blessed and the damned has not occurred—both for the living and for the dead.

¹¹ Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*, 206.

¹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 142.

In Chapter Three, I discussed John Hick's theology of death. Notably, his theology of death stands out especially with its elaborate "par-eschatology" of person-making, which is a postmortem soteriology under the assumption of the non-finality of death. Hick "emphatically" rejects the hypothesis of final decision, saying that "We cannot be content with a theory which gives meaning to death by depriving this life of its meaning."¹³ Moreover, Hick thinks that rejecting the finality of death will help draw adequate attention to par-eschatology, which avails Christian theology what he considers the much needed possibility of dealing with the topic of universal salvation. To him, finality of death would be injustice "at an intolerable maximum," considering the great disparity in life circumstances which hugely impact the outcome of this life.¹⁴ Notably, Hick's universalistic concern is particularly relevant under our global context today. In addition, Hick thinks that the state of sin and imperfection in which most people die entails that more time beyond the earthly sojourn must be granted, "if a divine purpose of person-making through the human being's free responses is to continue to its completion."¹⁵ He does not accept the theory of "instantaneous transformation" by God in our death, because "if he can do this consistently with his creative purpose ... the experience of temporal existence serves no necessary purpose, and this life loses its significance as a sphere in which the divine intention is at work."¹⁶

¹³ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 238.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

Despite of all the valuable insights above, the finality of death is currently the dominant view in mainstream Christianity. In this chapter, I shall join the conversation by examining this group of authors' still very controversial claim that the temporal axis of human existence must extend beyond death. To do this, I begin with a very recent Protestant scholarship on purgatory which concludes that, if sanctification ("person-making" in Hick's term) carries a quintessential import for salvation, then it is unavoidable that we embrace its corollary: i.e., opportunities for postmortem purgation. After that, I devote the main portion of this chapter to submit an extensive survey of the amazing array of developments in Christian theology, many of which making appeal to previously ignored common knowledge in the light of new discoveries. From diverse disciplinary angles, they unanimously endorse the soteriological primacy of sanctification.

There are six sections in this chapter. The first three are more focused looks at some individual works, which represent the forefront of the current probing. In the first section, I set up the logical contour of the whole chapter by introducing J. L. Walls' study on purgatory. Remarkably, Walls' study is conducted from the Protestant side to alleviate two typical suspicions against this Catholic concept based on scripture and doctrine. His study also deploys three forceful arguments for the necessity of "purgatory"—especially if salvation ultimately depends on sanctification. In the next section, I discuss A. D. Wallace and R. D. Rusk's book on moral transformation. Based on recent scholarship in New Testament and early Christianity, they contend that sanctification indeed holds such

a principal place in the original Christian paradigm of salvation. In the following section, I present P. Rainbow's scriptural analyses of writings by Paul and James, which show that the sole biblical criterion for eternal salvation or the "final justification" is not God's forensic declaration, as it is in the "initial justification," but our genuine transformation.

As current as these individual works are, to what extent do they reflect the collective insights today regarding the soteriological significance of sanctification? To address this question, the next two sections are aimed to be broad and comprehensive. First, I enumerate new advancements in ecumenical dialogues, New Testament scholarship, and Reformation studies to unveil a widely converging consensus on the soteriological centrality of sanctification. Then, I review recent theological arguments for emphasizing either sanctification or justification "by faith alone." Notably, both sides express some very valid concerns which need to be simultaneously addressed if Christian soteriology is to be credible and robust. In the final section, I conclude by arguing that, the recent cross-the-board crystallization on the soteriological primacy of sanctification withheld, it did not really win the case for sanctification in front of our always untimely death. In order to truly overcome this impasse for sanctification and to arrive at a coherent explication of the Gospel of salvation from sin, it is inevitable that we reckon postmortem purgation as an integral part of God's saving plan.

Understanding the Necessity for Postmortem Purgation through the Doctrine of God, the Logic of Heaven and the Resulting Need for Total Transformation—Jerry Lee Walls, Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation (2012)

In his 2009 article, Neal Judisch observes an encouraging development on the ecumenical front, namely, “the noteworthy warming of Protestant sensibilities to the idea of purgatory, understood as an intermediate postmortem state in which souls destined for heaven are purified or made fit for heavenly life.”¹⁷ At the height of this development three years later, Jerry Lee Walls’ *Purgatory: the logic of total transformation* (2012) offers a sustained Protestant defense for this sanctification model of purgatory.¹⁸ Given the many hotly contested issues involved, Walls intends to present the case not as a dogma, but as a proposal originated from some foundational theological commitments. Even though he claims no knockdown argument or decisive resolution, to the extent that one agrees with his assessments on certain constitutive theological issues, one is inclined to take the position in favor of purgatory. As Walls puts it, the debate over purgatory “is finally a debate about fundamental theological convictions involving the nature of salvation and the role of human freedom and cooperation in this matter. Even more fundamentally, this dispute hinges on different accounts of God’s goodness and his love for all persons.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Neal Judisch, “Sanctification, Satisfaction, and the Purpose of Purgatory,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (April 2009): 167-185.

¹⁸ Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

Addressing Counterarguments that

Invoke the Scripture and the Doctrine of Salvation

As a result of the Reformation, the strongest objections against purgatory come from the Protestant camp, and they typically involve either scripture interpretation or the Protestant doctrine of salvation emphasizing “by faith alone.” So, we begin with Walls’ responses to these common objections to see whether his case even has a foothold for takeoff.

The first objection is the claim that purgatory is not a biblical concept. On Walls’ reading, even though the scripture does not explicitly teach purgatory, it does not explicitly rule it out either; “texts cited to show this do not carry nearly as much weight as often claimed.”²⁰ Walls reminds the reader that, as a general character of the bible, there is only a minimal amount of explicit data related to eschatological topics. Consequently, even though reflections on these topics are indispensable for a fully-developed theology of hope, “there is no direct way to settle the issue by straightforward biblical exegesis of isolated texts.”²¹ Walls notices that, unlike their theological forebears, Catholic theologians today seldom defend the doctrine by locating explicit textual support from the bible. Correspondingly, he cautions Protestant theologians that, when critiquing the doctrine, they should “be careful not to mimic the mistakes of earlier

²⁰ Ibid, 178.

²¹ Ibid, 56.

generations of Catholics, who tried to get too much mileage out of ambiguous texts in supporting the doctrine.”²²

To still sort out the matter based on the bible, which alone is the authority for Protestant theology, Walls suggests that we examine and see whether the doctrine agrees with or can even be reasonably inferred from things that are explicitly taught in Scripture. More specifically, he suggests that the whole issue hinges on “whether the doctrine is compatible with, or perhaps even follows from, one’s larger theological commitments, particularly those pertaining to the nature and conditions of salvation.”²³

The second objection is the claim that purgatory is “a form of salvation by works that denies justification by faith and devalues the work of Christ to save us.”²⁴ Walls clarifies that this objection is directed against the “satisfaction model” of purgatory “according to which it is necessary for sinners to pay part of the price of punishments in order to satisfy the justice of God.”²⁵ However, this model is not the only way purgatory has been conceived and, arguably, it represents a significant departure from the original substance of the doctrine. Walls recommends some contemporary Catholic models of

²² Ibid, 55.

²³ Ibid, 178.

²⁴ Ibid, 54.

²⁵ Ibid, 178.

purgatory, which have sanctification rather than satisfaction as the purpose.²⁶ He argues that, since purgatory proper falls under the doctrine of sanctification rather than justification, “it is quite beside the point to appeal to the blood of Christ or the fact that justified sinners are no longer under condemnation as grounds for rejecting it.”²⁷ What’s more, Walls thinks that the sanctification model of purgatory is perfectly compatible with the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith, seeing that both pertain to the salvific work of Christ which not only forgives our sins but also restores God’s image in us. Notably, the aim of purgatory is the latter, which forgiveness itself cannot accomplish. Thus, Walls concludes that “Unless grace is limited to forgiveness and justification, the claim that the doctrine of purgatory represents a version of salvation by works is simply misguided.”²⁸

Offering Supporting Argument #1:

The Nature of Salvation Entails that We Become Holy *in Fact*

Besides answering the two counterarguments above, Walls also offers three interrelated arguments for purgatory—based on soteriology, on the doctrine of God, and on the nature of being human. His first argument may be captured by Pinnock’s rhetorical

²⁶ Catholic theologian Harvey D. Egan, S.J., affirms Walls’ observation in stating that “[rather than] a demi-hell set up by divine justice between heaven and hell to punish those who have died without having made sufficient reparation for their sins ... the purgatorial stage of the consciousness of the mystics, caused by their intense experience of the incompatibility of sin and divine love, is a paradigm of postmortem purgatory.” Harvey D. Egan, “In Purgatory We Shall All Be Mystics,” *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2012): 870.

²⁷ Walls, *Purgatory*, 178.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

question he quotes: “Is the doctrine of purgatory not required by our doctrine of holiness?”²⁹ Walls reminds the reader that it is generally acknowledged by all sides that according to the scripture he who sees the perfectly holy God at their salvific destination must *actually* be holy in character (e.g., Heb 12:14). It is not enough that we are forgiven of sin or have Christ’s alien righteousness imputed to us. And yet, the spiritual transformation required in order for us to become perfectly holy is not accomplished in the initial saving work of forgiveness and regeneration. In fact, most, if not all, believers are not perfectly holy even by the day they die. And so, the obvious question is how these believers can acquire the actual perfect holiness in order for them to be able to meet the perfectly holy God as promised. This is precisely the question purgatory answers.

Here, Walls specifically corrects a popular misunderstanding of “heaven,” the common term for our joyful salvific destiny. It is the idea that just about everyone with whatever moral disposition would enjoy being in heaven if they are allowed. As Walls describes, “it is widely believed that heaven is the sort of place where anyone would love to be, no matter what his tastes, inclinations, desires, and so on, as if it were some sort of cosmic version of Las Vegas that has something for everyone, whatever he likes.”³⁰ Using Bishop John Newman’s sermon on the topic, he elucidates that, according to the scripture, “heaven” as the Kingdom of God is not a state where any and all interests may be pursued, as is the case in this world: “here everyone does his own pleasure; in heaven

²⁹ Ibid, 56.

³⁰ Ibid, 4.

all must do God's pleasure." Therefore, it is entailed by the perfectly holy nature of our eternal salvation as preordained by the perfect holy God that, such a salvific state would not be an enjoyable "heaven" for those who have not "cultivated a taste for the holy," who have not found full joy in doing God's holy pleasure.³¹ In fact, it is logically contradictory to think that one can reach the state of eternal salvation, which is perfect holiness, without actually becoming holy.

Offering Supporting Argument #2:

The Christian Doctrine of God Emphasizes Divine Attributes of Grace and Faithfulness

The second argument Walls presents is the common argument based on the doctrine of God as a faithful God who is full of grace. Similar to Hick in *Evil and the God of Love* (1978), Walls reasons that the doctrine of purgatory is the perfect goodness of God articulated in the eschatological context because, soteriologically speaking, it makes possible things that are otherwise impossible within our limited earthly sojourn. It is this eschatological manifestation of God's goodness which grounds our real hope for salvation. God "is good in the moral sense that he hates our evil, and demands our purity, but he is also good in the sense that he loves us and desires our happiness and true flourishing, which can only be complete when we are perfected in holiness."³² Purgatory is the avenue furnished by God through which such perfection can fittingly take place.³³

³¹ Ibid, 5.

³² Ibid, 180.

³³ Notably, like John Hick, Walls also makes the argument for universalism, which extends the traditional sanctification model of purgatory to include postmortem grace and probation for all people. For my own project, the topic of universalism is beyond its scope.

Reiterating the point of many Catholic theologians, Walls states that purgatory properly understood demonstrates that God's grace really is effectual grace, for "The One who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." (Phil 1:6)

Offering Supporting Argument #3:

The Integrity of Human Identity and the Dignity of Human Freewill

Jerry Walls' most extensive argument for purgatory comes from the basics of being human, and it again has three interconnected points. The first and most crucial point is theological, which has to do with the importance God apparently grants to human freewill. In this deliberation, Walls counts out four possible solutions to the soteriological dilemma between the universal sinfulness we have on earth and the perfect holiness we must have if in "heaven." Walls reasons that the suggestion that people can see God as sinners or that hardly anybody gets to see God are not acceptable contenders in Christian theology. And so, the choice is really between the possibility that people are made holy instantaneously at death by a unilateral act of God, and the possibility that the sanctification process continues to unfold beyond death so that through our willing cooperation we are gradually made holy by God. The question, then, is what role if any does human freedom play in salvation? In Walls' view, this is "perhaps the most crucial matter on which the whole issue turns."³⁴ If God requires genuine human response for salvation, then purgatory is simply a logical inference from that. And Walls thinks that

³⁴ Ibid, 179.

there is strong evidence that God does grant human freedom a serious role in salvation.

This empirical evidence is articulated as “the evidential problem of evil”:

If God can unilaterally perfect persons at death who have saving faith, then he could do so now. So if God does not perfect those persons now, then he is responsible for whatever evil they commit, for such evil would be properly eliminable, since he could eliminate it without sacrificing any greater goods, or causing greater evils. So there’s good reason to think that God cannot unilaterally perfect persons now, and if so, then he cannot do so at death either.³⁵

In other words, this is an argument for the significance of freewill from the obvious prevalence of evil in the world. From a positive angle, Walls notes that the patient and long-suffering way God uses to sanctify people in this life shows that “The sanctification process is an intrinsic good that should be completed under its own internal momentum.”³⁶ To add a couple of side notes here, Paul O’Callaghan agrees with Walls’ view on freewill by saying that, there really is a capacity in human nature by which humans can really be said to cooperate with God in the process of salvation despite of the “fall.”³⁷ To deny authentically free response to God can “give rise to the misunderstandings that God justifies the person quite arbitrarily without the persons being affected or involved,” and salvation “would be simply reduced to a divine theater of little tangible relevance to the human situation. Man would be as involved in being

³⁵ Ibid, 121.

³⁶ Ibid, 121. Here, in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas, I may add that the target of this process, i.e., human freewill, is very much an intrinsic good itself, being created by God in the Image of God. Grace saves not by overpowering but by elevating; and so human freewill should be permitted to arrive at its complete perfection through the process that is suitable for it.

³⁷ Paul O’Callaghan, *Fides Christi: The Justification Debate* (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1997).

justified as a piece of tinder wood would be in a bonfire.”³⁸ Along the same line, Valerie A. Karras leverages on the core Christian understanding of God as Love and the great Christian command to love, and points out that “Where there is no freedom, there can be no love.”³⁹

The second point Walls raises is metaphysical and it has to do with the essentially temporal nature of authentic human transformation. In a nutshell, “if man is essentially temporal, his capacity for moral perfection is likewise.”⁴⁰ Humans are essentially temporal, in that we creatures with only limited cognitive capacities need time to discover and absorb truth, including moral truths about ourselves and about God. Besides time for cognition, we also need time to change and develop new dispositions, especially the disposition of love which jars with our primal selfishness most severely. And so, holiness as the end product of these can only be formed over time. Instantaneous virtue is unintelligible. Even though dramatic turnarounds do occur, it always requires practice and repetition (i.e., time) for those sudden awakenings to take roots in a person’s nature.⁴¹ Purgatory is that further stage of living which “allows for gradual moral and

³⁸ Ibid, 212.

³⁹ Valerie A. Karras, “Beyond Justification: An Orthodox Perspective,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 123.

⁴⁰ Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59.

⁴¹ I may add that, since moral truths basically are about right living, it makes sense that they can only be truly appreciated and internalized through actual living, here and hereafter.

spiritual growth that keeps pace with our ability to recognize and own truth in the correspondingly progressive fashion.”⁴²

Relatedly, Walls rejects a very common assumption which seems to make instantaneous moral perfection plausible, i.e., the so-called “death purgatory.” It is the idea that sin is associated with the physical body and so separation from the body at death automatically leaves a person pure. Walls refers to Fletcher’s remarkably incisive criticism against this view that to think that death can cleanse us from sin is to confuse moral and spiritual disorders with bodily disorders. In fact, “death has no more power to cure our pride than old age to remove our covetousness,” and this becomes extremely clear “when we recall that demons do not have bodies, and the most serious sins have traditionally been thought to be sins of the spirit rather than sins of the flesh.”⁴³ Moreover, there is no indication in the scripture which gives death “the final enemy” such a lofty position as the quick fix for sin.

The third point Walls makes is epistemological and it has to do with personal identity. The issue here is whether, after undergoing such a dramatic moral transformation at death in such an instantaneous fashion, there would be sufficient continuity left for the deceased to recognize themselves as the same person. Here, Walls cites Charles Taylor’s work that unveils the importance of narrative for a coherent personal identity. It is crucial that we are able to piece together how we have become

⁴² Walls, *Purgatory*, 119.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 50.

who we are, because “Part of my sense of its genuineness will turn on how I got there ... As a being who grows and becomes, I can only know myself through the history of my maturation and regressions, my overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, Walls cites David Brown’s article to show that, moral transformation entails attitude change, and the huge attitude change implied by such drastic moral transformation at death would be something the person cannot account for what has brought it to pass.⁴⁵ Consequently, not being able to trace the connection between one’s earthly past and one’s present character, “the most natural reaction for an individual in this situation would surely be for him to experience at least a profound identity crisis.”⁴⁶

The Logical Connection between the Centrality of Sanctification and the Necessity of Postmortem Purgation

Walls’ defense for purgatory may be captured by his responses to the two common objections against it and his three positive arguments for it above. To prepare for the rest of this chapter, it is helpful here to mention Walls’ keen observation regarding the innate connection between a person’s soteriological emphasis and his take on postmortem purgation. As he describes,

contemporary Protestants who still object to the doctrine of purgatory tend to conceive of salvation primarily in terms of justification, whereas those are more

⁴⁴ Ibid, 116.

⁴⁵ David Brown, “No Heaven without Purgatory,” *Religious Studies* 21, no. 4 (December 1985): 447-456.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 452.

sympathetic to the doctrine tend to stress sanctification and the transformational dimensions of God's work to save us. Those who see salvation in forensic legal terms emphasizes that there is no condemnation for those in Christ and reject purgatory on the grounds that it undermines this claim. But for those who conceive salvation primarily in terms of real moral and spiritual transformation, freedom from condemnation is only the beginning of salvation, crucial as it is.

As we shall see later in this chapter, there has been an increasing stress of salvation as real moral transformation or "sanctification," rather than forgiveness of sin or "justification." This is true even within Protestantism, and even when interpreting traditionally pure forensic terms like "atonement" and "imputed righteousness."⁴⁷ A prominent example of this soteriological shift of emphasis is N. T. Wright who speaks about the final Day of Judgment in these direct words: "Virtue is what happens—I know many in the Reformation tradition shudder at the thought of the very word 'virtue,' but there is no help for it if we are to be true to Scripture and to Trinitarian theology—when the Spirit enables the Christian freely to choose, freely to develop, freely to be shaped by God, freely to become that which is pleasing to God."⁴⁸ As another example, Zachary Hayes thinks that transformation is entailed by the very nature of the gift of salvation; and "To dispense with transformation is to dispense with the gift itself."⁴⁹

With that, my two-fold task for the rest of this chapter is set. First, I marshal all related theological developments in recent decades to argue that *salvation is*

⁴⁷ Walls reviewed several recent works in philosophical theology all of which came to the same conclusion that, "atonement" cannot be disassociated from actual sanctification. This is because, to truly plead Christ's atonement implies such an understanding of one's sin and of God's grace that it inevitably eventuates sincere repentance and genuine responses to God's work of moral renewal.

⁴⁸ Walls, *Purgatory*, 179.

⁴⁹ Walls, *Heaven*, 57.

sanctification. Even though justification is crucial by putting us on the starting line, inner sanctity is the finish line where it all comes down to. To paraphrase Hayes' words, to dispense with sanctification is none other than dispensing with salvation itself. The survey is to demonstrate that my first point has increasingly become the consensus of our day. Second, I spell out the incongruity that, postmortem purgation as the logical corollary of salvation as sanctification has not received nearly as much endorsement. And it should. Walls sums it gently like this: "if sanctification is essential, and not merely an optional luxury item for those on the way of salvation, *the doctrine of purgatory may be crucial for a coherent account of this claim.*"⁵⁰

How the Early Christians Understood Salvation—A. J. Wallace and R. D. Rusk, Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation (2011)

The most common objection to the soteriological emphasis on sanctification seems to be a post-Reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone. For this reason, A. J. Wallace and R. D. Rusk's book *Moral transformation: the original Christian paradigm of salvation* (2011) is particularly interesting, because it locates itself squarely within the inspiration that stirred the Reformers to strive to recover the original Christian Gospel; and yet, based on recent scholarship that has not been paid adequate attention to, it unearths sanctification (or "moral transformation" in their terms) to be the original

⁵⁰ Walls, *Purgatory*, 179. Similarly, see Justine Bernard, "Purgatory and the Dilemma of Sanctification," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (July 2007): 311-330.

Christian paradigm of salvation.⁵¹ The authors highlight the Reformers' determined effort to rectify erroneous doctrines and incorrect understandings of the bible with better knowledge from new scholarship despite of fierce opposition from dominant traditions of their day. Similarly, the aim of their book is to pull together different lines of recent scholarship and display a compelling picture of what the original Christian message truly conveys. The authors applaud the Reformers for prioritizing faithfulness to the bible over the status quo; for them, "if tradition had deviated from the early Christian teachings, it carries little weight—even if the majority believed it."⁵² In this sense, they see their study to be right in the constantly renewing spirit of the Reformation.

Regarding the Person of Jesus and the Essence of His Saving Work

Wallace and Rusk begin their study with an overview of the Gospels' depiction of Jesus and his teaching under its social historical contexts. They argue that, unlike the post-Reformation concentration on Jesus' death on the cross as the atonement for sin, the Gospel accounts focus much more on Jesus' life and ministry, and portray him as a divinely appointed teacher, prophet, and leader who died as a martyr for the cause he represented. More importantly, the Gospels attest to Jesus' life and ministry as centered upon moral transformations of the society and of the individual. The best known example of this is Jesus' teaching on ritual purity. Jesus taught that God did not want ritual purity but moral purity, as reflected, for example, by caring for others in need. The message

⁵¹ A. J. Wallace and R. D. Rusk, *Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation* (New Zealand: Bridgehead Publishing, 2011).

⁵² *Ibid*, 8.

behind these Gospel depictions of Jesus is to challenge people to follow Jesus and commit to his path to moral transformation. God's resurrecting Jesus shows, above all, that his cause of transformation is worth even to die for.

Consistent with this Gospel depiction of the person of Jesus, early Christians appreciated the work of Jesus primarily through the moral transformation he brought to their lives (e.g., Mt 1:21). Rather than placing Jesus' salvific significance on his death as the substitutionary punishment, they stressed that Jesus saved them by liberating them from the bondage of sin and enabling them to live rightly. To show this, Wallace and Rusk point to the variety of images New Testament authors used to describe the moral transformation Jesus engendered in them. Here, they identify two different focuses when explicating Jesus' work: guilt from the past vs. sinfulness in the present. There is a tendency in the post-Reformation traditions to focus on past guilt and explicate salvation in Jesus mainly as sparing us from the resultant wrath of God and our deserving punishments. On Wallace and Rusk's reading of the bible, though, only a handful of scripture verses mention this idea; and, when they do, they always interpret it within the larger framework of moral transformation. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of scripture passages focuses on present sinfulness and conveys the moral transformation view of salvation. According to this view, salvation in Jesus means a transformation of sinful character, thoughts and behavior; being spared from God's wrath derives from that as a result of the positive changes in us.

One thing that often tends to cloud the transformation view of salvation is the *ritual* language describing Jesus as the “sacrifice” for our sin. The Wallace and Rusk point out that, this language in the New Testament is a figure of speech under that particular cultural context for describing moral transformation brought by Jesus. They explain that, anthropological studies have found within different cultures the common pattern of gradual abandonment of sacrificial rituals together with their magical connotations, and use “sacrifice” instead to speak metaphorically about morality and ethics. Based on the clear contrast the Gospels make about the importance of morality vis-à-vis ritual sacrifice, it is quite obvious that the New Testament authors particularly rejected sacrifice as a religious ritual and used this cultic terminology metaphorically within the context of morality. For example, just as the “Passover lamb” that brought ritual purification in the past, Jesus brought moral purification to people by “saving his people from sins” (Mt 1:21). Both cases have the concept of purification in common, but the purifying transformation brought by Jesus did not work through the magic power of blood to cleanse what it touches, as was assumed in sacrificial rituals. According to Wallace and Rusk’s understanding of the New Testament authors,

They used the language of ritual purity not because Jesus’ accomplishments worked through the same magical mechanism, but to express the moral transformation Jesus had brought to their lives. They saw themselves as the temple that Jesus had purified morally with his blood, in a way analogous to the way in which blood had purified temples ritually in the past. Christ’s martyrdom lent itself naturally to the parallel of a purification sacrifice. His noble self-sacrifice brought [moral] purity to his followers through his movements that have transformed their lives.⁵³

⁵³ Ibid, 216.

To further validate their point, they introduce two more pieces of evidence regarding the ritual practice in Judaism. First are early Christian writings against the belief that ritual sacrifices were a part of the covenant between God and Israel. They believed, instead, that in the covenant at Sinai God provided guidelines to control the ritual system already in use. He then criticized it through the mouths of the prophets, and abolished it entirely after Jesus. As one scholar observes, according to these early Christian writers, “God did not need or want the sacrifices of the Jews, but rather demanded obedience, learning to do good, desisting from evil, seeking justice, correcting oppression, and support the widow and orphan.”⁵⁴ The second evidence comes from recent studies of the sacrificial system in historical Judaism which contradict the portrayal of Jesus’ death as a “substitutionary death” on behalf of others to atone for their sin. Specifically, for the Israelites, there was *no* sacrifice arranged to cleanse deliberate moral sin; they relied on a long tradition of repentance and prayer as the only available solution for that. Even though a burnt offering might help appease God to grant forgiveness, sinners’ ultimate standing before God depended solely on God’s grace and their own repentance, and not on any ritual sacrifices they might perform. Also, many scholars have taken pains to clarify that, laying a hand on the sacrificial animal during a religious ritual was meant to identify the animal with the offeror, and not to transfer his sins to the animal; for that would have polluted the gift given to God. The only time when such a transfer of sin was intended was on Yom Kippur. But the Israelites did not

⁵⁴ Ibid, 198.

sacrifice the animal; instead, they sent it away into the wilderness. Thus, it appears that “later Christian concepts of sacrificial atoning death have been systematically projected back onto Judaism” of the New Testament time.⁵⁵

Another misleading notion is that Jesus died an “effective death,” i.e., his death achieved something *in and of itself*. Rather than seeing Jesus’ death as an inevitable consequence of his activities, i.e., as martyrdom, this view perceives Jesus’ death “as a supernatural event that achieved certain cosmic changes.”⁵⁶ Wallace and Rusk challenge this notion on the basis of scholarships on ancient Greek literatures. Specifically, at the time of Jesus, there were Greek accounts that portrayed human death as “effective.” They are generally stories of human sacrifice which included descriptions of the problem which required this death as a solution, the supernatural effects of this death, and the mechanism of how this death worked to solve that problem. In contrast with these accounts of effective death, neither Greek nor Jewish accounts of Martyrdom portrayed martyrs’ death as “effective.” Using the death of a soldier as an example, Wallace and Rusk explain that “A soldier who died *for* his country fought to the death for his course and dies in the process of doing so. The soldier intended to serve and protect the country, not to die. The death itself did not function as the mechanism that defeated the enemy.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid, 199.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 234.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 235.

Looking at the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death, we see none of them identifying any problem which would require a death with supernatural effects. Notably, this is because, unlike the post-Reformation tradition which indicates God's forgiveness of our sins as the problem which required Jesus' effective death, "Jews believed that God forgave sins through repentance, and the gospel accounts endorsed this view consistently and recorded it concurringly."⁵⁸ The authors call our attention to the glaring fact that

The Gospels provide lengthy and detailed accounts of the death of Jesus, and yet provide no clear description of any supernatural effects of his death. ... No gospel writer mentioned the idea that the world's sin centered on Jesus when he died on the cross, nor did they state that Jesus suffered the punishment for all humanity. Despite describing the whole course of Jesus at length, they failed completely to mention any concept of effective death. This omission by the gospel writers thus challenges strongly the idea that they believed Jesus' death had an important and supernatural effect.⁵⁹

In comparison, New Testament statement about Jesus dying "for us" and other similar constructs fit very well with the ancient genre for describing martyrdom. Jesus' Resurrection is God's unprecedented validation of Jesus' brave and selfless death for his cause. Furthermore, because the idea of martyrdom was qualitatively different from the idea of effective death, "presence of martyrdom language in the New Testament should not be taken as proof that Jesus had a supernatural effect. If anything, they should incline us away from that conclusion."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid, 236.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 237.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 236.

Wallace and Rusk see the interpretation of Jesus' death as "effective" to be the result of *overreliance* on a small number of brief and ambiguous verses, mostly from the Pauline epistles. Here, they refer to some expert's in-depth investigation which substantiates their view,⁶¹ but they try to get their point across primarily by appealing to some general observations. For example, several of these "proof texts" are regarded by New Testament scholars as containing some of the most widely debated phrases for translation and interpretation—either because they involve rare Greek words that have obscure meanings, or because the meaning of key terms is unclear, or because the difficulties they present when pierced together with the logic of the wider passage, or because the ambiguity as to how the writer interpreted the quoted passage. Tellingly, many different interpretations of these verses exist today. Even taking these "proof texts" as they are,

The contexts of these passages do not elaborate on any notion of effective death. They do not spell out a mechanism by which such a death might have worked. In fact, whenever passages elaborate on the cause for which Christ died or draw an application from his death, they always do so in terms of his cause of moral transformation. . . . Paul seems to have never expanded on his brief allusions to Christ's death by expounding the idea that his death had supernatural effects. Conversely, whenever Paul did expand on these allusions, *he always did so in terms of moral transformation.*⁶²

The best example of this is 1 Peter 2: 21-25. While, using the suffering servant imagery from Isaiah 53:5, it does state that Christ bore our sin in his suffering on the cross, it also states immediately following that "*so that* we may die to sins and live for

⁶¹ For example, see New Testament scholar David A. Brondo's book *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

⁶² Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 238.

righteousness.” Thus, there is a dire scarcity of New Testament verses that could really be used to support the “effective death” interpretation. Wallace and Rusk reason that, if early Christians had really understood Jesus’ death as having far-reaching supernatural effects, they would have mentioned it much more often and elaborated it more much directly. Instead, we do not find unambiguous and widespread discussions of Jesus’ “effective death.” And so it seems very problematic to circulate such a central concept of salvation which was built on such a small number of brief and ambiguous sentences.

The Early Christians’ Key Doctrines of Salvation

It is clear from the above that, early Christians thought of the person of Jesus as a moral transformer; Jesus saved them by morally transforming them, and not by some sacrificial ritual or some superficial mechanism that left their moral status untouched. Having this Christological foundation properly laid, and with the benefit of modern New Testament scholarship, Wallace and Rusk devote the main portion of their book to explore how early Christians really understood “final judgment,” “faith,” “justification,” and “grace and forgiveness.” Together, these constitutive concepts unveiled to us the original Christian paradigm of salvation, which is none other than moral transformation.

First, to appreciate salvation within its appropriate horizon, the authors examine early Christians’ eschatological understanding of the “final judgment.” Notably, certain post-Reformation views prevalent today teach that final judgment depends only on beliefs and trust in God; even though moral conduct is good, it does not have much direct bearing on the final judgment. In contrast, Wallace and Rusk point to many passages in

the Old Testament which speak about God's judgment after death that is made according to the virtuousness of a person during his life. This belief is particularly emphasized during periods of injustice Jews experienced, which gave them much hope in the face of severe prosecution and even martyrdom. More importantly, according to their reading of the New Testament, Jesus and his followers largely endorsed this common Jewish doctrine; they continued to believe that God would base his final reward and punishment of a person on his moral dispositions, on how he lived his life. Early Christians understood God's final judgment to be personal and intelligent rather than legalistic. "Conduct" referred to the outward manifestation of a person's inward disposition; as Jesus teaches, "a tree is known by its fruit" (Mt 7:20).

Based on this eschatological outlook, the early Christians considered imitation of Jesus vital not optional. Their confidence in obtaining a positive final judgment was rooted in living out a Christ-imitating life and developing a Christ-imitating disposition. To show this, Wallace and Rusk go through every book in the New Testament to demonstrate that the texts are suffused with moral exhortations and calls for perseverance. Moreover, what the New Testament authors repeatedly held up as the central theological theme was not "faith," but love for others out of which correct conduct flow. Remarkably, the pervasiveness of moral admonition in the biblical texts attests to a widely-held conviction that people did have the ability to change with the help of God.

A crucial but severely distorted concept of salvation is “faith.” Notably, certain post-Reformation teaching posits almost an antithesis between faith and moral strivings, defining “faith” mainly as belief and trust in doctrines of who Jesus is and how he saves people. The authors urgently point out that “this post Reformation concept of faith is *almost the complete opposite of what the New Testament writers meant by the word.*”⁶³ Specifically, recent studies of how the ancient Greek word for “faith” (*pistis*) was used have discovered that it most often meant faithfulness, loyalty, and the attitude of commitment and obedience. The word *pistis* is used in this sense when the New Testament writers speak about John the Baptist, Moses, slave masters, and other teachers; and it carries exactly the same meaning when referred to Jesus. Even though early Christians did consider beliefs about Jesus important, “no New Testament passages advocate beliefs, trust or reliance in ideas about what Christ achieved as the grounds for final judgment,” nor did the New Testament writers refer to such beliefs when they spoke of “faith” toward Jesus.⁶⁴ For them, “faith” (*pistis*) toward Jesus meant faithfulness toward Jesus; moreover, “faith” was not the opposite of efforts and moral strivings, because

this faithfulness encompasses loyalty, obedience and perseverance. . . . In their minds, being faithful to Jesus meant being committed to his movements, his teachings, his example and his cause. It meant obeying his teachings and striving to live in the way he had instructed. It meant remaining loyal to him and

⁶³ Ibid, 121.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 136.

persevering in the way of life that he had taught. For the early Christians, living rightly and being faithful to Christ were one and the same.⁶⁵

Another poorly understood concept is “righteousness.” As Wallace and Rusk explain, this is particularly relevant for a correct understanding of the Apostle Paul’s teaching of “justification by faith.” For Paul, a person is considered righteous by staying faithful to Jesus; “God considered righteous the people who faithfully followed the example and teachings of Jesus. . . . Both righteousness and positive judgment depend upon the same criterion,” i.e., moral character.⁶⁶ Relatedly, to discredit the forensically driven take of the concept, Wallace and Rusk look into new scholarship on the Greek word *dikaiosyne* for righteousness. They explain that, current translation of “justice” is based on the Latin word *iustitia*, not the original Greek word *dikaiosyne*. That translation was done in 1600 A.D. by scholars who were well-versed in Latin and had a heavily legal frame of mind. To them, *iustitia* appeared to denote a person’s forensic and legal standing of guilt or innocence, rather than actual conduct. In contrast, recent biblical study focused on the original Greek word *dikaiosyne*, and

scholars have found that the word generally has little to do in the courts of law. Generally, in the Old Testament, *dikaiosyne* concerns correct behavior—moral virtual and good conduct—with virtually no mention of a legal meaning. As one scholar comments about the meaning of *dikaiosyne* in the LXX: “There can be little doubt that as applied to human beings the term usually has an ethical rather than forensic flavor.” Studies in the New Testament reached similar conclusions.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid, 122.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 158.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 138.

One other set of poorly understood concepts are “forgiveness” and “grace,” which are at the center of the question Martin Luther agonized over: “how does a holy God justify the sinner?” The answer Wallace and Rusk find to this question, in a nutshell, is that *God justifies the ungodly by helping them become godly*; it is indeed only “through faith and not by work,” in the sense that justification can only be achieved with God’s help and not by human effort itself. First, regarding God’s forgiveness, the authors acknowledge that it is often invoked as the reason behind the forensic conceptualization of “righteousness” and “justification”—the idea is, God imputes the “alien” righteousness of Jesus to us independently of how we have lived our lives. Consistent with their discussions above on “sacrifice,” in the authors’ view, *no such legalistic gesture was considered either necessary or adequate for obtaining God’s forgiveness*. Instead, first century Jews commonly held the view that “if people repented of their sinfulness and turned to live righteously, God would graciously forgive their past wrongs. They used the common phrase, repentance and forgiveness, to express the idea. . . . No Jew worried about how they could escape the guilt of their sins before God. They knew how—through repentance and forgiveness.”⁶⁸ On the authors’ reading, the New Testament authors shared this belief in God’s mercy and forgiveness resulting from sincere repentance; together with the doctrine of final judgment, this understanding of God’s forgiveness motivated people to truly repent and be morally transformed.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 159.

More importantly, for the early Christians, the concept of “grace” went far beyond God’s gracious forgiveness and acceptance of the ungodly; “it meant the active involvement by God and his agents in order to free people from the power of sinfulness and to lead them into a righteous way of life.”⁶⁹ This undeserved grace from God is manifested, above all, in God’s sending Jesus to deliver people out of their sinful ways of living and show them the way to eternal salvation, which they could not have done by themselves without this divine intervention. And so, their ideas of “salvation by grace” did not at all contradict their doctrines of righteous living and final judgment. God sent Jesus to them precisely as the result of God’s concern for how people lived their lives, and it is *the* grace of God that “he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) and so make them fitted for eternal life.

Further Supports from Historical Study and Theological Reasoning

Wallace and Rusk use the main portion of their book to show that, early Christians understood the “final judgment,” “faith,” “righteousness,” “forgiveness and grace” consistently around moral transformation. In the last part of their book, the authors offer some further supports for the transformation paradigm from historical studies of literatures generated from the first few Christian centuries. They also issue some further critiques against the forensic paradigm based on theological rationales. First, the authors introduce data from studies of the history of doctrinal developments in Christianity to show that, from the period immediately after the New Testament till the fourth century, Christians held the transformation paradigm of salvation. This conclusion is based on

⁶⁹ Ibid, 176.

studies of over 7,000 pages of Christian manuscripts surviving from this historical period. This huge source of ancient literature encompasses writings, in chronological order, by “the apostolic fathers,” “the apologists,” and the “theologians.”⁷⁰ In Wallace and Rusk’s view, it is especially significant that independent studies of Christian writers from the first two centuries uncovered a paradigm of salvation which is consistent with what they themselves found from reading the New Testament authors. This shows that the transformation view is an accurate understanding of the original Christian paradigm of salvation, because

the generation of Christians immediately following the apostles learned Christianity firsthand from the people that Jesus himself had taught. They in turn passed it on to the next generation. Thus, these early Christians were very well-placed to learn Christian doctrines accurately. We have no reason to presume that Christians worldwide forgot the heart of the Christian message after the completion of the New Testament.⁷¹

After the early centuries, aberrations occurred. Wallace and Rusk show that several major doctrinal changes took place from the fourth century to the Reformation which led the tradition away from the original paradigm of salvation. Although these changes were usually the result of misunderstandings and influences from evolving culture and they provoked fiery oppositions during their times and for centuries following, once established, these changes were taught as self-evident norms of Christianity.

⁷⁰ I may add that, the commonly accepted view that *Theosis* is a dominant theological theme during this historical period seems to furnish an objective validation of the authors’ claim here.

⁷¹ Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 250.

One of the two alternations the authors particularly target is the doctrine of “penal substitution”: “either in the sense that our sins are imputed to Christ and his obedience to us, or in the sense that God was angry with him for our sakes and inflicted on him punishment due to us.”⁷² On their reading, this idea is largely absent from the bible. It is also entirely absent from Christian writings from the earliest period despite of their lengthy discussions of Jesus’ salvific achievement; and so, “Protestant scholars of doctrinal history often express puzzlement at the absence of these Reformation ideas in the early Christian writings.”⁷³

The most worrisome issue with the talk of “penal substitution” is that it falsely shifts the attention of God’s forgiveness of sin from *our repentance* to Jesus’ supposedly sacrificial death. But the scripture clearly reveals that God freely forgives those who sincerely repent without any demand for sacrifice. For example, in the Old Testament, prophet Ezekiel taught that God prefers to forgive rather than punish sinners (Ez 18:32). Also, in the Gospels, we read that during Jesus’ earthly ministry he regularly told repented sinners that God *had* forgiven them *before* he even went on the cross; Jesus also instructed people to forgive others just as God forgives them. Here, Wallace and Rusk particularly emphasize God’s freedom and willingness to forgive *without* issuing them commensurate punishments—so long as we repent, stating that “The Jews believed that God offered forgiveness freely out of love if the person repents. They believed that God

⁷² Ibid, 295.

⁷³ Ibid, 295.

could forgive out of loving kindness and choose to avoid punishing sinners. He *would* forgive people who changed their ways.”⁷⁴

But when the original concept of repentance-forgiveness was lost in history, “penal substitution” theory was invented to handle the problem created by a blurred view of God’s forgiveness. Specifically, contrary to the God of Ezekiel who declares that “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live,” Athanasius thought instead that “it would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon his word and that man, having transgressed, should not die.” This gave him the reason to suggest his “satisfaction theory,” which was carried over later on by Anselm who explicitly stated that God cannot forgive freely without punishment. The Reformers followed this line of thinking and developed it into the concept of “penal substitution” which has persisted till today. As seen from the above, such a twisted sense of “forgiveness” not only contradicts the biblical depiction of a graceful God who forgives repentant sinners freely out of abundant love, it also has no historical basis in Israel’s sacrificial customs.

Likewise, Wallace and Rusk see the modern notion of “saving faith” as growing out of a misunderstanding of the early Christian term for faithfulness. What’s more, symptomatic of doctrinal meanderings over the history, this notion is logically incoherent with the usually heard-together concept of “penal substitution.” Specifically, it has been frequently claimed that, Christ’s “penal substitution” becomes atonement for us, *if* we believe, trust, and rely on what Christ has done for us—hence the “saving faith.” The

⁷⁴ Ibid, 303.

logical disconnect in this claim is this: “If Jesus has indeed saved us by paying our debt on the cross, it follows that our debt is now paid and that God will not judge us negatively. Jesus would have paid our debt *regardless* of whether or not we believe that he had paid it. ... Penal substitution need *not* require any belief in it in order to be effective.”⁷⁵

To conclude, Wallace and Rusk find problematic claims such as these which obstruct a clear hearing of the original Christian Gospel of salvation as genuine moral transformation. In their own words,

Such a claim makes the teaching and example of Christ valueless for salvation. It nullifies the significance of imitating Christ for final judgment. Moral conduct might still be desirable, and God might still command it. We could still learn from the teachings and example of Christ. Moral transformation might even be an inevitable consequence of the working of the Holy Spirit. Yet, claiming the final judgment does not depend on character makes all these only of secondary import. Whatever is needed to gain a positive final judgment becomes the most important focus, and the early Christian message of moral transformation becomes a message we need not actually follow.⁷⁶

In Search for the Biblical Theology of Salvation—Paul Rainbow, The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification (2005)

In previous section, Wallace and Rusk build their case for the soteriological centrality of sanctification against some post-Reformation teachings prevalent today. Besides Reformation theology, teachings of the Apostle Paul on “justification by faith alone” is the other source often appealed to when criticisms are raised against the sanctification emphasis, claiming that it is a form of salvation by works that Paul

⁷⁵ Ibid, 306.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 307.

vigorously opposed. In this section, I present another instance of recent scholarship in biblical theology which particularly aims to clarify the biblical doctrine of justification. All in all, the author finds that a truly biblical concept of justification contains a transformative aspect; what's more, the bible teaches that salvation hinges on actual moral transformation evinced by good works.

An Urgent Concern over Antinomianism

In the Preface of *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (2005),⁷⁷ Baptist bible scholar Paul Rainbow describes his book as “the harvest of some three decades of prayerful study of the Bible and of Christian theology, with one eye on worrisome trends in contemporary evangelical Christianity in North America and Britain.”⁷⁸ Specifically, Rainbow is aware that “For nearly half a millennium, *sola fide* has been a rallying cry of Protestantism. The phrase is supposed to sum up the gospel Paul preached, over against all humanistic hubris in religion.”⁷⁹ Due to the following reasons, though, the phrase often has antinomianism lurking behind it and so “yields up a large share of its utility.”⁸⁰ Theoretically, Rainbow thinks that such singular emphasis on “faith alone” reflects a Reformation bias toward Paul within the biblical canon, and a further bias toward selected texts even within the Pauline corpus.

⁷⁷ Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005).

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, vii.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, xv.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, xxi.

Without the full biblical message in view, “stress on faith alone severs justification too cleanly from sanctification,” and makes it difficult to convincingly demonstrate the theological necessity for sanctification.⁸¹ Rainbow worries that such narrow emphasis

renders the “faith alone” doctrine susceptible to an inherent ethical groundlessness. If justification be *wholly* independent of sanctification, then the requirement of sanctity becomes an add-on, and does not arise from the very nature of God’s gift of righteousness. On that hypothesis, the imperative to do good does not arise out of the fact that good behavior is part and parcel of righteousness itself, but from a different principle and collection of scriptural texts. There will always be those who argue from justification by faith alone that whatever follows is optional. And they have, not Scripture, but a relentless logic on their side.⁸²

Empirically, Rainbow is troubled by the church history which shows that “From the sixteenth century onwards ... antinomianism has clung like a shadow to every conquest won by the doctrine of sola fide.”⁸³ He also cites concurringly that “One prominent Lutheran theologian has dubbed antinomianism ‘*the* heresy of the contemporary American church’.”⁸⁴ The cause for that is “faith alone” leaves out the nature of the faith that saves, namely, that which engenders genuine transformation; and so, it easily gives rise to the distorted soteriological idea that forgiveness of sin or justification by faith is the saving mechanism in its own right. Like his fellow Protestants, Rainbow considers Scripture to be the area where such doctrinal dispute may be settled, and so he revisits pertinent teachings of Paul and James with his book. Rainbow

⁸¹ Ibid, xvii.

⁸² Ibid, xix.

⁸³ Ibid, xx.

⁸⁴ Ibid, xx.

challenges his fellow Protestants that “If Protestantism is to live up its radical claim to derive its doctrines from the bible, then its doctrine of justification needs” to incorporate *all* scriptural data.⁸⁵ The part of his thesis directly related to my investigation is this: “For persons to be justified in the full sense, God’s present imputation of righteousness to those who are incorporated in Christ by faith must be legitimized in the end by his approbation of an *actual* righteousness which he brings about in them during the meantime.”⁸⁶

The Dual Aspects of Grace and the Dual Aspects of Faith according to Paul

To clearly unpack the Apostle Paul’s multilayered doctrine of justification, Paul Rainbow underscores several conceptual duals in Paul’s thinking; isolating the two parts of these duals from each other will lead to distorted and false doctrines. First is the dual aspects of God’s grace: the *charitable* aspect of grace is represented by the imputation of Christ’s alien righteousness into us at conversion, which grants us an acceptable standing before God but does not change our sinful nature; in comparison, the *transforming* aspect of grace “conceives and gives birth to a new life, a new creation ... a bias toward actual righteousness. It enlists the freed will as a secondary cause in bringing forth the fruit of good works.”⁸⁷ These two aspects, “the charitable and the empowering, are notionally

⁸⁵ Ibid, 174.

⁸⁶ Ibid, xvi.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 139.

distinct but they permeate one another in reality. For us to tap into one without the other is no option.”⁸⁸

Correspondingly, saving faith as the receptacle of God’s grace has two aspects as well, best reflected in faith’s dual-relationship to Christ—the “indivisible object of Christian faith.”⁸⁹ Rainbow identifies from the first half of Romans “a double boon” that Christ administers to his followers: “Christ is our substitute who died and rose again for our benefit; he is also the archetype into whose image God’s power changes us.”⁹⁰ And so, saving faith holds onto Christ undivided “in his dual capacity as our legal representative and as the influence who remakes us like himself.”⁹¹ Saving faith is a “vital union” with Christ the Head through which the believer as Christ’s Body “enjoys a share in God’s positive verdict upon him, *and* is remade after the pattern of his obedience.”⁹² Because the Savior who died for us is the one and the same person who transforms us, the faith that saves cannot divide God’s total package of grace through Christ by believing in Jesus as our benefactor without believing him as our liberator from sin as well. Notably, saving faith differs from futile faith by good works, which is the “fruit of the Spirit,” the natural result of God’s grace working in us.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 129.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 124.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 124.

⁹¹ Ibid, 132.

⁹² Ibid, 129.

The Initial vs. the Final Justification according to Paul

Rainbow identifies in Paul two distinct phases of justification: the initial, which takes place at conversion; the final, which takes place on the Last Day. In Rainbow's view, such distinction is quite consistent with the general eschatological outlook of the New Testament as a whole, especially regarding the arrival of God's Kingdom in two phases, and thus the "already" and "not-yet" nature of it. The twofold distinction in justification is a reflection of that in the personal realm: "We are 'already' justified, but we are 'not yet' justified. Now in the present we have tasted of our future justification. The justification of God's people has been inaugurated; it has yet to be consummated."⁹³ He thinks that, since the Apostle Paul uses the same concept and terminology when speaking about these two different phases, both together constitute the complete Pauline doctrine of justification. Different from the initial justification where we are imputed with "alien" righteousness of Jesus and so are not actually righteous, at the final justification judgment will be made according to "deeds," the outward "index of faith's genuineness;" it will be made according to our "actual righteousness."⁹⁴ As Rainbow puts it, "From the human side, what is required for inaugural justification is faith (Rom 3:28), and for final justification, faith expressed in love (Gal. 5:6) or work(s) (2 Thes. 1:11; Jas. 2:24)."⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid, 174.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 194.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 226.

Furthermore, Rainbow gathers data to show that, contrary to some may claim, “What will be at stake for believers at the last judgment is their eternal destiny, not just the secondary issue of rewards.”⁹⁶ In other words, what hangs in the balance for sanctification is not some trivial matter, but eternal salvation itself. On Rainbow’s reading, even though determining ultimate destinies and issuing rewards and punishments both take place at the end, they are only “theoretically distinct:”

There is a total lack of evidence in Paul for the notion of two or more separate judgments for different purposes. On the contrary, whether salvation or final destruction (1 Cor 3:15, 17), and what rewards for those who are saved (1 Cor 3:14-15), are to be settled in one and the same assize (1 Cor 3:15-17). The primary purpose of the Last Judgment is to pronounce the everlasting destinies for each person according to actual righteousness—including the believers. The fact that a believer’s eternal fate is yet to be determined in the End can be seen, for example, from the passage where Paul advises the Corinthian church to do certain things so that the spirit of a person gone astray may “be saved” in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5). As another example, Paul also says a believer who suffers the loss of his work because the work is not founded upon Christ may himself still “be saved,” even though just barely as if being rescued from burning fire (1 Cor 3:15). Paul also clearly warns people in church that those who persist in sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5).⁹⁷

Between justification inaugurated and justification consummated is the Christian walk during which “Christians work out their salvation, energized by God in will and deed.”⁹⁸ Rainbow thinks that, for Paul, the doctrine of sanctification is an integral part of the doctrine of justification, in that it describes the imminent path between the two events through which our nature is gradually transformed by God to be in conformity to his Son;

⁹⁶ Ibid, 203.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 203.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 175.

for God justifies no one whom he does not also intend to sanctify (Rom 5:18-19; 8:29). Faith is the means and not the end in and of itself for our salvation—it is the means to sanctify us to become Christ-like. Some may protest the “already” and “not-yet” distinction of justification by saying that it does not provide us “assurance.” Rainbow responds by saying that the scripture establishes assurance not by stressing “faith alone,” but by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit and the external fruits of the Spirit observable to us. Using the Apostle Paul as the example, Rainbow advocates “a spirituality of duty rather than of possession,” reminding the reader that

Paul’s daily spirituality was not centered in answering the question, “How can I know for sure that I am already saved?” but in the question, “Am I responding in trust and obedience to my Lord in the here and now?” ... Nowhere in Paul’s epistles do we find a paragraph which addresses nervousness about individual status and destiny. ... Paul devoted himself to faithfully carrying out his commission in the strength of God’s enablement, sure that God will see to his final salvation. Paul’s strategy on the Christian journey is well summed up in the motto: “Rest in the Lord without presumption; Labor with the Lord without anxiety.”⁹⁹

Justification according to James

There is no question that, the Apostle James teaches that in order to be justified at the final judgment, Christians need to perfect their faith by bringing forth good fruit of their faith (Jas 2:14). Moreover, it is arguably a consensus view today that Paul and James are in substantive agreement on this topic, despite their different formulations of the theme under different contexts. Besides our discussion above, the most direct evidence for this is the verse where Paul states that “the only thing that counts is faith made effective through love.” (Gal 5:6) As to the fact that James and Paul do place their

⁹⁹ Ibid. 248.

emphasis differently, Rainbow highlights the Apostle James' often overlooked prominence in early Christianity, reminding the reader that

Paul deferred to James consistently as his ecclesiastical superior. On five occasions Paul went to Jerusalem to report on the progress of this mission; James did not seek out Paul. James was the judge of Paul's gospel (Gal 2:2), not Paul James's. When competing missionaries were in deadlock, Antioch appealed to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for decision, never Jerusalem to another local church. In the primitive church, James was the more universally known and respected personage. That is not to say that Paul was any less inspired by God, or a less reliable witness to divine revelation in his own right. Nor is it to deny that he was more articulate theologically than other evangelists and churchmen of his day. What it does mean is that when we speak of a canon, of a plumb line for determining what is normative in doctrine, anything James says weighs at least as heavily as what Paul says on the same subject.¹⁰⁰

The Apostle James' emphasis on "the fruit" is particularly helpful for safeguarding against the constant danger of antinomianism, which apparently flared up frequently during Paul's mission to the Gentiles despite his apostolic caliber for clearly articulating the Gospel of salvation. In Rainbow's succinct words,

Paul's success ... had a downside. While many were converted to his preaching of justification by faith, some also corrupted his message to vile ends and used it to support their conformity to the lifestyle of the society around them. Among those who came to Paul's side in resisting these elements were, notably, James, Cephas and John—the very pillars who had ratified Paul's ways of putting the good news (Gal 2:9). It is from the highest echelon of leadership in the church, therefore, that we hear an urgent appeal to use caution in setting forth Paul's doctrine of grace.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 123.

An Addendum: In Search for
the Complete Depiction of Salvation in the Bible

Paul Rainbow's work uncovers the Apostle Paul's "comprehensive doctrine of justification" which anchors justification ultimately upon the eschatological goal of sanctification. Notably, Rainbow's distinction between the initial and the final justification enables us to smoothly reconcile the few Pauline verses Wallace and Rusk find ambiguous and difficult with the transformation paradigm overall. Before wrapping up this section, I want to briefly introduce more scholarship in biblical theology which helps us see even more clearly the soteriological centrality of sanctification in the New Testament.

Protestant bible scholar Brenda B. Colijn's *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (2010) is motivated by her conviction that the lopsided slogan of "faith alone" leaves out the vastly rich variety of New Testament images for salvation.¹⁰² Her examination of nearly thirty New Testament images for salvation unveils that genuine moral transformation is the eschatological aim which undergirds all the important soteriological concepts in the New Testament. For example, the scripture tells that our justification via Jesus' death on the cross "reconciles" us to God, justification "makes possible a restored relationship with God." Hence Colijn argues that justification should be viewed above all as relational.¹⁰³ It is "not merely the declaration of a new legal status

¹⁰² Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 210.

but the creation of a new relationship.”¹⁰⁴ Importantly, this new relationship with God cannot help but have transformative impact on us. As another example, Colijin states that “salvation through participation has a strong foundation in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of John and Paul.”¹⁰⁵ The end result of this process is Christ being formed in us (Gal 4:19) and we truly “participate” in God and reflect God’s character and glory. In her concluding chapter Colijin reiterates that the New Testament understands salvation not as an external transaction outside of us, but as an essentially internal transformation that “involves a radical reorientation of one’s life that initiates a process of growth into the image of Christ.”¹⁰⁶

The main discourse among the research on Paul in recent decades has been the “new perspective on Paul” (NPP). The term was coined by James Dunn in a 1983 article titled “The New Perspective on Paul,”¹⁰⁷ and it was later amplified by other well-known scholars such as Krister Stendahl and E. P. Sanders. The “new perspective” has to do with the Apostle Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. The “old perspective” interprets the apostle’s objection to justification by work as saying that works in general do not factor into salvation. Even though scholars under the umbrella term the “new perspective” nuance it differently, they are in complete agreement against the “old perspective” on human works. The NPP interprets Paul’s objection as against ritualistic

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 212.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 248.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 141.

¹⁰⁷ James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65, no. 2 (1983): 95-122.

religious observations, but not good Christian works as the fruit of the Spirit. According to the NPP, it is a grave misrepresentation of Paul to separate faith from good works, or even set them in opposition to each other for salvation.

Another related insight of New Testament studies came from reexaminations of the meaning of “righteousness” in the Bible. As Paul Rainbow recounts, in the 1960s, a group of biblical theologians by the name of the Käsemann School traced Paul’s concept of justification to the background notion of “righteousness” in the Old Testament, which means “faithfulness to the terms of a covenant, whether on God’s part or that of humans.”¹⁰⁸ Specifically, they saw Paul’s phrase “the righteousness of God” as the key to his entire soteriology, and it denotes God’s redemptive action to save his people and all creation. More importantly, they clarify that God’s “justifying” action by pronouncing something in the right is effective rather than simply declarative, because “his is a creative Word which effects what it declares and thus brings into being a new creation.”¹⁰⁹ Later on, J. A. Ziesler and John Reumann built on the works of the Kasemann School on “righteousness” and traced in Greek the noun “righteous” (*dikaiosyne*) and the verb “justify” (*dikaioun*) to a common stem (*dikai-*). This, to them, suggests that “being declared righteous and actually being righteous may have something

¹⁰⁸ Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

to do with each other after all, in spite of the split in Protestant theology between justification and sanctification.”¹¹⁰

One last development I want to introduce is the so-called “*pistis Christou*” debate, which we already encountered somewhat in the work by Wallace and Rusk (2005). David Stubbs’ recent article offers a comprehensive look at this still ongoing debate within the New Testament circle.¹¹¹ According to Stubbs’ account, the controversy has to do with the Greek phrase *pistis Christou* and its near equivalents. This phrase appears about ten times in the Pauline epistles, all within theologically crucial sections which have been claimed to be the proof-texts for the Reformation understanding of “justification by faith.” The issue here is “whether ‘faith’ in these phrases refers principally to the believer’s ‘faith in Christ,’ as traditionally understood, or should be translated and understood as ‘the faith of Christ,’” which means faithfulness of Christ and faithfulness to Christ.¹¹² In the article, Stubbs defends the faithfulness interpretation, on the ground that it “not only serves well in understanding of Paul, but it creates new harmonies out of the old antitheses or disjunctions between old covenant and new and between Paul and the Gospels;” more importantly, the way of interpreting “faith” reveals an organic unity

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹¹¹ David Stubbs, “The Shape of Soteriology and the *Pistis Christou* Debate,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 2 (May 2008): 137-157.

¹¹² Ibid, 137.

between Paul's influential theology on justification and Paul's equally important writings on ethics.¹¹³

A Growing Consensus from Ecumenical Dialogues and Historical Studies

The previous two sections demonstrate the soteriological centrality of sanctification from the perspectives of the bible and early Christianity. The end of last section also touches on three major developments in the New Testament studies which at least indirectly cast their vote for the primacy of sanctification. Starting this section, I will zoom out the lens to take in a fuller view of the overall state of the question, particularly as manifested through discussions related to the doctrine of justification. As Paul Rainbow reports, ever since the 1950s, the question of "what God requires people to do in the present life in order to secure their entrance into the life of the world to come has again become a storm center of controversy among Christians."¹¹⁴ Several discourses from entirely different domains have been going on which, one way or the other, wrestled with the Reformation doctrine of justification. In this section, I present related developments in ecumenical dialogues and in historical studies related to Luther and Calvin. And we will discover again a widely converging theme regarding the soteriological primacy of sanctification. In the next section, I will present recent exchanges in theology related to the justification-sanctification dual, and this will lead to

¹¹³ Ibid, 155.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, xv.

my comments and reflections on the necessity of postmortem purgation in the concluding section of this chapter.

Ecumenical Dialogues Related to the Doctrine of Justification

The importance of the soteriological question may be seen from the extremely wide and quite sustained attentions it has regained in recent decades. Paul Rainbow credits Hans Kung's dissertation *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* in 1957 with breaking the ice for dialogue after 400 years' stalemate. Kung claims to find that the Council of Trent and the Reformed theologian Karl Barth are in substantive agreement on the doctrine of justification. Paul O'Callaghan traces the beginning of the ecumenical conversations as far back as 1956 when some French speaking Lutherans and Catholics, called the Group des Dombes, engaged with the doctrine of justification in their dialogue on "original sin."¹¹⁵ The earliest ecumenical document which directly dealt with the doctrine of justification may be the Lutheran-Catholic "Malta Report" titled *The Gospel and the Church* (1972). Despite their brevity, these earlier attempts laid bare the fundamental issues and inspired further conversations. After that, there are as many as nineteen important documents on justification generated from dialogues in which either Lutherans or Catholics were not involved. They dated as early as 1966, with conversation partners from the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Orthodox in geographic regions of Europe, North America, and even Russia.

¹¹⁵ Paul O'Callaghan, *Fides Christi: The Justification Debate* (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1997).

But the most significant advances on this ecumenical front are made between the Catholics and the Lutherans. Anthony Lane recounts as many as eight documents produced from their dialogues over the last fifty years. They are part of a cumulative effort to identify common beliefs, clear up misunderstandings, and spotlight issues yet to be resolved.¹¹⁶ Briefly, after Kung's 1957 dissertation with its earth-shattering claim, the next important document was produced in 1983 by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Ministries, the US branch of the Lutheran World Federation, titled *Justification by Faith*. In 1986, as the result of several years of bilateral conversation, a Joint Ecumenical Commission on the Examination of the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations, mostly Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians in Germany, generated *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Apply?* which looked specifically at the condemnations issued by each side during Reformation against the teachings of the other. In 1987, the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) produced a document titled *Salvation and the Church: An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission ARCIC II*. In 1992, the English Roman Catholic-Methodist Committee issued a document titled "Justification—A Consensus Statement" as the result of their meetings since the early 80s. In 1994, a lengthy report titled *Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification* was published by a group in Germany which explored the relationship between justification and ecclesiology. Again in 1994,

¹¹⁶ Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006).

another important article titled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) was released in the United States, representing views of a group of eight Evangelical and seven Catholic leaders. A follow-up article endorsed by another group of eighteen Evangelicals and fifteen Roman Catholics titled “The Gift of Salvation,” also known as ECT II, was published in 1997 as an effort to resolve some of the controversies broke out after the issuance of ECT I.

The most noteworthy document from the Catholic-Lutheran exchange has to be the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ), which was signed by officials of the Lutheran World Fellowship (LWF) and the Vatican on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. Overall, this landmark document gives the impression that “at least some propositions put forward by the two sides in the sixteenth century, perceived as contradictory in the polemic atmosphere of the time, may be viewed as complementary aspects of a complex truth.”¹¹⁷ David Truemper identifies the upshot of this document in §15, which declares the inherently transformative nature of justification as the following: “together we confess: by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to do good works.”¹¹⁸ Another significant paragraph is §18 which, while affirming the uniquely important role of the doctrine of

¹¹⁷ Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 3.

¹¹⁸ David G. Truemper, “Introduction to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” in *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids, MN: Baker Academic, 2006), 29-42.

justification in Lutheranism, underscores the innate connection between doctrines of justification and sanctification as the following: “more than just one part of Christian doctrine, it stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other.” Interestingly, evangelical theologian Tony Lane states his observation of JDDJ that “the dialogue documents generally accept the Catholic definition of justification.”¹¹⁹

Is Lane correct in saying that JDDJ articulates a doctrine of justification which in fact reflects the Catholic emphasis on sanctification? Section 4 of the document generates the following seven carefully worded assertions designed to address key aspects of the Reformation controversy. Based on my reading of them, Lane’s assessment of JDDJ is quite accurate:

1. We can confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.
2. We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ.
3. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ.
4. We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God’s unconditional justifying grace.
5. We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the gospel of “apart from works prescribed by the law.”

¹¹⁹ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 155.

6. We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God.

7. We confess together that good works—a Christian life lived in faith, hope and the love—follow justification and are its fruits.¹²⁰

It is not surprising that various parties' reactions to JDDJ reflect their different stands on the doctrine. But it is quite interesting that Baptist theologian Tony Lane concludes that evangelical doctrines on salvation are in fact much more in line with the Catholics' "transformationalist" view of justification, whereas the "declarative" view of their fellow Protestant Lutherans which emphasizes justification more as an acquittal or an imputation of Christ's alien righteousness is largely absent from it.

The "New Perspectives" on Luther and on Calvin

Developments in recent decades not only resulted in the "new perspective on Paul," but also the "new perspectives" on the Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, which drive a substantive wedge between the Reformers and Lutheranism and Calvinism in their forensic emphasis for justification. The most shocking claim by the "new perspectives" may be that genuine "participation" in the divine nature is the controlling theme in both Luther and Calvin's soteriological thinking. For example, Marcus Johnson attempts to demonstrate a striking parallel between Luther and Calvin in their usage of the believer's "union with Christ" as the central motif for explicating Christ's saving

¹²⁰ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," 31 October 1999.

works.¹²¹ Even though both Calvin and Luther saw a forensic element in justification, they conceived justification above all as the direct consequence of the “union” through the indwelling Christ; for them, “faith justifies by reason of the fact that faith joins one to the Christ who justifies.”¹²² Moreover, faith necessarily entails spiritual renewal as the result of the vital union it draws the believer into; justification and sanctification are thus organically related to each other through the person of Christ. Johnson raises criticism against the post-Reformation soteriology in which Calvin and Luther’s marked emphasis on the transforming “union” with Christ has been lost. Similarly, Ted Peters conducts a search for the heart of the Reformation faith and concludes that, regarding the central question of “*how* does faith justify?”, both Luther’s and Calvin’s answer is by Christ’s real indwelling in the believer.¹²³ As he aptly puts, “the key to understanding how faith justifies is to see that it is not *faith* itself that justifies. Rather, it is *Christ* who is present in faith.”¹²⁴

Notably, this alternative reading of Luther was originated in the late 1970s by the “Finnish School” at the University of Helsinki as part of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue in Finland. The Finnish School argues that, consistent with the concept of “deification” in ancient and Eastern Christianity which Luther endorsed, his idea of justification is rooted

¹²¹ Marcus Johnson, “Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ,” *Fides et Historia* 39, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2007): 59-77.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²³ Ted Peters, “The Heart of the Reformation Faith,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 6-14.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

in his presupposition of Christ's actual presence in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*).¹²⁵ For Luther, justification as the result of a "real-ontic" participation entails "both declaring righteous and making righteous" via Christ's real indwelling in the believer through the Holy Spirit.¹²⁶ An evidence of Luther's both-and understanding of justification may be his usage of the classic notions of Christ as "grace" (*gratia*, favor) and "gift" (*donum*): "The former denotes that the sinner is declared righteous (the forensic aspect) and the latter that the person is made righteous (the effective aspect)."¹²⁷ The most classic example of Luther's own formulation of the "union" motif may be found in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535; WA 40:228-29). When describing "true faith," Luther says "it takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. ... Therefore, faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ." Luther's central premise on the real presence of Christ in the faith of the believer is vividly described by Luther scholar Paul Althaus as the following: "The believing heart holds fast to Christ just as the setting of a ring grips the jewel: we have Christ in faith. Only in faith are Christ and man

¹²⁵ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification in the Global Context," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 38, no. 1 (February 2011): 4-16.

¹²⁶ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "'Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics: Insights from the Finnish Interpretation of Luther's Theology,'" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 2 (April 2007): 89.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89. Similar discussion on Luther's dual motif of Christ as "grace" and "gift" may be found in Dean Zweck's article, "Union with Christ: Understanding of Justification from the Perspective of Christ's Real Presence," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 45, no. 3 (2011): 156-166. Also, see Jeffery G. Silcock's article, "Luther on Justification and Participation in the Divine Life: New Perspective on an Old Problem," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 127-139.

so joined together, so made one, that man in God's judgment participates in Christ's righteousness."¹²⁸

Among Calvin scholars, Marcus Johnson is the most recent example of those who see "union with Christ" as the controlling principle in Calvin's soteriology.¹²⁹ Johnson situates this debate highly within the "bedrock doctrinal convictions that undergird basic Protestant beliefs about salvation—that is, justification, sanctification, union with Christ, and the relationship between them (*ordo salutis*)".¹³⁰ His first argument for this alternative take on Calvin is that it is nearly impossible to comprehend many of the pivotal contents in Calvin's *Institutes* without the notion of "union with Christ." For example, Calvin opens his discussion on "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ" with a chapter on the Spirit-wrought union with Christ. As another example, Calvin begins his discussions of justification and sanctification by emphasizing that both benefits are "received only insofar as faith receives / grasps / possesses Christ *himself*."¹³¹ In Calvin's own words, "We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us, but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him."¹³²

¹²⁸ Thomas L. Sheridan, "Newman and Luther on Justification," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2001): 223.

¹²⁹ Marcus Johnson, "New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin? A Reply to Thomas Wenger," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (September 2008): 543-558.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 543.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 557.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 558.

(*Inst.* 3.11.10) Secondly, Johnson points to the sacramental nature of Calvin's applied soteriology, according to which the benefits of salvation can only be received through partaking in the sacraments of the blood and the body of Christ, which is by faith a mystical union between Christ and the believer.

There are several other findings in recent Calvin scholarship which help us appreciate the Reformer's soteriology under the overall tone more appropriate to it, namely, the goal of sanctification. For example, Alan Clifford discerns some significant differences between Calvin and the Calvinists.¹³³ Most strikingly, Clifford claims that the authentic perspective of Calvin holds a view of progressive justification, which is a gradual process of spiritual growth assisted every step by God's double-grace of forgiveness and sanctification. This process of salvation involves "a perpetual correlation between repeated pardon and progressive sanctification, with the proviso that 'justification' always means 'forgiveness' at every stage of a believer's pilgrimage."¹³⁴ As another example, Jonathan Rainbow highlights Calvin's characteristic rubric of double-grace (*duplex gratia*) as the correct way of understanding how the Reformer relates justification to sanctification.¹³⁵ On the one hand, Calvin intends to secure the assurance of salvation via the doctrine of gratuitous justification; on the other hand, he wants to preserve the mandate of Christian obedience via the doctrine of sanctification.

¹³³ Alan C. Clifford, "Justification: The Calvin-Saumur Perspective," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no.4 (2007): 331-348.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹³⁵ Jonathan H. Rainbow, "Double Grace: John Calvin's View of the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification," *Ex Auditu* (1989): 99-105.

The two sides cannot be separated because of the unity of God's grace behind them both; "Sanctification is salvation, just as much as justification is salvation."¹³⁶

The third example is the finding of the theme of "deification" in Calvin's soteriology.¹³⁷ Trevor Hart presents Calvin's understanding of the atonement as principally incarnational.¹³⁸ He finds that Calvin conceives our at-one-ment with God as being accomplished in the very person of Christ, who is *homoousios* with the Father. Christ's incarnation results in a hypostatic union, which is an atoning union; incarnation unites our "polluted flesh" with the eternal Son and so raises it up to the Godhead. In Calvin's own words, "It was for the Son of God to become for us 'Immanuel' ... in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together." (*Inst.* II. xii.1) Hart concludes that, in this sense we may say that for Calvin "the Incarnation *is* the Atonement;" we are reconciled to God by becoming like God in disposition.¹³⁹

Recent Theological Reflections on the Justification-Sanctification Dual

The previous section shows that, sanctification not only has the New Testament and early Christianity on its side, but also official pronouncements from recent ecclesial dialogues on its side; it even has Luther and Calvin on its side. In this section, I will first

¹³⁶ Ibid, 104.

¹³⁷ For a recent example, see Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (2002): 39-60.

¹³⁸ Trevor Hart, "Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in Our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42, no. 1 (1989): 67-84.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 83.

introduce the evangelical stand on the debate, and we will find out that sanctification seems to have won the vote from evangelical theology as well and maybe even the vote from Christian theology in general. The rest of this section will be given to the voices we have not heard much so far, namely, those who stepped out in the debate to defend justification. Two things will become clear from this hearing: one, justification proponents do not really equate salvation with justification, and the center of their soteriology is none other than sanctification; two, justification proponents raise some very legitimate concerns based on the reality of Christian life that, unless credibly resolved, have the power to veto the whole sanctification project after all, no matter how many votes it has garnered from theory.

The Theological Votes for Sanctification

Maybe surprisingly to some, in the justification debate the theological points expressed from the evangelical quarter endorse not the “declarative” view of the orthodox Protestants, but the “transformationalist” view of the Catholics. A good example of this is Baptist theologian Anthony Lane’s *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (2006), which shows an objective grasp of the viewpoints from both sides of the dialogue.¹⁴⁰ Lane identifies the most substantive issue in the debate to be: “Is eternal life something that we in some sense earn or merit, even if it is only by grace that we are able to do so?”¹⁴¹ That is, to what extent is the eternal life

¹⁴⁰ Lane, *Justification by Faith*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 104.

granted according to our actual deserve? The answer according to Trent is that eternal life is both “a grace promised in his mercy through Jesus Christ to the children of God” and “a reward to be faithfully bestowed on the promise of God himself for their good works and merits.” Trent assigns a determinative significance to the actual merits of a person for receiving eternal life, stating that “Nothing more is needed for the justified to be considered to have fully satisfied God’s law, according to this state of life, by the [actual] deeds they have wrought in him and to have truly merited to gain eternal life” (ch. 16; cf. can. 32). Lane comments sympathetically:

Would Protestants really want to say that the reward is unmerited in the sense that God might just as well give it to Hitler as to mother Teresa? Most would not—though more radical Lutherans might be prepared to accept the statement. When they say that the reward is unmerited Protestants wish to affirm that the reward given is out of all proportion to the works rewarded, not that the works rewarded are totally without value and indistinguishable from heinous crimes.¹⁴²

After all is said and done, Lane comes to “the surprising conclusion that Evangelicals in particular are perhaps better placed to reach understanding with Rome than are orthodox Protestants in general.”¹⁴³ He confirms R. J. Neuhaus’ observation that “justification by faith alone” matters much more to those within the Lutheran or Calvinist orthodoxy than to other Evangelicals such as the Wesleyans or the Baptists.¹⁴⁴ For the latter groups, the most fundamental distinction is between the “born-again” Christian and the nominal Christian. It has to do with the differentiation Bonhoeffer makes between

¹⁴² Ibid, 210.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 127.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 145.

“cheap grace” and “costly grace”: cheap grace promises “forgiveness without repentance, grace without discipleship,” and turns the biblical doctrine of justification into a “secular message of self-esteem.”¹⁴⁵ In contrast, Bonhoeffer states clearly that “The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. ... Those who tried to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves.”¹⁴⁶

When expressing a Pentecostal reaction to the JDDJ, Frank Macchia explains the fundamental consistency between Pentecostalism and the Catholic stand on the issue.¹⁴⁷ The key point Macchia makes is the central import the “full Gospel” carries for Pentecostals. The “full Gospel” proclaims the Good News that Christ saves us in all aspects of our life “through the agency of the Spirit by sanctifying us, healing our bodies, delivering us from the oppression of sin, and coming again one day soon to raise us from the dead or to transform those of us who happen to be alive on earth so that this mortality may put on immortality.”¹⁴⁸ Pentecostalism insists on a “victim centered” explication of the doctrine of justification with the justice accomplished by Christ at its core, which truly delivers people from sin, injustice, and oppression. Macchia notices a lack of emphasis in the JDDJ regarding the salvific role of the Holy Spirit. And he proposes a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 134.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 135.

¹⁴⁷ Frank D. Macchia, “Justification and the Spirit of Life: A Pentecostal Response to the *Joint Declaration*,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. by William G. Rusch (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 133-149.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 134.

pneumatological foundation of justification instead, seeing that to be “the precise theological linkage between the Lutheran emphasis on declared righteousness and the Catholic stress on the renewal of life.”¹⁴⁹ It may be called “justification through new creation” which, as the Holy Spirit’s saving work in us, goes beyond unmerited pardon from God and brings the righteousness of the Kingdom that by its very nature is truly liberating and transforming.

Outside the Evangelical camp, numerous other arguments have been made to underscore the soteriological necessity of actual spiritual renewal. One type of argument locates a “transformative aspect” of justification.¹⁵⁰ It spotlights the innate bond between justification and justice, between the Gospel and the Law, and between the forgiveness of God and the Commandments of God.¹⁵¹ Another type of argument tries to integrate “justification by faith” with Theosis on the account of their common foundation in Christ’s Incarnation (*kenosis*).¹⁵² Still another type of argument connects justification with sanctification as “a unity of distinctions” rooted in the selfsame work of Christ,¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Roland Chia, “Salvation as Justification and Deification,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 2 (2011): 125-139.

¹⁵¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “The Lutheran doctrine.”

¹⁵² See, for example, Roland Chia, “Salvation as Justification.” Also, Paul R. Hinlicky, “Theological Anthropology: Toward Integrating Theosis and Justification by Faith,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34, no.1 (Winter 1997): 38-73.

¹⁵³ Andrew V. Snider, “Sanctification and Justification: A Unity of Distinctions,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 159-178.

and through the selfsame “active faith.”¹⁵⁴ Even though sanctification is not automatic, it is inevitable, and there can be no justification which does not engender sanctification.¹⁵⁵ Thus, the doctrine of justification must have a strong doctrine of sanctification as its necessary counterpoint to steer clear of dangerous heresies.¹⁵⁶ One other type of argument stresses the inevitability of good works as the result of justification. Luther’s “ear-catching irony” is evoked where he describes the Christian as simultaneously “the freest lord of all” and “the most dutiful servant of all;” Calvin’s stand on this is characterized by his famous comments on Galatians 5:6, saying “It is not our doctrine that the faith which justifies is alone; we maintain that it is invariably accompanied by good works.”¹⁵⁷

“By faith alone!”—What Do They Really Mean to Say?

In the justification debate, there are some who explicitly defended the “faith alone” position. Here, I introduce works by several of the spokespersons of the “faith alone” side to find out what exactly they mean to convey. Eberhard Jungel’s book, *Justification—The Heart of the Christian Faith: A Theological Study with an Ecumenical Purpose* (2001), shortly after the *Joint Declaration* is said to be “easily the most

¹⁵⁴ Ross Aden, “Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* (1994): 87-109.

¹⁵⁵ William W. Combs, “The Disjunction between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 2001): 17-44.

¹⁵⁶ David Fergusson, “Reclaiming the Doctrine of Sanctification,” *Interpretation* (1999): 380-390.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas K. Johnson, “Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2012): 143-160. Similar argument is made in Mary L. Vandenberg’s article, “Hope-filled Sanctification: A Reformed Appropriation of the Theological Virtue of Hope,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012): 99-114. Also, in Richard Foster’s article, “Salvation Is for Life,” *Theology Today* 61 (2004): 297-308.

substantial contribution to that debate from the *non placet* Lutheran side.”¹⁵⁸ Given the fact that the third edition of Jungel’s book came into print less than a year after its first appearance, this statement is very likely to be accurate. Jungel’s discontent over the JDDJ has to do with what he perceives to be an overshadowing of “justification by faith alone” as the controlling principle for all Christian doctrines. In his view, the most valuable heritage from the Reformers is their search (and re-proclamation) of a gracious God, the basic problem motivated the doctrine. If the central status of this doctrine is obscured, we lose sight of the riches of God’s grace as an absolutely unconditional gift for us. And, “As long as we think we have to achieve something before God in order to gain God’s recognition we begrudge ourselves the good that God has already planned and bestowed on us in Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹ To Jungel, deemphasizing “by faith alone” also betrays an inadequate understanding of the severity of our fallen nature. It plays down the seriousness of sin, trivializes the joy of the Good News, and robs the conscience of any lasting and certain consolation.

All that said, Jungel’s take on justification is not merely forensic. His actual position on it may be seen as a modern explication of Luther’s famous motto of Christians being the freest lord of all and the most dutiful servant of all. Specifically, Jungel insists on the creative and effective nature of God’s Word of judgment, which not

¹⁵⁸ Eberhard Jungel, *Justification—The Heart of the Christian Faith: A Theological Study with an Ecumenical Purpose*, trans. Jeffery F. Cayzer, with an Introduction by John Webster (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2001), vii.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

only pronounces and discloses reality, but also helps to bring it to pass; “the Word can both pronounce and make us righteous.”¹⁶⁰ Jungel declares that “This forensic act *is* the effective act of making the ungodly righteous. It *is!* Imparted righteousness ... is not something which differs from imputed righteousness. ... God granting divine righteousness in such a way as to effectively change the being of humans.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, humans are actively involved in justification by their “faith,” which is their affirmative response to God’s definitive affirmation of them in justification. Jungel in particular emphasizes that “faith is trusting with the heart. ... in it decisions are made concerning the whole person,”¹⁶² “the foundational act of a life lived definitively outside itself,”¹⁶³ which allows us to be made anew by God. Tellingly, his book ends on ethics by stating that “it should be evident that from such faith deeds of gratitude proceed quite spontaneously. ... There is no more liberating basis for ethics than the doctrine of justification of sinners by faith alone.”¹⁶⁴

In the anthology published shortly after the JDDJ, Bruce McCormack’s article clearly intends to salvage the “forensicism” position on justification.¹⁶⁵ McCormack

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 200.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 211.

¹⁶² Ibid, 238.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 242.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 259.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81-117.

senses that our age is one in which people desire real and fundamental transformation in their life. He laments that “Today’s Protestants give every indication of wanting to understand justification as being itself transformative.”¹⁶⁶ An evidence for this is that “there are no hotter topics in Protestant theology today than the themes of Theosis, union with Christ ... Efforts to find what look like Roman and Eastern soteriologies in the Reformers themselves are rapidly becoming something of a cottage industry.”¹⁶⁷ To this, McCormack offers a candid articulation of his concern over the lack of clear distinction between justification and sanctification, saying

it made God’s forgiveness of sin conditional upon the current state of our actual righteousness. ... it makes the root of our justification to lie in what God does in us. But to the extent that we see our salvation as in any way contingent upon what we are or have become at a particular point in time, we shift the locus of our attention from what Luther called the ‘alien righteousness of Christ’ (which is complete in itself) to a work of God in us which is radically incomplete. And to just that extent, we make personal assurance of salvation to rest on a work which, as incomplete, can never bring adequate comfort. Those with sensitive consciences are thrown back on their own experience of grace, in an effort to discern whether God has really been at work “in them.”¹⁶⁸

Interestingly, McCormack suggests that as Protestants it is in fact possible to maintain the “forensicism” interpretation of justification and respond to people’s longing for real change. How? By recognizing that justification as “a judicial act for God is never merely judicial; it is itself transformative. ... Imputation is *itself* regenerative.”¹⁶⁹ In other

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 105.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 106.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 107.

words, he acknowledges that God's declarative act has to be simultaneously transformative, just like Jungel does.

Robert Kolb offers an outline of the key points of "radical Lutheranism," whose perceived radicalness comes precisely from its singular emphasis on "faith alone."¹⁷⁰ Kolb describes Radical Lutheranism's take on Luther in contrast to the "Finnish school" as the result of their different take on human nature. For example, Gerhard Forde, the founder of Radical Lutheranism, calls for a "radical Lutheran" proclamation of the gospel on the basis of an anthropology focusing on the bondage of the will. In Forde's view, "what is at stake is *the radical gospel, radical grace*," which challenges "an anthropology which sees the human being as a continuously existing subject possessing 'free choice of will' over against God ... The radical gospel is the end of that being and the beginning of a new being in faith and hope."¹⁷¹ And yet, alongside Forde's sharp vigilance against hubris and his keen awareness of the persistence of sin, we find his understanding of justification to be both forensic and effective, just like Jungel and McCormack's: God's declarative Word is his instrument of recreation; justification is both "dying and rising" with Christ, it is "God's killing sinners and out of them bringing children of God to life;" and "faith in Christ is to be defined as the orientation and nature of the entire human creation, not simply a set of psychological characteristics."¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification: A Selective Glimpse," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 153-176.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 160.

¹⁷² Ibid, 161.

There are those who spend their writing especially on the complexity and the challenge of the Christian life. For example, Alan Spence's *Justification: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2012) gives "faith alone" the prized place in Christian faith, for he perceives it to be the divine remedy for a worrisome ailment of our day, namely, the overwhelming burden on people's conscience.¹⁷³ Specifically, Spence recognizes in our postmodern society "a movement in which the demand upon us to live with integrity in a manifestly unjust world has come to challenge many aspects of our corporate and personal behavior;" in his view, "the level of personal accountability is raised so high that many of us find ourselves overwhelmed by a sense of guilt and personal failure along with estrangement from God."¹⁷⁴ Spence thinks that it is the message of justification which most clearly conveys God's pardon and forgiveness; it has the power "to provide a lifeline of hope to those who find themselves adrift in the sea of moral failure and personal guilt. For those who regret that their lives have been compromised by sin and who are ashamed of their participation in its dark designs, the promise of justification comes as unimaginable good news."¹⁷⁵ Spence is concerned that "many of the spiritual practitioners of the Western Church are now generally ill-equipped to administer such medication. No longer comfortable in affirming the radical nature of our guilt and personal accountability under a transcendent law and before a holy God, they have over

¹⁷³ Alan J. Spence, *Justification: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2012).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 158-159.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

the years lost the art of applying the divine remedy to those, both religious and otherwise, who have been caught up in so helpless a condition.”¹⁷⁶

Due to the same concerns for the overburdened conscience, Joseph Dillow insists that works of the regenerate person are the basis for future reward or rebuke, but not the basis for eternal salvation.¹⁷⁷ He wants to distinguish “the ‘salvation’ that is obtained by enduring to the end (Mt 10:22) from shame and disgrace, not from damnation.”¹⁷⁸ Eternal salvation must always be based only on God’s unmerited grace to us through faith. To those who object, Dillow retorts, “since post-conversion works are not perfect and complete, how can they have any role in obtaining final entrance in to heaven?”¹⁷⁹ To this end, Gerard Forde’s student Marc Kolden reminds the reader that the Reformers took “faith alone,” above all, as a pastoral matter.¹⁸⁰ Kolden explains that,

Many pre-Reformation Christians ... thought of Jesus as the new Moses (the first lawgiver) and turned the good news of salvation into a new form of law so that people supposed they could achieve salvation by living according to Jesus’ teaching—with the help of grace, of course. But then the radical, freeing gospel of divine forgiveness is lost and the result is despair over not being able to live up to Jesus’ teachings (or perhaps pride at thinking one has done so). ... The Lutheran reformers argued that Christian preachers and teachers must distinguish between law and promise so as not to lose the promise.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 159.

¹⁷⁷ Joseph C. Dillow, “Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? A Review,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (October-December 2008): 463-79.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 467.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 471.

¹⁸⁰ Marc Kolden, “Background Comments on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone,” in *By faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, eds. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 22-30.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 25.

Lastly, Randall Gleason's comments on the whole "Lordship salvation" controversy perhaps offer us the clearest articulation of the real legitimate concerns of the "faith alone" proponents.¹⁸² The debate broke out in late 1950s, with intense episodes added in 1980s and continues to this day. Heated exchanges over the decades have involved influential figures from Fuller Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Dallas Seminary, John MacArthur a well-known bible teacher on radio, and others from *Christianity Today*, the Evangelical Theological Society, the advocacy group Christians United for Reformation (CURE), the Campus Crusade for Christ, etc. Gleason calls the crossfire "one of the most hotly debated controversies within twentieth-century Evangelicalism."¹⁸³ The eye of the storm revolves around this: "Must Christ be our Lord in order to be our Savior?" Those who answered "no" to this question point to the harm of basing assurance of salvation on complete Christian surrender, and prefer to distinguish saving faith from discipleship; in contrast, those who answered "yes" to this question point to the harm of a false sense of assurance, and highlight the inseparable bond the saving faith carries with repentance, obedience, and renewal. Gleason's reservation over the "Lordship Salvation" view is based on the real challenges experienced during the sanctifying process, especially the deep-seated impact of sin and the huge diversity of spiritual maturity he observes among Christians.

¹⁸² Randall Gleason, "The Lordship Salvation Debate," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 1 (2003): 55-72. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, Chapter One also offers a clear account of this soteriological debate in the evangelical camp of Christianity.

¹⁸³ Gleason, "The Lordship Salvation Debate," 55.

Specifically, Gleason reminds “Lordship” advocates of the existence of “immature faith” which, though surely not as ideal as the saving faith they define, ought to be affirmed to allow room to grow. He reminds the reader that “Faith is frequently presented in Scripture as something that grows and matures (Jas 1:2-4). ... examples abound throughout Scripture of genuine faith mixed with unbelief.”¹⁸⁴ In Gleason’s view, to use the degree of obedience as the measure for the genuineness of faith overlooks the reciprocal dynamic between commitment to Jesus’ Lordship and transformation as a life-long pilgrimage (2 Cor 3:18), with many twists and turns along the way. He stresses that, total dedication never occurs instantaneously but is attainable only at the end; true believers continuously struggle in their progress toward sanctity. We should not question the genuineness of their faith when that happens. Considering the frailty of spiritual life to the destructive impact of guilt and despair, “to doubt the salvation of every believer who seriously struggles with disobedience in his life leaves him vulnerable to the accusing work of Satan (Rom 8:33-39; Rv 12:10).”¹⁸⁵

I think by now it is finally clear that, what is really at stake is much deeper than the insecure psyche or the uneasy conscience; what concerns justification proponents the most is the threat of the sanctification process itself being derailed. As we see above, “faith alone” advocates deem sanctification extremely important; in fact, one may say that their high esteem for sanctification is the very reason why they insist on “faith alone”—so that people would neither self-deceive nor despair and abandon their always

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 60.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 66.

imperfect and often strenuous walk onto sanctity. The only difference is, instead of focusing on the cup half full, they are more mindful of the other half that is empty: namely, when all is said and done, the reality is, most if not all people are not even close to complete holiness by the time they die.

Concluding Comments: A Call for Another “Copernican Revolution”

Our long and winding tour this chapter is intended to demonstrate a few things. Most importantly, it is to display a panoramic view of the unprecedentedly broad consensus regarding the primacy of sanctification within the order of salvation. Forgiveness is not itself the goal; justification is for sanctification. For salvation to be an ontological truth instead of a mere legal fiction, it must be transformative rather than only declarative; it must be person-making. As Paul O’Callaghan puts, “if God did not effect a real change in men by forgiving him ... such forgiveness would be either meaningless in reality or hedged in intention.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, we can conclude unequivocally that, just as a fruitless tree is futile, salvation is in vain without sanctification. Major arguments for it we have encountered include the early Christians’ soteriological focus on eschatological renewal, the effectiveness and the indivisibility of God’s saving grace, as well as the inherently transformative nature of saving faith. Arguably, the fact that diverse disciplines ranging from exegetical scholarship, to biblical theology, to historical theology, to constructive theology, and even to ecumenical dialogues have all in their own ways come to the clear defense for the soteriological centrality of sanctification is

¹⁸⁶ O’Callaghan, *Fides Christi*, 223.

itself a phenomenal support for the thesis. No doubt, this widely crystalizing insight emerged during recent decades is a remarkable step forward in Christian soteriology.

And yet, even a brief reality check is enough to dash any naive optimism for sanctification. As the result, Anthony Lane quotes sympathetically that “it used to be said that every good Catholic became a Lutheran on his deathbed!”¹⁸⁷ That is to say, confronted by the utter inadequacy of their own merits earned in life, even the sanctification advocates do not entrust their eternal destination to their actual merits at the end of life, but resort again to God’s incommensurate mercy to promote them to heaven, as the justification advocates do. However, the question is, is that really an option? If so, why should people agonize over sanctification during life? Why does Christianity devote all its attention to something that at death would be taken care of for us perfectly by God anyhow? If the process of sanctification is allowed to be called off by death at any and every arbitrary point, as we observe in life, does God really value sanctification for us that much, as proclaimed in the Christian faith? Again, if it were logically possible for God to instantly achieve sanctification for us, why wouldn’t God do it at the beginning of time instead of extraneously sending Jesus “in the fullness of time”? If the sanctification process were to end at death, as most sanctification advocates now hold, all the arguments of the sanctification proponents would fold upon themselves when confronted by death and become self-refuting. Sanctification seems to be soteriologically inconsequential after all.

¹⁸⁷ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 209.

So we see that our newfound soteriological clarity about the primacy of sanctification did not really ease the perennial tension between justification and sanctification; instead of brining the two sides “in balance,” as many observers remarked in relief, it in fact left both sides hanging with their equally valid concerns still unaddressed. On the one hand, the justification proponents can no longer feel comforted because, it now becomes clear that, the degree of our salvation is no more than the degree of sanctification; on the other hand, the sanctification proponents cannot be satisfied either, because the reality of our spiritual life is that no one dies a saint, sanctification is at most a half-baked process at death with much left to be desired. So now, our conscience can neither be satisfied, because of the keener awareness of our spiritual incompleteness; nor be assuaged, because of the clearer realization of what genuine salvation logically entails. The toughest opponent of the sanctification advocates is not the justification advocates, for they too support sanctification; the toughest opponent of the sanctification advocates is death—ruthlessly mocking sanctification with its always unpredictable and always uncompromising interruption.

That is, unless death is not the final end. At this point, if the acceptance of the necessity or at least the possibility of postmortem purgation hinges upon the soteriological primacy of sanctification, as we hear Jerry Walls positing at the beginning of this chapter, then I think a robust case has been made for it—thanks to the insights independently produced by an impressive host of scholars from a large variety of disciplines. Even though many of these authors may not currently recognize this

necessity, as soon as they follow their insights to the logical end, they shall see that it really is inevitable. Once again, as Jerry Walls argues in Section I, the nature of eternal salvation implies that, no one can see God without being perfectly holy; neither does God seem likely to short circuit the sanctification process at death by violating our God-given freewill. Therefore, if sanctification holds such crucial import for our salvation, but it is unfinished by the time we die, it is reasonable to expect that God will allow its momentum to continue after death in order to arrive at its preordained goal. And so, death, otherwise a breaking-point in the case of sanctification, turns out to be a breakthrough point into a vastly new soteriological horizon.

In welcoming Jerry Walls' book on purgatory, William Abraham states that "For a generation or more a stout Protestant doctrine of purgatory has been an accident waiting to happen." To paraphrase him, one may say that, in order for a truly biblical and logically coherent Christian message of sanctification, a stout doctrine on postmortem purgation has been an accident long waiting to happen. When discussing the *pistis Christou* debate, David Stubbs hopes that the exegetical insights from it will become "a force in a larger sea-change in Protestant theology, a change in which salvation, the law and the righteousness of God take on new meanings."¹⁸⁸ To paraphrase Stubbs, one may say that, after decades of deliberation on sanctification, the challenge for a real sea-change is here—the call for a Christian soteriology that properly incorporates postmortem purgation, which will finally render credible and intelligible Jesus' central Gospel of salvation from sin. Lastly, to paraphrase John Hick's favorite metaphor of the Copernican

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 139.

revolution, an analogous revolution with similarly far-reaching consequence is needed, where we no longer consider the earthly embodiment to be the determining center of our creaturely tenure, but only as a tiny portion of the immense plan that God has in store for us to bring us home.

CHAPTER FIVE
POSTMORTEM EMBODIMENT IN LIGHT OF
GEORGE BERKELEY'S SACRAMENTAL IDEALISM

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter, I argued that postmortem *time* is necessitated by the central position sanctification occupies in the Christian understanding of salvation. Remarkably, as physicist John Polkinghorne points out when envisioning the world to come, there exists an innate connection between *time* and *matter*.¹ Specifically, modern discovery of general relativity reveals that time, space and matter are all linked together in a single “packaged deal.” Polkinghorne thinks that such linkage seems to be a general feature of the Creator’s will that is likely to continue in the world to come. Hence, if there will be “time” in the life after, as argued in the previous chapter, there will also be “matter” and “space” for it. That is to say, during the “time” of postmortem existence, human beings will live “embodied” with “matter” of the next world. Moreover, Polkinghorne observes similarly like John Hick that “matter of this universe has a physical character that is appropriate to its evolutionary role as the medium within which creatures existing at some epistemic distance from their Creator are allowed to be

¹ John Polkinghorne, “Eschatological Credibility: Emergent and Teleological Processes,” in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 43-55.

themselves and to make themselves.”² I think it is reasonable to anticipate that such a formative function of “matter” for person-making will again be its key purpose in postmortem embodiment.

In this chapter, I argue that postmortem embodiment in the Berkeleian sense is the most robust and convincing way to envision bodily existence after death. Furthermore, Berkeley’s sacramental conceptualization of embodiment is most helpful for grasping the pedagogical role of “body” Hick suggests in the process of salvation. When making these arguments in this chapter, I pay particular attention to Hans Bynagle’s dual-emphasis of *compatibility* with Christian orthodoxy and *tenability* with established philosophical and scientific truths.³ My aim for such balanced investigation is, on the one hand, to better recover crucial insights from scripture and tradition and, on the other hand, to better demonstrate the rationale and the credibility of the Christian understanding of the afterlife. Without this balance, the Christian Hope may be so distorted by concepts foreign to it that it becomes hardly recognizable as Christian; or, the Christian Hope may be so clouded by muddled notions that it appears hardly intelligible or credible to inspire genuine hope.

In the first section, I begin by recapping relevant points from the previous two chapters of my dissertation. I then supplement it with other works in philosophy related to postmortem embodiment. And I close the section with a summary of insights generated

² Polkinghorne, “Eschatological Credibility,” 43.

³ Hans E. Bynagle, “Debating Soul, Body, and Survival—A Review Essay,” *Christian Scholar's Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 109.

so far for a proper conceptualization of postmortem embodiment, as well as open questions to be addressed in the next section. In the next section, I introduce Berkeley's Idealism as the robust framework for envisioning postmortem embodiment. I spotlight particularly its principal congeniality with the sacramental and pedagogical understandings of the world and of the body in Christian theology. In the following section, I review New Testament passages and earliest Christian traditions on postmortem embodiment under the concept of "Resurrection." It shows that the Berkeleian definition of postmortem embodiment not only does not contradict these Christian orthodoxies on "Resurrection," it often is most effective in conveying the theological insights behind them. At the end of this section, I show that Berkeley's understanding of the body also seems required for rendering several other core Christian beliefs more intelligible, such as Incarnation, Trinity, and Creation *ex nihilo*.

To more thoroughly establish Berkeley's Idealism as the proper framework for conceptualizing postmortem embodiment, in the section after, I broaden the conversation by introducing current philosophical literatures on the mind-body relation, known as the "philosophy of mind." Even though this investigation is based on human life now, it looks into the human nature in general. And so, insights coming from these works apply to the life after as well. Overall, a deadlock exists between the Physicalist and the Dualist in their portraits of the human being; while each captures some key features, each also suffers some fatal flaws. Listening in to their quarrels further demonstrates the strengths of Berkeley's Idealism for depicting the human person, even though few in the debate considered Idealism an option. As we shall see, Berkeley's Idealism well communicates

the insights of Physicalism and Dualism while avoiding the pitfalls of them both. In the following section, I broaden the conversation even more by bringing in philosophical writings inspired by modern physics. Given that physics is considered *the* scientific study of the physical, metaphysical insights generated from that field call for our close attention when assessing Berkeley's Idealistic claims. Surprisingly, breakthroughs in physics during the past century seem to cast vote for Berkeley's Idealism. I conclude the chapter by recounting the key points in this chapter and anticipating the questions to be addressed in the next chapter.

The Current State of the Discourse on Postmortem Embodiment

A Recap of Related Points from Chapters Two and Three

Chapter Two reviews the literature from theologies of death and eschatologies. An important thing to recall is that disagreement exists on how salvation is to be envisioned for the material world in general and the material body in particular. Some think that it is nonsensical to speak about salvation of matter *as such*. To define matter's salvation as being transformed into something permanent and incorruptible is unintelligible, given our scientific understanding that all material organisms are constantly changing and inherently perishable. To think that matter needs to be saved from hindering God's presence to us does not make sense either, because spiritual issues reside ultimately in the spirit and not the body; this is made particularly clear by the case of the demons who do not have a body. I also add that talks about "salvation of the matter" divert our attention from the proper focus, i.e., the human spirit, so much so that some anticipate human salvation as gaining a body willed by ourselves or discarding the

body all together. However, others insist on the “salvation” of the body because the spirit naturally inclines towards a body, because the body is a good creation of God, and because God’s eschatological victory entails God being “all in all.” In my view, this disagreement is directly caused by a muddled notion of “matter” and so also the material body. And so the crucial question is how to understand the body in a way that adequately captures the importance it occupies in Christian eschatology and yet not contradict science or muddy soteriology.

There is also some emerging consensus from recent eschatology and theologies of death. First, soteriology in moral and spiritual terms needs to be kept front and center when reflecting on postmortem issues, not the mere technical aspects of surviving death, because soteriology is the foothold from where Christian eschatology takes off. Second, the biblical emphasis on the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit both for the resurgence of life in general and for the postmortem “body” in particular must be retrieved. Third, the Christian doctrine of “Resurrection” goes beyond the human body and speaks about the human person as a whole. The embodied existence goes beyond physicality and represents the entire concrete history of a lived personal reality.⁴ Fourth, there has been an increasing recognition of the formative purpose of embodiment in postmortem existence for the sake of continuous human becoming. For example, bodily existence after death was hypothesized as the medium for self-expression and intercommunion, or as the avenue for the healing and restoration work of the Spirit. Multiple resurrections and

⁴ See also Bernard Prusak, “Bodily Resurrection in Catholic Perspectives,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 (2000): 64-105.

gradual embodiments according to a person's spiritual states have also been hypothesized.

Chapter Three introduces John Hick's theology of death and mainly has to do with philosophical considerations of postmortem existence. Two unique insights on embodiment should be recalled. First, Hick understands the *why* of embodiment in terms of person-making. Embodiment is a means of delimitation for humans with finite cognitive capacities. Moreover, it establishes some concrete externalities, and it furnishes the medium for interactions. Here, Hick especially emphasizes the expedience of "matter" for setting up an orderly environment, which offers both an epistemological distance for exercising freewill and a set of fixed existential parameters for humans to wrestle with in order to survive. For this is the way through which human intelligence is developed and moral characters formed. Second, regarding the *how* of postmortem embodiments, Hick conjectures in principle that each embodiment will be tailored to the specific laws of the worlds a person needs to live through in order to reach the eventual union with God. Borrowing concepts from Hinduism, Hick envisions that an individual's personal continuity across the string of episodes of embodiment resides in the individual's "objective identity"—which is from the view of "a hypothetical external observer," and not in the "subjective identity"—which is from "the view of the consciousness in question."⁵

Valuable insights are also gained from Hick's not so successful attempt to come up with a survival scenario within the Physicalist's framework, i.e., the "replica" theory. After the dust of the "replica" controversy settled it became clear that genuine survival of

⁵ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 410.

the human being necessitates that the unique aspect of being human, namely, as a subject of internal experience, must be preserved. Because internal experiences, by definition, are nontransferable, it entails that unlike purely physical beings the human being cannot be replaced once it ceases to exist—this in short is the Dualists’ objection to Hick’s theory. It also entails that true survival of the human being builds on certain concepts qualitatively foreign to “matter” known according to physics—this in short is the Physicalists’ objection to Hick’s theory.

The Broader Philosophical Discourse on Bodily Existence after Death

What else has been generated on postmortem embodiment in the wider philosophical circle? These are efforts to produce a conceivable account of the Christian doctrine of “Resurrection” within a credible metaphysical framework. In this segment, I begin by introducing major theories offered by Physicalists who understand the human being as purely physical. After that, I comment on theories offered by Dualists who understand the human being as partly physical and partly spiritual. I end this segment with comments and observations on the current difficulties in coherently conceptualizing the bodily resurrection.

Resurrection Envisioned within the Framework of Physicalism

The great majority of recent philosophical deliberations on “Resurrection” came from the Physicalist (rather than the Dualist) camp. As a whole, they all face the challenging issue of personal survival. As Hans Bynagle reports, “Survival is a significant issue for those who argue for the compatibility of orthodox Christian belief with Physicalism or some closely neighboring view. ... [There are] notorious issues

about personal identity, specifically how a person instantiated by some future resurrection body can be identical with the person instantiated by my present body.”⁶ John Copper explains that the existential gap opened up by bodily death seems impossible to bridge on the Physicalist’s terms because they see no part in the human person that is not physical and so they commit to “an unbreakable connection between persons and their bodies.”⁷ For them, personal identity is tied to numerical identity of the body, that particular earthly body which inevitably disintegrates when the person dies. As we shall see in the following, the Physicalists contemplated different theories to try to overcome this problem—from physical continuity, to causal continuity, to subjective continuity, to denying the necessity of personal continuity. Unfortunately, it seems that none of them really succeeded in maintaining genuine human survival.

Preserving material continuity via re-assembly, staggered resurrection, or “body snatching”

This type of attempt tries to address the concern that, since the person is identical with the body, if the resurrected body is different from the earthly body, there are really two different persons instead of the same person before and after death. God re-assembling old body parts to bring the person back to life is the oldest response to address this issue. It is suggested by Athenagoras in the late second century to solve the “chain consumption” problem—how can martyrs be alive again after their bodies being devoured and digested by beasts, whose bodies are also devoured and digested by other

⁶ Bynagle, “Debating Soul,” 117.

⁷ John Copper, “The Identity of Resurrected Persons: Fatal Flaw of Monistic Anthropology,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (1988), 27.

beasts or other humans? Athenagoras' answer is that God will retrieve and reassemble their body parts back to the original state; for God is so powerful that he is capable of even mightier deeds.

A modern version of the reassembly theory is proposed by David Hershenov who takes into account our knowledge of the body as a dynamic system which replaces all of its cells every few years. He suggests that even though human bodies share the same particles during earthly existence, this poses no problem for material continuity after death, because God can resurrect people in a staggered fashion, so after the one first resurrected assimilates new matter and releases the old matter, the old matter may be used in resurrecting other beings.⁸

Another modern attempt at keeping material continuity is the "body snatching" scenario proposed by Peter van Inwagen.⁹ Van Inwagen's rationale for attempting such an admittedly novel solution, in his words, is this: "If human persons are physical substances, nothing but physical continuity can ground the identity of human persons across time. The problem for the Christian materialist, therefore, is to try to present a plausible theory according to which such physical continuity exists." Like Hershenov, Van Inwagen is aware that "the atoms of which a living organism is composed are in continuous flux," and he thinks "This fact ... confronts the materialist who believes in resurrection with a grave metaphysical difficulty." This is because, if there is no overlap

⁸ David B. Hershenov, "Van Inwagen, Zimmerman, and the Materialist Conception of Resurrection," *Religious Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2003): 451–469.

⁹ Peter van Inwagen, "I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come," web source, accessed December 2012. <http://philosophy.nd.edu/people/all/profiles/van-inwagenpeter/documents/Resurrection.doc>.

between the set of particles constituting the earthly body and the set of particles constituting the resurrected body, the person does not really survive; and yet, it is extremely difficult to reconcile the apparent fact of bodily discontinuity with the identity requirement of “material continuity.”

So, using Socrates as an example, Van Inwagen speculates that, right before Socrates’ death, God “could have miraculously translated Socrates’ fresh corpse to some distant place for safe-keeping (at the same time removing the hemlock and undoing the physiological damage it had done) and have replaced it with a simulacrum, a perfect physical duplicate of Socrates’ corpse; later, on the day of resurrection, he could reanimate Socrates’ corpse, and the reanimated corpse, no longer a corpse but once more a living organism, would be Socrates. Or, I suggested, he might do this with some part of the corpse, its brain or brain-stem or left cerebral hemisphere or cerebral cortex—something whose presence in a newly whole human organism would insure that that organism be Socrates.”

Positing an immanent causal connection between the bodies before and after death

This type of attempt also aims at eliminating the existential gap through some kind of continuity within the Physicalist’s framework. However, these authors realized the fact failed to be recognized by the previous authors that mere identity or overlapping of material substance—whether in part or in total—does not guarantee personal identity or continuity of a *living* thing. For example, John Cooper states that “it is well known that

material composition is not the source of self-identity in living things.”¹⁰ And so, they try to preserve continuity (and so identity) through the so-called “immanent causal connection” between the earthly life and the resurrected life. The rationale behind this type of attempt is the understanding that, instead of by some external factors like God’s miraculous tracking and reassembling old body parts, “an organism at one time is identical to an organism at another time only if there is the proper *biological* continuity linking the two. The organism’s parts must be caught up in the same life processes and these [ongoing] life processes must be responsible for the role and position of the parts.”¹¹ Under this principle, personal continuity exists only when the particles constituting the person “remain caught up in a life without interruption;” what’s more, “Both the self-maintained structural integrity of the organism and the addition of new matter must be due to biological processes.”¹²

The main advocate here is Dean Zimmerman who proposed the so-called “fission” scenario. He claims that the proposed scenario satisfies the principle of “immanent causation” for biological continuity, which requires “the parts, states, and processes of the organism be caused by the previous parts, states, and processes of that organism.”¹³ His theory suggests something like this: at the moment of a person’s death, God causes the dying body to undergo fission such that the particles constituting the body split into two sets of particles, with one set of them constituting the corpse and the other

¹⁰ Cooper, “Identity of the Resurrected Persons,” 29.

¹¹ Hershenov, “Van Inwagen,” 457.

¹² *Ibid*, 458.

¹³ *Ibid*, 459.

set constituting a living being. According to Zimmerman, such fission ensures that the resurrected body is caught up in the same life process with the dying body and is immanently caused by it; in this way, personal continuity and survival are ensured.

On technical grounds, David Hershenov raises a significant objection against the “fission” theory—that is, the resurrected body and the earthly body are never caught in the same life process, given that fission can only be hypothesized to occur when the earthly body dies. As he explains, in Zimmerman’s fission scenario, “The new particles never composed any cells, tissues, and organs with the older particles; they never combined with any of the older particles to form part of any skeletal structures; and they were never involved in any metabolic or homeostatic processes with the already existing particles. Contrast this with the normal bodily assimilation of new matter and the loss of old. ... [which maintains] an overlap of the new and the old, and this enables the new particles to be assimilated into the individual’s body.”¹⁴ Consequently, “fission” does not preserve personal identity. Another technical objection he raises has to do with the speed of the fission—which is instantaneous rather than gradual, and the amount of particles involved—which is all the particles in the dying body. Based on our understanding of how fission occurs, he doubts that a living organism can survive such sudden change in such magnitude. What’s more, bio-fission is a split of existing particles which results in two entities that are half the size of the original, since it takes place within the material constraints of the original entity; but we do not observe the corpse changing in that way.

On anthropological grounds, Joseph Baltimore objects to the “fission” theory because it violates the metaphysical principle of (objective) identity, which stipulates that

¹⁴ Hershenov, “Van Inwagen,” 462.

“For any x and y, if x is identical to y, then, necessarily, x is identical to y.”¹⁵

Specifically, in Zimmermann’s “fission” scenario, there are two sets of particles—one of the earthly body and one of the resurrected body—both are equally valid candidates for the person’s identity. Also, oddly enough, the validity of the candidacy of the earthly set of particles hinges on the external event of fission. But metaphysical identity is not the kind which can be affected by external factors—Socrates is still Socrates, no matter what happens to him externally.

The response Zimmermann gave to his critics is that God makes sure that only one set of particles exists to be the person. But this is “identity by fiat” rather than by fact. Kevin Corcoran, another key proponent of the “fission” theory, offers a response that basically boils down to “identity by scripture.” His four-step reasoning for physical identity through immanent causation is this: “(1) Bodies cease to exist. (2) The scriptures teach that my body is going to be raised. (3) The Immanent Causal Condition for the persistence of bodies is true. (4) Therefore, immanent causal relations can cross temporal gaps.”¹⁶ This seems hardly convincing as a metaphysical argument.

Although a Physicalist herself, Christina van Dyke’s critique against the “immanent causation” hypothesis exposes the root issue of this theory. She points out that, by definition, “A life is the sort of thing whose ‘causal paths’ end at death; ... the resurrected human being can be identical to the original human being only if, in some way or other, the life of a human being doesn’t end at death—that is, if the appropriate

¹⁵ Joseph A. Baltimore, “Got to Have Soul,” *Religious Studies* 42, no. 4 (December 2006): 419.

¹⁶ Kevin Corcoran, “Dualism, Materialism, and the Problem of Post Mortem Survival,” *Philosophia Christi* 4, no. 2 (2002): 423.

causal paths remain intact.”¹⁷ In other words, physical life by definition ends at physical death. I want to add that Physicalists’ attempts to locate an “immanent causation” across the chasm of death appear to be assuming the conclusion that has yet to be argued for. That is, they already posit that “immanent causation” does exist within the Physicalist framework, and they try to create scenarios that may fit Physicalism. The resulting case does justice neither to the nature of “immanent causation,” as Van Dyke points out, nor to biological phenomena scientifically understood, as Hershenov points out. Simply put: what empirical data within the Physicalist’ constraints do we have for proposing that a completely dead physical entity can issue life again out from its dead self? The only possible answer may be “Resurrection”—but that is the question we set out to explain.

Shortchanging objective identity with subjective perception of identity

With objective identity appearing largely unattainable within Physicalism, this type of attempts focuses instead on subjective identity. As Lynn Baker observes, the criterion of identity used here is subjective: identity exists if there is mental continuity across death in terms of memory, personality, self-awareness, etc.¹⁸ Baker further observes that these views share the same defect, i.e., the ontological possibility of duplicates. As we learned from the “replica” controversy, this very possibility is symptomatic of fundamental flaws in the anthropological assumptions they start with.

The problem, as John Cooper points out, is that they “located personal identity in a set of

¹⁷ Christina van Dyke, “Human Identity, Immanent Causal Relations, and the Principle of Non-repeatability: Thomas Aquinas on the Bodily Resurrection,” *Religious Studies* 43, no. 4 (December 2007): 388.

¹⁸ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection,” *Religious Studies* 43, no. 3 (September 2007): 333-348.

[mental] *attributes* instead of in a continuously existing *entity*,”¹⁹ whereas true identity can only be associated with the latter but not necessarily with the former. Most importantly, unlike purely physical beings (e.g., a statue) which do not have a subjective perspective, the human “I” is logically irreplaceable once it ceases to exist, even if its subjective experiences were transferred to another being. The most extensive effort along this line may be Lynne Baker’s “constitution view” of the human person. As we shall see, this theory also suffers the “duplicate” problem Baker diagnoses in other theories, avoiding it only by “fiat” under “divine mystery.” What’s more, Baker’s complicated theoretical maneuvers are seen by some as covertly Dualistic—this unwitting result, in my view, betrays the fundamental impossibility to render an ontologically coherent account of survival within the Physicalist’s framework.

Specifically, Baker distinguishes her version of Physicalism by the fact that it sees the human person as constituted by, but not identical to, the earthly body. Examples of physical constitution Baker gives include: pieces of paper constitute a dollar bill, pieces of cloth constitute the American flags, and pieces of bronze constitute a statue. Baker emphasizes that the body is not identical to the human person, because “Smith’s body alters radically while Smith endures.”²⁰ According to her theory, human beings differ from other beings in that “they have first-person perspectives *essentially*,” but this perspective still must be supported by a physical body.²¹ This, to her, entails that while a person cannot exist without body, the person has no problem surviving death as long as

¹⁹ Copper, “Identity of Resurrected Persons,” 30.

²⁰ Baker, “Persons and the Metaphysics,” 337.

²¹ *Ibid*, 339.

there is some sort of physical body,²² and “sameness of pre- and post-mortem person is sameness of first-person perspective.”²³ Against the problem of “duplication,” Baker shores up her view by claiming “mystery,” “miracle,” “primitive fact,” and ultimately “God’s free decree.” As she puts it, “For it is part of God’s natural knowledge that it is metaphysically impossible for one person to be identical to two persons. And according to the notion of God’s natural knowledge, what is metaphysically impossible is not within God’s power to bring about. Hence, there is no threat from the duplication problem.”²⁴

Baker’s critics are not convinced. Peter van Inwagen, a fellow Physicalist, finds it incomprehensible to say that the human being is constituted by but not identical to his physical body. As he puts it, “I have only one major objection to ‘constitution theory’: I can’t bring myself to take seriously the idea that constitution is real. ... there is nothing numerically distinct from me that is spatially coextensive with me.”²⁵ More importantly, he raises the question of “what is it for x and y to have the same first-person perspective? ... what is the numerical identity of first-person perspectives?”²⁶ This, in essence, is the question of the ontological basis for the *objective* identity within the “constitution view.” As he explains, “it’s hard to see how being told that God can make a post-resurrection person me by giving that person a first-person perspective numerically identical with mine explains anything—

²² Lynne Rudder Baker, “Christian Materialism in a Scientific Age,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 70 (2011): 47-59.

²³ Baker, “Persons and Metaphysics,” 345.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 346.

²⁵ Van Inwagen, “I Look for the Resurrection.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

for an essential part of giving a person a first-person perspective identical with mine is to make that person identical with me.”²⁷ That is to say, objective identity is not that kind of thing attainable by decree, even by divine decree.

Buckareff and Van Wagenen raise an objection within Baker’s framework itself. The gist of it is this: given that Physicalism explains a person’s mental states through its physical states without remainder, “the relevant [mental] properties mentioned are properties a person *derives from* the [particular] body to which she bears the constitution relation;” consequently, personal identity is lost when the physical identity it builds upon is lost, as is allowed by the “constitutive view.”²⁸ Their point becomes clear by their reminder for us that “orthodox Christians take resurrected persons to have undergone a fairly radical bodily change. What is doubtful is that persons who are resurrected are any longer human organisms. In fact, their status as organisms is dubious.”²⁹ Given that Physicalism understands all mental states including the first-person perspective as the direct result of the physical states, the drastic degree of bodily *dissimilarity* posited in the Christian doctrine of Resurrection seems to preclude the possibility of maintaining sameness of the mental states. On this ground, Dean Zimmerman, another fellow Physicalist of Baker’s, objects to her theory to even be called Physicalism in the proper sense. This is because, as far as Zimmerman can see,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Andrei A. Buckareff and Joel S. Van Wagenen, “Surviving Resurrection,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 67 (2010): 125.

²⁹ Ibid, 125.

Organisms and aggregates of matter cannot, presumably, lose all of their physical parts at once; and there are limits on the ways in which the subsequent physical states of organisms and aggregates may evolve out of earlier ones. Baker's persons are free of such constraints. They can, miraculously, jump from one body to another, losing the shape and size and so on of the one body, and instantaneously acquiring those of that other, whatever they may be. Not even a miracle could allow mere hunks of matter or organisms to perform such feats. I would say that, if the current size and shape and physical makeup of an object puts no necessary constraints upon the immediately subsequent size and shape and physical makeup of that object, then the object does not really have that size, shape, or make-up—however appropriate it is to ascribe them to it in ordinary contexts on the basis of relations to things that really have them. Persons that can pass instantaneously from organic matter to ectoplasm (or whatever intermediate-state bodies are made of) are 'physical' in an attenuated sense at best, able to pass from one body to another like shadows or spirits.³⁰

Last but not least, there is the fundamental issue of whether the mental can even be properly said to be “constituted” by the physical. As Hans Bynagle reports, currently, no constitution views have provide any conceivable account of exactly *how* the mental is constituted by the physical.³¹ Empirical experiences reveal that physical constitution basically is either by composition or by proper relation or by a combination of the two. An example of constitution by composition would be a bunch of stones collectively constitute a pile of stones. An example of constitution by proper relation would be a sand depression constitutes a footprint as the result of its causal relation to the prior event of a foot pressing on the sand. But neither way seems helpful in explaining how the physical constituted the mental, as constitutionism claims. As we shall discuss in more details in the segment below on the “philosophy of mind,” this inconceivability is the result of the fundamental incommensurability between the quanta (the quantified) and the qualia (the felt), which

³⁰ Dean Zimmerman, “Rejoinder to Lynne Rudder Baker,” in *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 340.

³¹ Bynagle, “Debating Soul.”

are the building blocks of the physical and the mental, respectively. And so, one cannot help but asking, “By virtue of what would the one constitute the other?”³²

Forfeiting personal identity all together

Christina Van Dyke concludes that the common difficulty the Physicalists face in securing personal identity is rooted in the fact that no *living* organisms, especially humans, can be restored to numerical identity after it ceases to *live*—even God cannot do that, because God cannot violate logic.³³ Perhaps due to this intrinsic difficulty, some Physicalists suggest that human existence can be gap-inclusive, or that personal continuity after death is not necessary. For example, David Hershenov thinks existential gap should be allowed because, “If it does not matter whether we are initially a result of a miracle, in vitro fertilization or sexual reproduction, why should it matter when the parts are reassembled a second time?”³⁴ The reason, again, is that, unlike physical artifacts such as a bronze statue, the human subject’s having an internal perspective entails that, even though it matters not how it begins, once it does begin, it cannot be restored after it ceases to be. As another example, Buckareff and Van Wagenen propose that “A person may survive in some looser, weaker sense. And perhaps this is all we *really* need for an adequate metaphysics of resurrection.”³⁵

The concept of “Resurrection” is central to the Christian understanding of postmortem existence. Therefore, to the suggestion that personal identity may not be

³² Ibid, 130.

³³ Van Dyke, “Human Identity.”

³⁴ David B. Hershenov, “The Metaphysical Problem of Intermittent Existence and the Possibility of Resurrection,” *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (January 2003): 30.

³⁵ Buckareff and Wagenen, “Surviving Resurrection,” 126.

necessary—which Physicalism seems inevitably lead to—a theologically minded response has to be an unequivocal “no.” First, as John Copper articulates,

It is a central biblical promise and a basic hope of Christians that we who now live on earth will be with Christ forever in his new creation. Implicit in this vision is the unspoken assumption of numerical personal identity: the persons who will be there are one and the same as those who existed previously on this earth. God has not just promised to have an indefinite group of people there, a wholly different crowd perhaps. Nor is he intending to resurrect people who look like us and believe they are us, but are in fact mere copies of us.³⁶

In other words, the very genuineness of the Christian Hope is at stake when it comes to the issue of whether the resurrected person is in fact the same as the one who died—if not, the Christian Hope is actually in vain. Copper thinks that “It is so fundamental that inadequacy on this point would be sufficient for rejection of that version of personal eschatology.”³⁷ I would add: if personal continuity were not necessary, the notion of “re-surrection” would not have come into existence in the first, as the “re” denotes. What’s more, the Christian understanding of salvation is affected by whether or not the resurrected person is the same as the one who died. This is because core soteriological notions of justification and sanctification are all moral concepts associated with a personal subject; they become nonsensical if the subject who is to undergo the salvific process is surrogated before reaching the eventual eschaton—that can only mean that the person did not really get saved. God’s plan of salvation appears illogical under this light. In addition, I think the scriptural response to the Physicalist’s proposals would be an unequivocal “no” as well, considering that the biblical authors, in contrast to the Physicalists, emphasize precisely differences and discontinuity between the earthly and

³⁶ Copper, “Identity of Resurrected Persons,” 25.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

the resurrected bodies. As Baker points out, “A resurrection body is a ‘spiritual’ body. Whatever a spiritual body is, it is incorruptible. All earthly bodies are corruptible. Anything corruptible is essentially corruptible, and anything that is incorruptible is essentially incorruptible.”³⁸

Resurrection Envisioned within the Framework of Dualism

According to substantive Dualism, the human person is a composite of the physical body and the non-physical soul; death is an event in which the body dies whereas the soul separates from the body and lives on; and “Resurrection” is a subsequent event through which the soul is reunited with the body. Notably, substantive Dualism has been the usual framework used to articulate the Christian understanding of “Resurrection,” and there is little work done recently by Dualists to offer further thoughts on the topic.

This may give the impression that the Dualist’s depiction of “Resurrection” is watertight. In reality, however, the Dualistic conceptualization faces a severe challenge posed by the metaphysical principle stipulating that “objects which are distinct at any time must be distinct at all times.” Particularly, it raises the questions of personal identity and postmortem survival: for if the Dualist’s account of resurrection equates the human person with a non-physical entity, it should identify that non-physical entity with the human person *at all times*, rather than with the composite before death but with the non-physical element of it after death; otherwise, the human person cannot be identified with that non-physical element *at any time*, and so the person does not really survive death. Notably, a closer look at Dualists’ typical arguments reveals that all the cogent defenses

³⁸ Baker, “Christian Materialism,” 52.

they were able to marshal are for the non-physical element in the human person, and so these defenses go no further than defending Idealism; as to the physical element, little is said in their arguments. Perhaps realizing that, Dualist John Copper defines his Dualistic position by saying that “By ‘Dualism’ I mean the ontological possibility that human persons can exist temporarily without being embodied. ... It makes no commitment to the various philosophical Dualisms.”³⁹

Another important challenge against Dualism’s depiction of the Christian concept of “Resurrection” comes from theology. As Baker points out, the Dualists “leave dangling the question of why resurrection should be bodily.”⁴⁰ That is, why embodiedness is explicitly emphasized in this Christian eschatological concept, given that the eschatological aim according to Christianity is perfect union with God, who does not have body?

Accumulated Insights and Unresolved Questions

Several valuable insights may be gathered from various discourses so far on postmortem embodiment. Positively, we learn from John Hick to properly appreciate embodiment as the very path through which human beings are made to become the Image of God. We also learned from recent eschatological reflections about the need to keep soteriology front and center, to keep the role of the Holy Spirit front and center, and to consider postmortem embodiment as the concrete trajectory of growth of the entire person. Negatively, we see the confusion in soteriology caused by muddled notions of “matter.” And, through the failed attempts by Hick and by the Physicalists, we realized

³⁹ Copper, “Identity of Resurrected Persons,” 21.

⁴⁰ Baker, “Persons and the Metaphysics,” 341.

that a philosophically intelligible and theologically acceptable account of postmortem embodiment is unattainable within the parameters of Physicalism. On the other hand, we see that the Dualist's depiction of "Resurrection" faces its own formidable challenge of postmortem identity, as made clear by the metaphysical principle that "objects which are distinct at any time must be distinct at all times." In addition, the Dualist leaves unanswered the puzzling theological question of why resurrection has to be embodied, if the human person is essentially non-physical and is eschatologically destined to unite with God who is also non-physical.

Our investigations above also exposed several important issues left open. Hans Bynagle captures them well with his dual concern: how to think about postmortem embodiment in a way that is both compatible with core Christian beliefs and tenable on veritable grounds?⁴¹ I have spent the above space describing the lack of *philosophical* tenability in both Physicalism and Dualism in current literature for rendering a convincing picture of "Resurrection," a key Christian notion of postmortem survival; I will elaborate more on their philosophical lacks in a following section when I introduce the Philosophy of Mind debate. In the last section of this chapter, I will describe their lack of *scientific* tenability. Here, I only want to unpack a bit more their lack of *theological* rigor. Specifically, during an interdisciplinary dialogue on "Resurrection," Ted Peters clarifies that "St. Paul ... speaks of heavenly bodies (*somata epourania*) with their *doxa* – connoting glory or radiance. ... Glory here does not emphasize a body with radiance or any other such quality. 'Rather, this reflects Jewish eschatological language

⁴¹ Bynagle, "Debating Soul," 120.

for the future state of the *righteous*.”⁴² And so, articulations of the Christian notion of “Resurrection” must be conducive for conveying this soteriological nature of “Resurrection,” which is dying to sin and being raised to the life of righteousness. Along the same line of thinking, Andreas Schuele states that

the Christian understanding of resurrection is not limited to the question of continuity and discontinuity between life before and life beyond physical death. It is not the fact that we have to die that brings resurrection to the theological agenda. ... conceiving of resurrection requires us to relate what we are destined to become, as well as what we are at any present moment and what we have been in the past, to the fullness of Christ's own life. ... It seems, therefore, of utmost consequence that Christianity had to express its understanding of life and death in a way that would correspond to its view of a ‘person’ as that which is destined to be transformed into the image of Christ. This, it seems to me, is the very essence of the idea of resurrection that New Testament traditions.⁴³

How do the Physicalist and the Dualist’s depictions of “Resurrection” measure up against this soteriological core in the doctrine of “Resurrection” as being transformed into the image of God? When defending his “body snatching” scenario, Peter Inwagen acknowledges that some may respond by saying that “God would not do such a frivolous thing!” To me, this response seems applicable to all the solutions the Physicalists have come up with, because in all their scenarios God has to perform some extraneous acts for no apparent reason other than the Physicalist metaphysical commitment, and yet still losing the person to death in the end. To a less apparent degree, the Dualist’s outlook is susceptible to the same criticism, because the prime import of embodiment so

⁴² Ted Peters, “Introduction: What Is to Come,” in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), viii-xvii.

⁴³ Andreas Schuele, “Transformed into the Image of Christ: Identity, Personality, and Resurrection,” in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 219-235.

emphasized by the doctrine of “Resurrection” is left unilluminated and so tends to appear frivolous in their disembodied renditions of the afterlife.

In his most recent book on Christology, theologian Michael Welker makes the interesting suggestion that we understand Jesus’ resurrected body as a manifestation and a revelation of the Spirit. As Welker puts it, “In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we encounter the Spirit in ‘bodily’ form.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Welker sees the human body as “a realm, a sphere in which God intends to ‘dwell’ and through which also to be glorified.”⁴⁵ In the rest of this chapter, I will try to show that George Berkeley’s sacramental Idealism offers us the framework to conceive bodily existence after death in a way that is both agreeable with core Christian concepts and tenable according to knowledge from philosophy and physical science. Borrowing Welker’s phrases, it may be said that, according to Berkeley’s Idealism, the postmortem “body” would be where the human spirit is to be manifested and where God is to be encountered and glorified.

George Berkeley’s Sacramental Idealism and the Purpose of Embodiment

There are three segments in this section. In the first segment, I outline the key features of Bishop George Berkeley’s Idealism. In the second segment, I offer a more detailed report on a unique aspect of Berkeley’s Idealism, namely, his sacramental understanding of the material reality as “divine communication” from God. With this segment as a bridge, in the third segment, I demonstrate the soundness of Berkeley’s Idealism via the Theology of the Body, which is a contemporary Christian understanding

⁴⁴ Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 42.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 133.

of embodiment under the pedagogical, soteriological aim of being transformed into the image of God.

Introducing Berkeley's Idealism

In this segment, I introduce Berkeley's Idealism using his most representative work, "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous," supplemented by his "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge" and "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision." I begin by sketching out Berkeley's position on some basic ontological questions. I then recount the main objections Berkeley raised against the claim of a "material substance" independent from all minds. I finish the segment by describing the unique strengths Berkeley highlights for us regarding his Idealistic outlook.

Berkeley's Thesis in a Nutshell

In a nutshell, Berkeley denies any "material substance" existing independently from the mind. According to Berkeley, there exist only two types of things: spirits and their perceptions. All those which exist but cannot perceive must be the perceptions of spirit—if not of finite spirits, they are certainly of the infinite Spirit God "in whom all things move and have their beings." (Acts 17:28) This entails that no unperceiving things can exist completely independently from mind. The unperceiving things perceived by us are collections of ideas in the form of sensible qualities. Therefore, the so-called "corporeal substance" is in fact a mere collection of ideas of sensible qualities which, as ideas of mind, cannot exist except in a mind; and the "corporeal world" we perceive is nothing but a world of sense perceptions.

By “ideas,” Berkeley does not mean fictions and fancies of the mind, but regular notions of the mind; he uses “idea” to emphasize its derivative and dependent status vis-à-vis the mind. In Berkeley’s view, recognizing the sensible things as collections of ideas of the mind does not render those things any less “real,” because these ideas are imprinted on our mind by God rather than conjured up or malleable by ourselves. As far as Berkeley can see, “By the principles premised we are not deprived of any one thing in nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or anywise conceive or understand remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever.”⁴⁶ Sensible things are real as real sense perceptions, which are exactly *what* we gather and *all* that we gather from everyday experience; they need not at all be an independent “substance” to be “real” for us in carrying out our life as we do. Scientific knowledge about the world describes regularities in terms of succession of ideas, e.g., thunder follows lightening, pain follows a pinch; it says nothing and cannot say anything about the so-called “material substance” *independent* of the mind.

Two points in Berkeley’s Idealism are particularly relevant for our current investigation. First, Berkeley thinks that a spirit is not directly perceivable by other spirits. He says that “I have properly no idea, either of God or any other spirit; for these being active, that which perceives ideas, thinks and wills cannot be represented by things perfectly inert, as our ideas are.”⁴⁷ In other words, this impossibility is the result of the utter incommensurability between a spirit and an idea. And so, the sensible qualities of a person we perceive (e.g., color, figure, motion, etc.) are *markers* pointing out for us the

⁴⁶ George Berkeley, “A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge,” paragraph #34.

⁴⁷ George Berkeley, “Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous,” in *A New Theory of Vision and Other Selected Philosophical Writings*, with an Introduction by A. D. Lindsay (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1910), 267.

existence of a finite spirit like ourselves. An important implication of this is the necessity for the spirit to have perceivable “markers” for there to be interactions among spirits. Relatedly, second, Berkeley conceives the “body” as a collection of markers of a spirit. Sensible “body,” rightly considered, is nothing but a collection of such qualities or ideas in our mind. Notably, Berkeley thinks his Idealistic understanding of the “body” is particularly helpful for illuminating and defending the Christian doctrine of “resurrection.” He says,

about the Resurrection, ... Take away this material substance, about the identity whereof all the dispute is, and mean by body what every plain ordinary person means by that word, to wit, that which is immediately seen and felt, which is only a combination of sensible qualities or ideas, and then their most unanswerable objections come to nothing.⁴⁸

Berkeley’s Step-by-Step Rebuttal against the Common Arguments for a “Physical Substance”

In “Three Dialogues,” Berkeley patiently goes through all the common arguments for “physical substance,” and methodically dispels them one by one. Berkeley’s objections against the claim of an independent “physical substance” may be summed up this way: upon close examination, this claim turns out to be unsubstantiated and also incoherent. It is “unsubstantiated,” because we have no evidence which would suggest the existence of such substance; it is “incoherent,” because the concept itself is logically intractable.

Claim: A material substance is where the sensible qualities we perceive inhere

It is claimed that the sense qualities we perceive point to some external object in which they inhere, and this external object is a material substance. We can infer this

⁴⁸ Berkeley, “Principles,” paragraph #95.

especially from those less intense qualities—for even though we hardly perceive them, they still exist somewhere. Berkeley replies that every sensible quality—to however small degree it *is* perceived—is nothing but perceptions in the mind; by definition, no sensible qualities can exist outside the mind which senses them. It is a contradiction in terms to say that some sensible qualities exist in a “material substance” which does not sense. Berkeley also points to a familiar experience of ours: the same cup of water can feel cold to our left hand and warm to our right hand at the same time, if the two hands have previously been in waters of different temperatures. This relative nature applies to all other sense experiences (e.g., sight, sound, taste, etc.) which, he argues, shows that sense qualities are entirely in our mind, and not in something “external” and objective to the mind.

Claim: Scientific observations enable us to distinguish a thing in itself vs. the thing as perceived by us

It is claimed that scientific observations have opened our eyes to the difference between a thing in itself versus the thing in our perception. For example, heat sensed by us is in itself motions of unperceivable particles; the latter is the cause of the former. Berkeley replies that all of our perceptions—whether obtained through the naked eye or through a scientific instrument like a microscope—are still perceptions in the mind; no mental perceptions can be in “the thing itself” outside the mind. Moreover, all perceptions are equally apparent and valid, for they are equally perceptions by the mind—in what way can we differentiate some mental perceptions as “apparent” and other mental perceptions as “true, in the thing itself”? We really have no basis to pick one perceptive

scope of the mind (e.g., through the microscope) among many and claim that particular scope to be “the thing in itself.”

Claim: Even though some qualities exist only in the mind (i.e., the “secondary qualities), there are still other qualities which inhere in an external object (i.e., the “primary qualities”)

It is claimed that, even though qualities like sound and color, or the so-called “secondary qualities,” exist completely in our mind, qualities like shape, solidity, and motion, the so-called “primary qualities,” inhere in the material object external to the mind. Berkeley replies that “primary qualities” are also nothing but perceptions in the mind. The most obvious evidence is that “primary qualities” also demonstrate relativity rather than absoluteness vis-à-vis the mind, like the “secondary qualities” do. For example, the same motion can be perceived as fast and slow at the same time, the same solidity can be perceived as soft and firm at the same time, etc., depending on the condition of the mind which senses it. Moreover, Berkeley asks the reader to notice the fact that, it is impossible for us to separate “primary qualities” in our mind from “secondary qualities;” “primary qualities” such as shape and motion always coexist with some “secondary qualities.” Thus, no “primary qualities” can exist outside the mind.

Claim: Since sensible qualities cannot exist by themselves, it is necessary to suppose a substratum to support them, and this substratum is a material substance

It is claimed that sensible qualities cannot exist on their own; therefore, we must suppose some substratum to “support” them, and this substratum is a material substance. Berkeley replies that, first, it is a contradiction in terms to say that the sensible qualities

manifest in our mind exist in some “material substance”—for these qualities are sensations in nature, but the “material substance” does not sense; these qualities are thoughts, but the “material substance” does not think. Second, *in where* does this “supporting” relationship between the sensible qualities and its “material” substratum exist? And *how*? Inferring from the sensible qualities a “material substance” as their substratum is unfounded. Even though it is correct to notice that the sensible qualities exist independently of *our* finite minds, it is wrong to conclude that they exist independently of *all* minds. Since these qualities are sensible qualities, there can be no substratum to “support” them except that which can sense, i.e., the spirit.

Claim: Our ideas are “representations” of external objects which are not immediately perceivable by us; these objects are material things

It is claimed by John Locke that, there are two types of objects external to the mind. One is our ideas, which are perceived by us immediately; the other is things in themselves, which are not directly perceivable and are perceived by us only via the mediation of ideas serving as their representations. The second type of objects is material things which exist without the mind. Berkeley replies that an idea cannot be an accurate representation of anything except another idea, and neither idea can exist in some unperceiving “substance” outside the mind. It is inconceivable how *sensible* ideas can give a representation of a thing which is *insensible*. At this point, Berkeley urges his readers to carefully examine the basis upon which they come to agree with the claim that certain “material substance” exists which is insensible itself and exists independently of the mind. He asks, “Whatever we perceive is perceived immediately or mediately: by

sense, or by reason and reflection. But, as you have excluded sense, pray show me what *reason* you have to believe their existence; or what *medium* you can possibly make use of to prove it?”⁴⁹

Claim: The perception of “distance” suggests something outside of and so external to us

It is claimed that our perception of distance shows that some things exist externally outside of us. Berkeley replies that, in dreams, we perceive things existing outside of us, but we all know that those things in fact exist only in our mind. Moreover, Berkeley points out that newborns and blind men do not know how to react properly to ideas of distance when they first gain eyesight. This shows that “distance” is also nothing but a collection of ideas; we learn it from experience by association. Specifically, as Berkeley explains, “from the ideas you actually perceive by sight, you have by experience learned to collect what other ideas you will (according to the standing order of nature) be affected with, after such a certain succession of time and motion.”⁵⁰

Claim: The mind is affected by sensible ideas of which it finds neither itself nor the ideas themselves to be the cause; the cause of these ideas is called “matter”

It is claimed that, since the sensible qualities are ideas occurring to our minds without we ourselves causing them to happen, and these ideas cannot cause themselves to occur to our minds, they must have some cause that is neither us nor themselves.

“Matter” is the name for this external cause of ideas in our minds. Berkeley replies, first, by protesting that this way of defining “matter” is not what is commonly meant by the

⁴⁹ Berkeley, “Dialogues,” 237-238.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 234.

word, which “signifies an extended, solid, moveable, unthinking, inactive substance”—something, by now, has been shown to give us no reason at all to suppose its existence. Even if we suppose that it did exist, how can this “material substance,” which itself is unthinking and thus *inactive*, be a cause of anything, not to say a cause of thinking? For all genuine actions are volitions, and volitions can exist in nowhere except in a mind. Even though it is correct to deduce an external cause of our ideas, that cause cannot be properly defined as an unthinking “material substance,” because *nothing can give to another that which it itself does not yet have*.

Claim: Activities of our material brain is the cause or occasion for ideas in our mind

As another version of the above, it is claimed that activities in the material brain are discovered to be the cause or the occasion for ideas in our mind. Notably, this is what we often hear in the mind-brain debate today. Berkeley replies that the so-called “material brain” we observe, being something observable, is still just a collection of ideas and so exists only in the mind. Furthermore, Berkeley asks, “What connection is there between a motion in the nerves, and the sensations of sound or color in the mind? Or how is it possible these should be the effect of that?”⁵¹ These questions Berkeley raised are known today in the mind-brain debate as the “problem of incommensurability” between the mental and the physical attributes.

Claim: “Matter” is the instrument God uses to generate ideas in our mind

It is claimed that, even though God is the Supreme Cause of all things, the unthinking “matter” can still be a cause through that kind of action proper to it, namely, motion. And so, matter is the instrument God uses to produce ideas in our mind. Berkeley

⁵¹ Ibid, 243.

replies by asking, first, how is it possible to even conceive the “material substance” to be an instrument for God, when it is devoid of all sensible qualities we know of? Second, what basis do we have to even think that this unknown and unknowable “substance” actually exists in independence? Is it by sensible experiences? But the substance is said to be insensible. Is it by inference? But all inferences are connected to ideas in our mind. Third, Berkeley raises an objection based on the divine attribute of omnipotence. He argues that it is quite conceivable that God affects the ideas in our mind by a mere act of God’s will without there being any external objects resembling them; our perceiving mind would not notice any difference between the two situations. Hence, it is inconsistent with the infinite perfection of God, if God uses some lifeless inactive “material” as his instrument to produce ideas in our mind, while God could have done it perfectly without it.

Claim: Things would not be real without supposing the existence of “matter”

It is claimed that, the real existence of things cannot be maintained without supposing the existence of a “material substance.” Berkeley replies by asking, “Is it not a sufficient evidence to me of the existence of this glove, that I see it, and feel it, and wear it?” If not, “how is it possible I should be assured of the reality of this thing, which I actually see in this place, by supposing that some unknown thing, which I never did or can see, exists after an unknown manner, in an unknown place, or in no place at all?” And, “How can the supposed reality of that which is intangible be a proof that anything

tangible really exists? Or, of that which is invisible, that any visible thing, or, in general of anything which is imperceptible, that a perceptible exists?”⁵²

As another version of the above, it is claimed that, without a “material substance” external to the mind, we cannot distinguish real things and “chimeras” produced by our mind—since ideas are all in the mind. Berkeley replies by pointing out that products of our own mind, such as dreams and fancies, “are faint and indistinct,” often “dim, irregular, and confused,” and “not being connected, and of a piece with the preceding and subsequent transactions of our lives;” besides, they all entirely depend on our own mind. In contrast, sensible ideas are real because they “are more vivid and clear ... being imprinted on the mind by a Spirit distinct from us, have not the like dependence on our will.”⁵³

Claim: It is at least possible that “material substance” may in fact exist, since there is no logical contradiction in supposing it; our inability to conceive it does not guarantee that it does exist

As a last resort for upholding Physicalism, it is claimed that, at least it is not logically impossible to suppose that “material substance” may exist; our inability to conceive it does not mean that we have successfully proved its nonexistence. Berkeley replies by first pointing out that, it is utterly irresponsible to insist something which “you know not what, for you know not what reason, to you know not what purpose” still just *may* exist, even when one does not even know what this thing or its existing means. He protests: “Is it come to this, that you only believe the existence of material objects, and

⁵² Ibid, 259-260.

⁵³ Ibid, 271-272.

that your belief is founded barely on the possibility of its being true? Then you will have me bring reasons against it: though another would think it reasonable the proof should lie on him who holds the affirmative.”⁵⁴ And, “It is to me a sufficient reason not to believe the existence of anything, if I see no reason for believing it. What it is you would have me believe, since you say you have no manner of notion of it. ... to believe you know not what and you know not why.”⁵⁵

In sum

At the end of the dialogues, Berkeley summarily declares that “In fact, I deny it to be possible!” He denies even the mere *logical* possibility for the so-called “matter” as “an extended, solid, figured, moveable substance, existing without the mind” to actually exist. First, we find no and we can find no evidence whatsoever which would lead us to believe its existence. As he puts it:

Either you perceive the being of Matter immediately or mediately. If immediately, pray inform me by which of the senses you perceive it. If mediately, let me know by what reasoning it is inferred from those things which you perceive immediately.⁵⁶

I have no reason for believing the existence of Matter. I have no immediate intuition thereof: neither can I immediately from my sensations, ideas, notions, actions, or passions, infer an unthinking, unperceiving, inactive Substance—either by probable deduction, or necessary consequence. ... no sign or symptom whatever that leads to a rational belief of Matter.⁵⁷

Second, Berkeley denies the existence of “material substance” because he finds the notion itself to be entirely empty of any meaning; we know that the thing described

⁵⁴ Ibid, 238.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 252.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 255.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 269.

by a concept with no meaning cannot exist. Berkeley recounts how the dialogues look into what exactly is meant by the term “matter.” It begins with the claim that “matter” is a substance—but how can we know a substance without knowing any of its accidents or sensible qualities? It is then claimed that “matter” is the substratum supporting the sensible qualities—but how can such supporting relationship be conceived? It is then claimed to be the archetype of ideas, the external cause of ideas, the instrument or occasion of ideas, and finally, it is claimed to be something in general without any positive content—in Berkeley’s words, “I know not what is meant by its existence, or how it exists. . . . its where, its how, its entity, or anything belonging to it.”⁵⁸

In Berkeley’s view, “material substance” is just a name introduced by philosophers to denote a kind of existence independent from the mind. However, close examination reveals that, the “material substance” they contend for “is an Unknown Somewhat (if indeed it may be termed somewhat), which is quite stripped of all sensible qualities, and can neither be perceived by sense, nor apprehended by the mind.”⁵⁹ And so, it is “no more than a *hypothesis*; and a false and groundless one too.”⁶⁰ In the end, “Matter comes to nothing.”⁶¹

Some Unique Strengths of Berkeley’s Idealism

In addition to dismantling the concept of “material substance,” Berkeley calls to attention several important strengths of his Idealism.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 257.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 300.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 265.

⁶¹ Ibid, 258.

Confirming the common sense

First, Berkeley argues that his Idealism is no more and no less than what we actually posit when carrying on our everyday living. It is not a “novelty,” as his critics claim, but the common folk’s common sense. For, to a common folk, what he perceives by sense is what he calls real and thinks it really exists; what he does not perceive, he calls unreal and thinks that it does not exist. And this is precisely how Berkeley’s Idealism understands reality as well. It is those who uphold Physicalism that actually claim something entirely opposite to common sense. As Berkeley describes,

That the qualities we perceive are not [really] on the objects: that we must not believe our senses: that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be assured even of their existence: that real colors and sounds are nothing but certain unknown figures and motions: that motions are in themselves neither swift nor slow: that there are in bodies without extensions, without any particular magnitude or figure: that a thing stupid, thoughtless, and inactive, operates on a spirit: that the least particle of a body contains innumerable extended parts—these are the novelties, these are the strange notions which shock the genuine uncorrupted judgment of all mankind; and being once admitted, embarrass the mind with endless doubts and difficulties.⁶²

Combating skepticism

As a related point, Berkeley thinks that his Idealism is particularly effective in combating skepticism, a worrisome plague that was particularly prevalent in his time. It was claimed that the philosophers knew better, for they knew the “real” nature of things behind the mere appearances seen by other people. Consequently, endless doubts are planted in people’s minds when they are told that

You may indeed know that fire appears hot, and water fluid; but this is no more than knowing what sensations are produced in your own mind, upon the

⁶² Ibid, 281.

application of fire and water to your organs of sense. Their internal constitution, their true and real nature, you are utterly in the dark as to that.⁶³

It seems, then, we are altogether put off with the appearances of things, and those false ones too—The very meat I eat, and the cloth I wear, have nothing in them like what I see and feel. ... what any one of them is in its own true nature, I declare positively I know not. And the same is true with regard to every other corporeal thing. And, what is more, we are not only ignorant of the true and real nature of things, but even of their existence.⁶⁴

By claiming an absolutely objective “reality” outside the mind *distinct* from the ways they are perceived, this “sophisticated” Physicalism in effect denies sensible things in everyday life to be real. But Berkeley reasons, “That a thing should be really perceived by my senses, and at the same time not really exist, is to me a plain contradiction;” and so he says, “it is my opinion that the real things are those very things I see, and feel, and perceive by my senses. These I know; and, finding they answer all the necessities and purposes of life, have no reason to be solicitous about any other unknown beings.”⁶⁵ There is no valid reason to be skeptical about the real nature or even the very existence of things we sense. This is because

I should not have known them but that I perceived them by my senses; and things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived; and things immediately perceived are ideas; and ideas cannot exist without the mind; their existence therefore consists in being perceived; when, therefore, they are actually perceived there can be no doubt of their existence.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid, 262.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 263.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 265.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 266.

Pointing toward God

Berkeley emphasizes that his Idealism is especially effective in pointing out for people the existence of an infinitely perfect Mind, i.e., God. This is because, it is obvious that ideas cannot exist other than in a mind; it is equally obvious that they do not depend on our finite minds, seeing that it is beyond our power to determine what sensible ideas come to mind. We are thus led to infer that “there must be some other Mind wherein they exist. As sure, therefore, as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite omnipresent Spirit who contains and supports it.”⁶⁷ It is according to the laws established by this Mind that sensible ideas exhibit themselves to us finite minds. Hence, one cannot help but realizing “There is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive. And, from the variety, order, and manner of these, I conclude the Author of them to be wise, powerful, and good, beyond comprehension.”⁶⁸

A scripture verse Berkeley highly favors is “in God we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) He points out that people usually first believe the existence of God, which is a bigger hurdle of faith to overcome, and then they believe the omniscience of God, which is relatively easier to accept once God is believed to exist. His Idealism leads people to belief in God through the opposite order, which is easier to come by. He explains, “Men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God, because they believe the being of a God; whereas I, on the other side, immediately and necessarily conclude the being of a God, because all sensible things must be

⁶⁷ Ibid, 245.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 249.

perceived by Him.”⁶⁹ “This furnishes you with a direct and immediate demonstration, from a most evident principle; ... an infinite Mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare existence of the sensible world.”⁷⁰

Affirming the world around us

Last but not least, Berkeley thinks that Physicalism renders the world around us illusory and with no apparent purpose—because God does not need such a world of physical things to effect ideas in our mind, and it is contradictory to “Divine wisdom, to make something in vain, or do that by tedious *roundabout* methods which might have been performed in a much more easy and compendious way.”⁷¹ In contrast, his Idealism recognizes the world around us to be a world of ideas for our mind, as the direct result of divine ingenuity under God’s purpose; it is a world suffused with divine wisdom and intention, a world radiant of the personal presence of God.

“A World for Us”: A Recent Update

John Foster’s recent book offers us a good understanding of modern day Idealists’ stand on Berkeley’s classic thesis.⁷² In the Preface, Foster states that “the aim of this work is to establish that the existence of the physical world is logically sustained by the world-suggestive way in which, under God’s ordinance and authority, things are disposed

⁶⁹ Ibid, 245.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 246.

⁷¹ Ibid, 247.

⁷² John Foster, *A World for Us: The Case for Phenomenalistic Idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

to appear at the human empirical viewpoint.”⁷³ He underlines the fact that this Idealistic understanding of the world stands in sharp contrast to materialistic view “which takes the world to have an existence that is both logically independent of the human mind and metaphysically fundamental.” And he argues that “it is only by accepting the Idealist thesis that we can represent the physical world as having the empirical immanence it needs if it is to form *a world for us*.”⁷⁴

In positioning his own work in relation to Berkeley, Foster states that “Berkeley’s version of this Idealism is not entirely to my liking. In particular, he has what is, from my standpoint, an impoverished view of the sorts of entity and property that the Idealistic world can contain. ... But it is to his vision of a world that is created by the orderly way in which God brings about our sensory experiences that my own approach can be ultimately traced.”⁷⁵ In other words, even though modern knowledge may warrant relaxation of certain stipulations in Berkeley’s theory, which will result in a more enriched world of ideas, Berkeley’s Idealism is substantively endorsed by Idealists of our day.

The Sacramental Core of Berkeley’s Idealism

In this segment, I zoom in on a quintessential understanding of Berkeley’s Idealism, namely, the *sacramentality* of embodied experiences. I begin by highlighting a distinctively Berkeleian theme, i.e., sense experiences are the language God uses to communicate with us. I follow that by describing Berkeley’s two fascinating observations

⁷³ Ibid, vii.

⁷⁴ Ibid, vii.

⁷⁵ Ibid, ix.

regarding our sense perceptions, which supply fascinating support to his sacramental understanding of sense perception. First is his observation that the concept of “distance” is learned through experiences of association and not directly perceived. Second is his observation that different types of sense experiences (e.g., sight, touch, etc.) do not really have any necessary connection with one another; they are regularly associated together in our understanding as the result of experience. In other words, our sense experiences are the way they are as the result of God’s personal intentions and intimate workings, and so sense experiences are God’s communication to us.

The Upshot: Sense Experiences as Communication from God

Like other theologians who admire the Creator because of the creation, Berkeley recognizes the divine attributes through the world around us. For example, he repeatedly calls to attention that, the fact that our myriad sense experiences appear in a law-like order and steadiness, immensely intricate and stunningly coherent at the same time, witnesses to the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. The regularity of the world allows us to learn about its laws, and this “gives us a sort of foresight which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. . . . without this we should be eternally at a loss.”⁷⁶ Creation also attests to the divine attribute of faithfulness, in that God sustains us through every moment of our existence. As Berkeley puts it, “Whenever the course of nature is interrupted by a miracle, men are ready to own the presence of a superior agent. But, when we see things go on in the ordinary course they do not excite in us any

⁷⁶ Berkeley, “Principles,” paragraph #31.

reflection; their order and concatenation ... [in fact are] an argument of the greatest wisdom, power, and goodness in their Creator.”⁷⁷

More importantly, the extremely *immanent* nature of God’s presence to us is made exceptionally clear through the way Berkeley understands the ideas in our mind, i.e., all of our sense perceptions are created and sustained for us by an All-Perfect Mind. That is to say, humans experiencing sense perception is the direct result of God immediately present and acting on their minds. In Berkeley’s words, “God concerns Himself so *nearly* in our affairs,” that He is “a Spirit who is *intimately* present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations which continually affect us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short ‘in whom we live, and move, and have our being.’”⁷⁸ When unpacking the relationship between visual and tangible experiences, Berkeley even writes endearingly that “visible ideas are the *Language* whereby the governing Spirit on whom we depend informs us what tangible ideas he is about to imprint upon us, in case we excite this or that motion in our own bodies.”⁷⁹ According to Berkeley, God is made manifest by all that we experience because, just as the way we experience other finite spirits like ourselves

after the same manner we see God; all the difference is that, whereas someone finite and narrow assemblage of ideas denotes a particular human mind, whithersoever we direct our view, we do at all times and in all places perceive manifest tokens of the Divinity: everything we see, hear, feel, or anywise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the power of God; as is our perception of those very motions which are produced by men.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid, paragraph #57.

⁷⁸ Ibid, paragraph # 149.

⁷⁹ Ibid, paragraph #44.

⁸⁰ Ibid, paragraph #148.

Observation #1: “Distance” is a Notion Taught by Experience, rather than Perceived

Directly

To demonstrate the utter closeness of God unveiled by his Idealism, in *A New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley deconstructs our seemingly mundane experience of distance.

In his words,

it is shown (1) that distance or outness is neither immediately of itself perceived by sight, nor yet apprehended or judged of by lines and angles, or anything that has a necessary connection with it; but (2) that it is only suggested to our thoughts by certain visible ideas and sensations attending vision, which in their own nature have no manner of similitude or relation either with distance or things placed at a distance; but, by a connection taught us by experience, they come to signify and suggest them to us, after the same manner that words of any language suggest the ideas they are made to stand for.⁸¹

The concept of “distance” is developed over time in our mind as the result of repeatedly experiencing regularities of certain visual ideas of varying degrees of outness vis-à-vis us always being associated with certain series of tangible ideas. “Distance” denotes a customary connection regarding what ideas of touch will be imprinted on our minds in consequence of such and such actions when such and such visual ideas come up; it does not mark out for us some external things actually existing outside of us. It has become such a habitual notion to us through daily living that we can predict what tangible experience will come up as the result of certain visual experiences. Tellingly, it is not so for blind men, as Berkeley keenly observes,

a man born blind, being made to see, would, at first, have no idea of distance by sight; the sun and stars, the remotest objects as well as the nearer, would all seem to be in his eye, or rather in his mind. The objects intromitted by sight would seem to him (as in truth they are) no other than a new set of thoughts or

⁸¹ Berkeley, “A New Theory of Vision,” paragraph #43.

sensations, each whereof is as near to him as the perceptions of pain or pleasure, or the most inward passions of his soul.⁸²

That newborns cannot react properly to visual experiences until sometime after is a well-known fact, which should offer strong support to Berkeley's point. Berkeley validates his view with a further treatise *Theory of vision vindicated and explained*. In it, we learn about the case of a thirteen-year-old boy who was blind from infancy as the result of cataracts. As Berkeley predicted, when his vision was restored by an English surgeon by the name of William Cheselden, he had severe difficulties comprehending visual experiences, especially the idea of "distance." Two-dimensional paintings confused him. Rather than knowing it instinctually, he had to learn from scratch how to associate tactile experiences with visual ones.

Observation #2: None of the Sensory Properties We Experience Have Any Necessary Connection to One Another; They Are Known to Manifest Together Only Through Experience

Furthermore, Berkeley makes the astonishing statement that various types of sense experience (e.g., sight, sound, touch, etc.) are completely distinct ideas which possess no necessary connection whatsoever with one another. As he explains,

That which I see is only variety of light and colors. That which I feel is hard or soft, hot or cold, rough or smooth. What similitude, what connection have those ideas with these? Or how is it possible that anyone should see reason to give one and the same name to combinations of ideas so very different before he had experienced their co-existence? We do not find there is any necessary connection betwixt this or that tangible quality and any color whatsoever. And we may sometimes perceive colors where there is nothing to be felt. All which doth make it manifest that no man, at first receiving of his sight, would know there was any

⁸² Ibid, paragraph #41.

agreement between this or that particular object of his sight and any object of touch he had been already acquainted with.⁸³

To demonstrate his point more clearly, Berkeley invites the reader to think counterfactually:

Now, that there is no necessary connection between these two distinct extensions is evident from hence: because our eyes might have been framed in such a manner as to be able to see nothing but what were less than the minimum tangible. In which case it is not impossible we might have perceived all the immediate objects of sight, the very same that we do now: but unto those visible appearances there would not be connected those different tangible magnitudes that are now. Which shows the judgments we make of the magnitude of things placed at a distance from the various greatness of the immediate objects of sight do not arise from any essential or necessary but only a customary tie, which has been observed between them.⁸⁴

“We see God”: A Quick Summary

To conclude my introduction of Berkeley’s Idealism via the previous two sections, it helps to quote Sigmund Bonk’s remark on the sacramental core of Berkeley’s Idealism. Bonk reminds us that, unlike what his philosophical critics usually focus on, “Berkeley did not simply ‘deny’ matter ... but he interpreted it newly, namely as a (primarily visual) language by which God speaks to us ... the idea is that we can *see* God through this delicate, diaphanous medium if we look at physical nature in the right (contemplative) manner.”⁸⁵ As to God’s purpose for communicating to us through the world of ideas, Berkeley himself says it the best in the Fifth Dialogue of his later work *Alciphron*:

⁸³ Berkeley, “A New Theory of Vision,” paragraph #103.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, paragraph #62.

⁸⁵ Sigmund Bonk, “*We see God*”: *George Berkeley’s Philosophical Theology* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1997), 14.

To me, it seems that man can see neither deep nor far, who is not sensible of his own misery, sinfulness, and dependence; who does not perceive that , this present world is not designed or adapted to make rational souls happy; who would not be glad of getting into a better state; and who would not be overjoyed to find that, the road leading there was the love of God and man, the practicing every virtue, the living reasonably while we are here on earth, proportioning our esteem to the value of things, and so using this world as not to abuse it. ... Can there be a higher ambition than to overcome the world, or a wiser than to subdue ourselves, or a more comfortable doctrine than the remission of sins, or a more joyful prospect than that of having our base nature renewed and assimilated to the Deity, our being made fellow-citizens with angels, and sons of God?⁸⁶

Berkeley's "Divine Language" View of the Physical World and

the Reason for the Tremendous Intricacy in the Organization of the World of Ideas

Berkeley's remark in *Alciphron* quoted above is one of those rare occasions where he directly reflected on God's purpose for placing us in a world of ideas. Given that Berkeley's focus is metaphysics and not theology, he simply declares that "I do not design to trouble myself with drawing corollaries from the doctrine I have hitherto laid down," and he allows that "others may, so far as they shall think convenient, employ their thoughts in extending it farther, and applying it to whatever purposes it may be subservient to."⁸⁷ In this segment, I show that the answer to the challenge Berkeley acknowledged regarding his Idealism is actually already given by himself, albeit only briefly and generally, i.e., for the sake of effective person-making. The detailed workings of that answer are amply elaborated in the sacramental theology of the world. Recent theological reflections on the phenomenon of "virtual reality" in a way offer support for Berkeley as well. A specification of the sacramental view of the physical reality is the *Theology of the Body*, which appreciates embodiment as the very avenue for humans to

⁸⁶ George Berkeley, "Alciphron," Fifth Dialogue, paragraph #5.

⁸⁷ Berkeley, "A New Theory of Vision," paragraph #149.

be made into the image of God. Notably, both the sacramental theology and the Theology of the Body presume Dualism. As will become clear, however, their central sacramental theme of person-making can only be effectively conveyed in Berkeley's Idealistic world of ideas.

Why Such Abundant Intricacy in the Organization of the World of Ideas?—A Question Berkeley Only Answered Very Briefly

When addressing objections to his Idealism, there is only one time when Berkeley did admit it to have some force, and that is the observation that the world of ideas is nonetheless organized with such a tremendous degree of intricacy. Berkeley ponders:

to what purpose serves that curious organization of plants, and the animal mechanism in the parts of animals; might not vegetables grow, and shoot forth leaves of blossoms, and animals perform all their motions as well without as with all that variety of internal parts so elegantly contrived and put together; which, being ideas, have nothing powerful or operative in them, nor have any necessary connection with the effects ascribed to them? If it be a Spirit that immediately produces every effect by a fiat or act of his will, we must think all that is fine and artificial in the works, whether of man or nature, to be made in vain. If so, why may not the Intelligence do it, without his being at the pains of making the movements and putting them together? Why does not an empty case serve as well as another? The like may be said of all the clockwork of nature, great part whereof is so wonderfully fine and subtle as scarce to be discerned by the best microscope. In short, it will be asked, how, upon our principles, any tolerable account can be given, or any final cause assigned of an innumerable multitude of bodies and machines, framed with the most exquisite art, which in the common philosophy have very apposite uses assigned them, and serve to explain abundance of phenomena?⁸⁸

The best response Berkeley was able to come up with amounts to an appeal to the relative weights of different evidences. He argues, "though there were some difficulties relating to the administration of Providence, and the uses by it assigned to the several parts of nature, which I could not solve by the foregoing principles, yet this objection

⁸⁸ Berkeley, "Principles," paragraph #60.

could be of small weight against the truth and certainty of those things which may be proved a priori, with the utmost evidence and rigor of demonstration.”⁸⁹

The question of *why* God “would be at the expense (if one may so speak) of all that art and regularity to no purpose” is particularly puzzling when we consider the phenomenon of growth and development, or “evolution” in modern-day term, for “the slow and gradual methods observed in the production of natural things do not seem to have for their cause the immediate hand of an Almighty Agent.”⁹⁰ To this Berkeley answers by simply saying that, in fact, “the operating according to general and stated laws is so necessary for our guidance in the affairs of life, and letting us into the secret of nature, that without it all reach and compass of thought, all human sagacity and design, could serve to no manner of purpose.”⁹¹ As we shall see in the following segments, the amazing degree of intricacy in the way which this world of ideas is presented to us in fact is necessary—not only for the practical reason of enabling us to carry about everyday life but, much more importantly, for the spiritual reason of effectively making us into the “children of God” with its convincing *concreteness*.

An Illumination from the Importance of “Concreteness” According to Karl Rahner’s Sacramental Theology of the World

Karl Rahner’s sacramental theology of the world helps us understand that human “materiality”—which according to Berkeley is a set of ideas God presents to our mind—offers the concrete context required for the finite and free human spirit to actualize itself

⁸⁹ Ibid, paragraph #60.

⁹⁰ Ibid, paragraph #64.

⁹¹ Ibid, paragraph #64.

into what God intends it to become.⁹² Specifically, Rahner's anthropology conceptualizes the human person as responsible and free, and the material world of time and space provides the "concrete mediation" for humans to exercise their freedom through concrete activities and thus to decide about them very selves.

From the point of soteriology, Rahner emphasizes that Christianity is an "incarnational faith" which situates the process of salvation squarely in the concrete history—as epitomized in the Christ event. Due to the finite nature of the human spirit, it has to be through the concrete reality of the "material" world that God is most clearly revealed and humans truly saved. Specifically, on the one hand, God's supernatural reality is revealed to us through the "categorical" reality of the concrete world, and "God's gift of himself, the gratuitously elevated determination of man ... is itself always mediated categorically."⁹³ And so, as Berkeley's Idealism would completely endorse and offer better account for, "there is for Christianity no separate and sacral realm where alone God is to be found."⁹⁴ On the other hand, similar to Hick's seeing the world as a cognitive distance for human self-discovery, Rahner understands that, for the human subject, "his subjectivity and his free, personal self-interpretation take place precisely in

⁹² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

and through his being in the world;"⁹⁵ "the subject's self-alienation in world is precisely the way in which the subject discovers himself and affirms himself in a definitive way."⁹⁶

A Second Illumination from "Virtual Reality" and the Felt Necessity of Concreteness via Embodiment

Interestingly, "virtual reality" created by information technology provides a modern way to appreciate Berkeley's Idealistic world of ideas—as Bruce Umbaugh suggests, the universe may be seen as "virtual world all the way down."⁹⁷ More importantly, recent theological reflections on the phenomenon of "virtual reality" offer support to Rahner's emphasis on the soteriological essentiality of existential *concreteness* through embodiment—the effect brought by none other than the degree of intricacy of the world Berkeley marveled. The key insight is this: to the extent that a "virtual" setting fails to be concrete, it fails to produce existential effects for the purpose of person-making.

As Gary Mann describes, virtual reality is the result of human interface with the computer through which sense perceptions are manipulated to generate the feel of existing in an artificially created environment.⁹⁸ In the words of an expert in the field, virtual reality can seem very real: "It's not like television or a personal computer. With those you're still on the outside. With virtual reality, once that field of view surrounds you and controls everything you see, you're inside. That paradigm shift of perception

⁹⁵ Ibid, 40.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁹⁷ Bruce Umbaugh, *On Berkeley* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), 81.

⁹⁸ Gary Mann, "Tech-Gnosticism: Disembodying Technology and Embodying Theology," *Dialog* 34, no. 3 (1995): 206-212.

becomes absolutely compelling.”⁹⁹ In their editorial on cyber spirituality, Yust, Hyde, and Ota talk about “avatar,” a type of virtual reality through which even the embodied self can be manipulated.¹⁰⁰ They report that “Massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMPORGs) often involve the creation of avatars: virtual characters that embody aspects of the self a player wants to ‘try on’ or ‘try out’ in the virtual world of the game. The term ‘avatar’ comes from the Sanskrit and refers to the Hindu concept of a deity (most often Vishnu) that manifests in an incarnate (animal or human) form (Dictionary.com 2010).”¹⁰¹

One aspect of being concrete is the lack of *malleability* to human will, as Berkeley points out when differentiating sense ideas from fancies. And so, one concern over virtual reality is its potential underlying message that human redemption is to escape from the constraints of the embodied world and into the realm created according to one’s own liking. The virtual realm does not operate according to parameters established by God; instead, it is “a world in which one can be the determinative deity-virtually omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal.”¹⁰² Another aspect of being concrete is the feel of *realness*; to the extent it is felt real, it forms the person—for better or for worse. To the extent that virtual reality is seriously engaged as it would be in a physical environment, Yust *et al.* report positively that inhabiting an alternative identity through an avatar “provides ‘an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-

⁹⁹ Ibid, 207.

¹⁰⁰ Karen-Marie Yust, Brendan Hyde, and Cathy Ota, Editorial, “Cyber Spirituality II: Virtual Reality and Spiritual Exploration,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 1–3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 1-2.

¹⁰² Mann, “Tech-Gnosticism,” 209.

knowledge” for participating young gamers.¹⁰³ However, given that human beings are embodied beings, the fullest human presence can only be embodied presence; and so some see virtual reality as creating a highly diluted notion of presence.¹⁰⁴ This is seen as particularly detrimental to the soteriological aim of becoming a self-giving person, because “the body expresses the soul and so the giving of the whole human person generally requires bodily presence.”¹⁰⁵

When concluding his article on theology related to information technology, Gary Mann underscores several areas for further work in order for Christian theology to be relevant for the information age. Mann’s points are very valid and warrant being quoted in full length. Unbeknown to Mann who is suspicious of the gnostic tendency in the notion of “disembodiment,” his points capture both the theological strengths and the cultural importance of Berkeley’s Idealism for us today. Mann advocates:

1. Restoring a sense of an active divine presence immanent in the processes of the natural world would assist in revisioning the relation of God and the world in ways more understandable for a culture with a scientific conceptual framework.... so that (1) religious and theological affirmations are understood to be relevantly connected with the natural world and (2) a prophetic-critical voice can be heard in science and technology.
2. Renewed study in the doctrinal area of the Incarnation and sacramentology, focusing on the relationship between the divine spirit/presence and the natural body/world, is integral to any attempt to restore a sense of the sacredness and value of the whole creation.
3. Most importantly, theology must seriously consider the consequences of the Greek dichotomy of body and spirit for our culture, a dichotomy which is at the

¹⁰³ Yust et al, “Cyber Spirituality,” 1.

¹⁰⁴ Stuart Swetland, “Another Response to the Thesis of Sister Mary Timothy Prokes’ Encountering the ‘Really Real’: Realism, Sacraments, and Virtual Reality,” in *After Forty Years: Vatican Council II’s Diverse Legacy*, ed. K. D Whitehead (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 79-90.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

heart of any gnostic movement. The notion of the person as a psychosomatic unity must continue to be reconsidered, particularly in light of current scientific assertions of the mind/body as being a multilevel organism and not two separable entities. This also calls for the formulation of an understanding of physical embodiment, envisioning how our physical body and its functioning contextually impacts on our theology. ...

Lastly, theologians must incorporate into our theological reflection, construction, and teaching a 'bodily epistemology'—the knowing through our bodies in their psycho-somatic wholeness. ... a concretization of knowing.¹⁰⁶

A Third Illumination from the Theology of the Body

Human embodiment has been investigated in theology since the time of Church Fathers. For example, as Hans Boersma's recent book explains, Gregory of Nyssa understands embodiment as being in service for our growth in virtue.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Adam Cooper's recent book looks into how St. Maximus the Confessor understands the status and the function of the human body and the world in God's economy of salvation.¹⁰⁸ A. Cooper reports that St. Maximus understands the material world in general and the bodily reality in particular "as a single though indispensable dimension of a multi-faceted symbolic *pedagogy* that engages the soul through history, scripture, Christ, and Church;" as such, they hold "a definitive, constitutive place in God's creative, saving, and sanctifying economies."¹⁰⁹ In our time, Karl Rahner also addressed the theological

¹⁰⁶ Mann, "Tech-Gnosticism," 211.

¹⁰⁷ Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 249.

question of the body in the order of salvation in terms of its concreteness for freedom-exercising.¹¹⁰

However, as M. T. Prokes tells us, the phrase “body theology” came into prominence only in the 1960s, and that is not a mere coincidence.¹¹¹ Specifically, this is the time when “matter” itself has been understood in a brand new way, thanks to modern physics, and so “A Theology of the Body would not have been able to emerge with the same scope and intensity prior to the twentieth century.”¹¹² Prokes defines the Theology of the Body as faith seeking understanding concerning the body and the material universe and, to her, “to reflect theologically upon the embodied person is to penetrate ever more deeply, in the light of Revelation and Tradition, into the sacred mystery of the total person from the perspective of corporeality.”¹¹³

Prokes stresses that, to attempt any faith understanding of the body, “there must be an abiding awareness of the eschatological destiny of the whole body-person;”¹¹⁴ that is to say, the theological significance of the body should be probed under the proper background, namely, the eschatological destiny of the person. More specifically, “theological reflection on the embodied person springs from what has been divinely revealed concerning the human vocation to be ‘the image and likeness of God.’”¹¹⁵ The

¹¹⁰ Rahner, *Foundations*.

¹¹¹ Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

¹¹² *Ibid*, 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, xi.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 22.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

purpose of the body can only be properly derived from the *vocation* of the person given by God. In addition, like Gary Mann, Prokes thinks that “in approaching the study of body, the co-inherence of Christian doctrines will prompt theologians to see the manner in which there is an illumination of body meaning from doctrine to doctrine.”¹¹⁶ Given the organic coherence of all Christian doctrines, new theological insights gained regarding human embodiment should bring new insights to other theological subjects as well. Lastly, Prokes calls to attention “the immense spectrum that the discipline spans. As Ratzinger notes, this extends from the ‘wavicles’ of matter tracked at dizzying speeds, to the inner perichoretic relations of Trinitarian life.”¹¹⁷ Given the innately interdisciplinary nature of the topic of the body, empirical knowledge from related fields helps deepen theological understandings of the body through faith and revelation.

The *vocational* purpose of embodiment is made particularly salient by Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. Carl Andersen and Jose Granados’ recent book does an excellent job in explaining the Pope’s theology through the theme of the human vocation to love.¹¹⁸ Even though John Paul II’s theology was generated specifically for the marital context, it is applicable for all aspects of our embodied life. The body has been wrongly looked upon as something to fear, to worship, or to despise. The right understanding of the body is discovered when its meaning is sought in relation to the meaning of the whole person. In short, the body is both *God’s call* for us to love, and *the path of fulfillment* for

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 22.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 22.

¹¹⁸ Carl Andersen and Jose Granados, *Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II’s Theology of the Body* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2009).

human beings, which is none other than the path of love. Livio Melina sums it well by saying that “The body speaks of God; it reveals his goodness and wisdom. It also speaks of us ... our vocation to love. This is a prophetic word, pronounced by the body in God’s name, revealing to us the path to take toward human fulfillment: the way of love.”¹¹⁹

First, the human body pronounces God’s call for us to love others, our God-ordained vocation. The call is most clearly revealed in the differences in human embodiment and the complementarities among them as the result. Andersen and Granados observe that “The fact that man and woman are different keeps them aware of their need for each other, reminding them that they are not complete in themselves. This difference (inscribed, remember, in the male and female body) is thus the beginning of a dynamic movement that takes each partner beyond him—or herself.”¹²⁰ It is easy to see that our fundamental need for and the resulting drive toward one another applies not only to the male-female relations but to all human interactions due to the differences in our particular embodied expressions.

Second, the body is also God’s path for us to love; human embodiment is the way for us to answer God’s call to love and, through it, to find our fulfillment. This is because the body is precisely that portal through which we come in contact with others and with the outside world. Because the human person is created to be the Image of God, who is Love, John Paul II writes in his first encyclical that “Man remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love.” (RH, 10) Thanks to our God-given body, “Man’s self-

¹¹⁹ Ibid, vii.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 46.

consciousness—his awareness of his true dignity—comes to fruition ... in a gesture of hospitality toward the world that comes to knock at the door of his [bodily] senses.”¹²¹

Therefore, “The body is like a road on which our freedom journeys to God and grows in relationship with him;”¹²² it is the path through which we are made to become like God.

The Compatibility of Berkeley’s Idealism with Christian Orthodoxies

In this section, I demonstrate the strong compatibility between Berkeley’s Idealism and Christian orthodoxies, which is assumed to be nonexistent by many if not most people. In the first segment, I begin by outlining New Testament scriptures related to “Resurrection,” followed by related insights generated from recent biblical scholarship. Through these, I intend to uncover a more accurate understanding of the biblical perspective on postmortem embodiment under the notion of “Resurrection.” In the second segment, I discuss what “Resurrection” meant during the time of the Church Fathers. Through it, I intend to gain a better grasp of the rationale and thus the spiritual insights they intended to convey under the creed of “bodily resurrection.” In the third segment, I show the strengths of Berkeley’s Idealism through its unique illuminations for the central Christian beliefs such as Incarnation, Trinity, and Creation *ex nihilo*. All these made clear that Berkeley’s Idealism is not only sound when tested under the light of Christian orthodoxies, it is often required in order to effectively communicate core Christian insights.

¹²¹ Ibid, 32.

¹²² Ibid, 36.

Biblical Teachings on “Resurrection”

An Outline of All the Related New Testament Verses

In this segment, I outline all New Testament passages related to “Resurrection” in the order as they appear in the New Testament. These verses reflect the earliest Christian understanding of resurrection in light of their experiences of Jesus’ resurrection. Before I begin, one important thing to keep in mind is the largely silent posture of these verses when it comes to the question of metaphysics. As John Honner keenly observes, “traditional theology of the resurrection is less specific about ontological questions. ... The New Testament understanding of the resurrection of the dead also has its own complex evolution. Because the biblical writers are more interested in ‘completion’ and ‘perfection’ than in ontology, talk about resurrection leaves questions about the nature of the risen body and the locale of heaven, literally, ‘hanging in the air.’”¹²³ Consequently, we should focus on the theological meanings they intended to convey.

Matthew 22: 23-32

This section in the Gospel of Matthew recounts Jesus’ exchange with some Sadducees who claimed that there was no resurrection. They challenged Jesus with the scenario of a woman who was married to seven brothers before she died, and they asked him whose wife she will be upon resurrection. Above all, Jesus affirmed the reality of resurrection with a scripture verse the Sadducees themselves would have been familiar with, i.e., God declaring that “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus reasoned that the *powerfulness* of God entails that “He is God not of the

¹²³ John Honner, “A New Ontology: Incarnation, Eucharist, Resurrection, and Physics,” *Pacifica* 4 (1991): 32.

dead, but of the living.” (22:32) Another important detail in this story is that Jesus underscored the qualitatively *different* nature of the resurrected existence, saying “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (22:30)

John 5:24-29; 6:35-40; 11:23-26

Some of these verses are part of Jesus’ “I am” teachings; others belong to the story of Jesus’ raising Lazarus. The most salient theme here is that *belief* in Jesus is the cause of passing from death to the resurrection life. For example, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (11:25-26) Also, we read about the two *opposite types* of resurrection, namely, “those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (5:29)

Acts 24:15

This verse is part of Acts’ account of Paul’s defense of himself before Felix, where he states his belief in two *opposite types* of resurrections, i.e., “there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Romans 6:4-13, 8:11

These verses in Romans spotlight the intrinsic connection between bodily resurrection—which means here the resurrection to life—and *spiritual renewal*. For example, we read Paul’s linking resurrection with baptism, saying that “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (6:4)

Relatedly, these verses make clear the crucial role of *the Holy Spirit* in the believer's spiritual renewal and eventual resurrection, stating that "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." (8:11)

1 Corinthians 15

These passages probably are the best-known New Testament verses related to resurrection. Theologically, Paul emphasizes the *constitutive import* of the factuality of Jesus' resurrection for the Christian faith, putting it succinctly that "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain and so is your faith." (15:14) If Jesus were not raised, "you are still in your sins" (15:17), human strivings for the good are futile (15:30-32), and death pronounces our final defeat. But, thanks to Jesus' resurrection, the definitive victory of Good over Evil has come to pass. Moreover, Paul situates resurrection—first of Jesus and then of the believers—within *God's power and providence* since the beginning of time (15:54-57).

Technically, Paul responded to those who doubted resurrection by stressing the tremendous transformation from the earthly life to the resurrected life, which is death. For example, we read here Paul's numerous *contrasts* of different types of embodiment, especially the "physical body" versus the "spiritual body" (15:44). And we hear from Paul that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For

this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (15:50-53)

2 Corinthians 5:1-9

These verses in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians carry on the previous theme of the drastic *contrast* between the earthly body and the heavenly body. It is expressed through the Apostle’s longing to leave behind “the earthly tent” in which we groan under burden and to “have a dwelling from God, a house not made with hands” (5:1) “so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (5:4). Also, these verses reiterate the themes in Romans regarding the centrality of *spiritual renewal* in the Christian life—“whether we are at home [with the Lord] or away”—with “our aim to please him” (5:9), as well as the indispensable role of *the Holy Spirit* given to us by God as “a guarantee” (5:5) for the resurrected life.

Philippians 3:10-12, 21

Here, Paul once again specifies the route to attaining “resurrection from the dead”—namely, through knowing “the power of his resurrection,” which is the *power of God*, and “the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (3:10), which is a Christ-like life of self-sacrifice. In other words, resurrection to life necessitates *spiritual renewal* to a God-centered life. Paul also conveys his expectation of “our humble body” being made *different* by Christ so as to “be conformed to the body of his glory.” (3:21)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

Here, Paul describes the *multiple rounds* of resurrection at Jesus' Second Coming, where "the dead in Christ will rise first" (4:16), in order to inspire hope regarding those who died among the Thessalonians.

Revelation 20:4-5

Multiple rounds of resurrection are also implied by the author of Revelation when he describes his apocalyptic vision that "I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. ... They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection." (20:4-5)

Summary

Scripture outlines above make clear that New Testament verses on the topic convey a handful of repeated themes. The most important theme is the fundamental import of the reality of resurrection for the validity of the Christian faith. Moreover, resurrection is rooted in the power of God who ordained it from the very beginning as a centered piece in his plan for our salvation. Also, there is a Trinitarian understanding of the resurrection, which grounds it in the power of the Father, epitomizes it through the sacrifice of the Son, and operates it through the continuous working of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, resurrection cannot occur except in the context of spiritual renewal through faith. In addition, we find an important nuance between the "resurrection to life," which is what most of the related scriptures describe, and the "resurrection to condemnation." This seems to imply the moral neutrality of "Resurrection" *per se*, and so

the conditionality of postmortem embodiment upon the state of the spirit. On the “technical” front, we notice the biblical emphasis of contrast rather than continuity between the earthly body and the resurrected body, as well as the theme of multiple rounds of resurrection.

Considering the fundamental differences in the character of Jesus and other humans (i.e., Jesus never sinned) and in the purpose of Jesus and believers’ resurrection (i.e., declarative versus salvific), I did not include New Testament accounts of Jesus’ own resurrection. Here, I only want to note in agreement with Joanne Dewart that, metaphysically speaking,

these three [resurrection] stories speak volumes about the ambivalence in the belief of the church at the end of the first century concerning the resurrected body of Jesus. ... the overcoming of Thomas’ doubt ... implies a physical body. But, equally noteworthy, two of the other stories—that of Mary Magdalen, who does not at first recognize her Lord and is forbidden to touch him, and that of Jesus appearing among his disciples through closed doors imply precisely the opposite. The question of the nature of Jesus’ risen body (and therefore of the future resurrection body of the Christian) was still apparently an open one.¹²⁴

Insights from Biblical Scholarship

Even though the Christian belief in resurrection is articulated in the New Testament and has its catalyst in the resurrection of Jesus, recent scholarship on the Old Testament also sheds light on the Christian understanding. Joanne Dewart finds several important Old Testament insights on resurrection that laid the infrastructure through which the Christian hope was communicated.¹²⁵ First, there is “the ancient Israelite

¹²⁴ Joanne E. McWilliam Dewart, *Death and Resurrection, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, Series #22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 33.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

conviction that no true life was possible without the body, and, consequently, that any existence of the soul separated from the body (as existence in Sheol was envisioned to be) could be merely a pale shadow of real life.”¹²⁶ Second, postmortem existence was necessitated by the gradually deepened appreciation of “the worth and [moral] responsibility of the individual” and, more importantly, by the Jewish conviction in the justice of God in the face of “the problem of the suffering of the just in its most acute form—martyrdom.”¹²⁷ In her words, “with the covenant individualized and the notion of divine faithfulness and justice deeply engrained, the hope of a retributive afterlife could not be long in entering Jewish thought.”¹²⁸ Third, there was the understanding of a “double-resurrection” where “some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dn 12: 3)

New Testament scholarship on “Resurrection” generated observations similar to what we noticed in the previous segment, where we directly examined relevant scriptures. On the theological front, the most important thing to note is that several authors underscored the inner relation between the believer’s bodily resurrection and *spiritual renewal*.¹²⁹ On the technical front, first, there seems to be a consensus regarding the

¹²⁶ Ibid, 16.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 20.

¹²⁹ For example, see Jon Paulien, “The Resurrection and the New Testament: A Fresh Look in Light of Recent Research,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 249-269; Anthony Thornhill, “The Resurrection of Jesus and Spiritual (Trans)formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (2012): 243-256; Calvin J. Roetzel, “‘As Dying, and Behold We Live’: Death and Resurrection in Paul’s Theology,” *Interpretation* 46, no. 1 (January 1992): 5-18; and John Gillman, “A Thematic Comparison: 1 Cor 15:50-57 and 2 Cor 5:1-5,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 3 (1988): 439-454.

holistic nature of the Apostle Paul's remarks on postmortem existence.¹³⁰ As Peter

Lampe underscores, God's salvation gets hold of the entire person and subjects the entire person to a transforming and newly creating act called "Resurrection." Second, there is an agreement on the indispensability of *embodiedness* in postmortem existence.

According to Lampe, precisely because of this, Paul talks about "Resurrection" instead of such things as "spiritual immortality" or "ascending souls;" without the bodily aspect of this transformation, there would be no legitimate usage of the word "Resurrection."

Third, scholars highlight the qualitative *difference* between the earthly body and the resurrected body. This is made particularly clear by the scholarship on the spectrum of meanings of the Greek word *soma* Paul uses in various occasions. As James Dunn explains,

For Paul *soma* has a spectrum of meaning. The idea of body as physical, or of the physicality of "body," is only one end of the spectrum of Paul's usage. For Paul *soma* as denoting the human body includes the physical body but is not to be simply identified with the physical body. *Soma* in Paul is more than the physical body. A better way of characterizing its more typical connotation would be embodiment. ... In Paul's most characteristic usage *soma* is the person as embodied.¹³¹

Dunn tries to support his thesis by the uniquely Pauline distinction, i.e., between *soma* and *sarx*. He observes that

Paul seems to have deliberately pulled the two senses apart, and in *soma* to have retained the Hebraic sense of the whole person, while using *sarx* with a negative connotation more reminiscent of Greek's Dualistic tendency. The two spectrums of his usage overlap (Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 6:16). But more characteristic

¹³⁰ Peter Lampe, "Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 103-114.

¹³¹ James D. G. Dunn, "How Are the Dead Raised? With What Body Do They Come? Reflections on 1 Corinthians 15," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (2002): 9.

of Paul is the use of a more negative phrase to qualify the otherwise neutral “body”—for example, “body of sin” (Romans 6:6), “mortal body” (Romans 8:11), whereas “flesh” is more regularly negative without any qualifying phrase or adjectives (most strikingly Romans 8:3-12).¹³²

And so, for Paul, “body” is not interchangeable with “physical body,” but denotes “that wholeness of existence in the particularity of that existence in a particular context.”¹³³ Specifically, in the earthly context of embodiment, “body” means that particular form of existence characterized by physicality; but, in the different context of resurrection, “body” shall denote the mode of being appropriate for that particular context. Furthermore, in Dunn’s view, the verse “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” clearly conveys the qualitative difference Paul intend to underscore between the earthly and the resurrected bodies. He reasons that “in Paul’s usage, *sarx* is consistently set in antithesis to *pneuma* (Romans 2:28; 8:4-9, 13; Galatians 3:3; 4:29; 5:16-17; 6:8; Philippians 3:3). It would be strange indeed, then, to find here that Paul suddenly determined to associate the *sarx* positively with *pneuma* and to advocate not just a resurrection body but a resurrected *flesh*.”¹³⁴

In addition, an interesting suggestion is made by Markus Cromhout who argues for a *processive* connotation in Paul’s understanding of the after-life.¹³⁵ The scriptural basis for his interpretation is the Greek word *καταλυσθῆναι*. When it is used by Paul elsewhere, it describes a continuous process of being built up spiritually by God, for

¹³² Ibid, 10.

¹³³ Ibid, 15.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 16.

¹³⁵ Markus Cromhout, “The Dead in Christ: Recovering Paul’s Understanding of the After-life,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 60, no. 1-2 (2004): 83-101.

example, in terms of the Christian community. Thus, when the same word is used in 2 Corinthians 5:1 to describe the heavenly body as “a dwelling from God,” Cromhout thinks that it refers to God’s continuous building up of the spiritual body after death, a process of continuous transformation, to be completed at the parousia. In his words, “2 Corinthians 5:1 then tells what will happen immediately after death. When our earthly tent-dwelling is ‘dissolved’ or ‘destroyed’ (aorist tense of *καταλυθῆ* suggests the moment when death occurs), there immediately is a building from God (Hoekema 1994:106) ... What Paul is saying is that we will enter a glorious heavenly existence, not a temporary one such as our present existence, clothed with a spiritual body which, for the moment, will be under construction.”¹³⁶

Another intriguing suggestion is made by P. W. Gooch, who argues that Paul’s statements regarding “the spiritual body (*soma*)” can be properly read in a “disembodied” sense, that is, without a physical body with extension in space.¹³⁷ Gooch reasons, for those who insist on the physicality of the resurrection body, they have to explain the spiritual nature of the “spiritual body” by suggesting a new physicality defined by moral characters, e.g., as being controlled by the Spirit; but a non-physical being can have these moral characters just as well. And so, “everything the ‘materialists’ read in Paul’s characterization of the resurrection body might be possible in a [physically] disembodied resurrected state, except of course the materiality of the body. But *materiality is not*

¹³⁶ Ibid, 94.

¹³⁷ P. W. Gooch, “On Disembodied Resurrected Persons: A Study in the Logic of Christian Eschatology,” *Religious Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 1981): 199-213.

necessarily implied in anything Paul says, even on the materialists' own reading."¹³⁸

Also, Gooch brings up the requirement of characteristic *similarity* for the resurrection to be a state of closeness to God. He points out that "we shall see him face to face—and (here is why that word is metaphorical) not because he will be like us but because we shall be like him (I John 3. 2)."¹³⁹ But God is non-physical. It is difficult to fathom how a physical resurrection would be state of closeness to God who is non-physical. So Gooch concludes that "Exegetically, nothing in the text forbids this interpretative move, while some things may encourage it; philosophically, the alternatives land us in muddles and confusions, at least in the context of Christian theism."¹⁴⁰

In sum, recent scholarship on resurrection confirms our findings through direct engagement with the scripture. Theologically, the prime import of *soteriological* concerns behind biblical witnesses of resurrection cannot be overemphasized, especially regarding resurrection's intrinsic connection to spiritual renewal and its reliance on the Holy Spirit. Technically, there has been a crystallization of the *holistic* nature of biblical discourses on resurrection; the notion that the scripture stipulates physicality in resurrection is misconceived. In my view, both points stand as criticisms against the Physicalist and the Dualist's philosophizing of resurrection; and they offer strong endorsement for Berkeley's Idealistic take.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 209.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 204.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 211.

Reading the Bible through the Lens of Idealism

A more general objection based on the scripture is that Berkeley's Idealism is not biblical. Berkeley's own response is that "matter" in the bible carries the common folk's meaning, i.e., as perceived by senses; at the minimum, nowhere does the scripture mention the notion of a "material substance" that exists independently from the mind, especially God's mind. James Spiegel argues further that not only is Berkeley's Idealism congruent with the bible, it is even favored by certain scriptural themes.¹⁴¹ Above all, the linguistic metaphor plays a central role in Berkeley's Idealism; this metaphor is also salient in the scriptures. For example, "If one carefully examines the creation account given in the book of Genesis ... there is a fruitful analogy between the manner in which God created the world *ex nihilo* and the ordinary human experience of sharing ideas through speech."¹⁴²

Early Christian Traditions on the "Resurrection"

In this section, I introduce understandings of "Resurrection" according to Christian traditions during the first four centuries, as described in Joanne Dewart's book in the Message of the Fathers of Church series.¹⁴³ As we shall see, debates over the nature of the resurrection body under various historical contexts were rooted in concerns from soteriology and anthropology. Even though many church fathers did hold a largely Physicalistic notion of the resurrected body, once we realize the theological concerns

¹⁴¹ James S. Spiegel, "The Theological Orthodoxy of Berkeley's Immaterialism," *Faith and Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (April 1996): 216-235.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 216.

¹⁴³ Dewart, *Death and Resurrection*.

behind their Physicalistic stand, it becomes clear that their concerns can be adequately addressed within Berkeley's Idealistic framework (e.g., the value of the created world contra Gnosticism); what's more, some of their concerns can only be addressed within this Idealistic framework (e.g., maintaining personal identity through death).

Late 1st to Early 2nd Centuries: A Physicalistic Leaning

The original writings Dewart examined for this period belong to I Clement, II Clement, the *Didache*, Ignatius, and Polycarp. She reports that, "Resurrection is not in itself often a focus of discussion and, when it does occur, it is subordinated to other concerns: exhortation to the Christian life, rejection of a docetic Christology or expectation of the millennial reign of Christ."¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Dewart observes "a lack of clarity concerning the meaning these writers gave to 'body' and consequently concerning the nature of the resurrection body,"¹⁴⁵ perhaps as the result of the topic not being the focus of their attention. That said, she also observes that "in general the Apostolic Fathers were moving towards a more material understanding of the resurrection than that held by Paul and John."¹⁴⁶ The reason she offered to account for this Physicalistic trend include: the fight against Docetism; growing concerns over gnostic soteriologies; and the assumption that a fleshly body is necessary for the just to share Christ's triumphant reign after the Second Coming.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 37.

Latter Half of the 2nd Century: The Apologists

Dewart recounts that the Apologists during the latter half of the second century had a different task: unlike the Apostolic Fathers who were mainly concerned with issues internal to the Christian community, the Apologists strived to demonstrate to the outside community the morality and the reasonableness of the Christian faith. A crucial aspect of this task is establishing the credibility of the Christian eschatological hope, e.g., as expressed in the doctrine of resurrection. As a whole, “no one coherent eschatological picture emerges from this period. There were fundamental differences of opinion among Christians themselves concerning the worth of the material world, the relationship between body and soul, the nature of the eschatological kingdom and—tied in with all these—the meaning of resurrection.”¹⁴⁷ Notably, it is during this period that the notion of “chain consumption” was first addressed by Athenagoras. Athenagoras’ insistence on the resurrection of the flesh was rooted in his concern for maintaining personal identity through death. In his words, without resurrection of the original flesh, “the same parts would not be united with one another in a way that conforms to their nature, nor would the same men be reconstituted as they were.”¹⁴⁸

The 2nd to the 4th Centuries: Combating Gnosticism

The question of the nature of the resurrection body is at the center of the crossfires during this period between Christian orthodoxy and Christian Gnosticism, which shared a tendency to anticipate the resurrected body to be immaterial.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 78.

Irenaeus' famous treatises against the Gnostics fiercely defended the resurrection of the flesh, his main reasons being "a strongly positive creationist theology (a position in stark contrast with gnostic Dualism) and of an equally strong expectation of a material millenarian kingdom."¹⁴⁹ Tertullian also affirmed the goodness of the body by claiming resurrection of the flesh. But he emphasized as well the sacramental role of the body for the salvation of the soul, saying that "To such a degree is the flesh the pivot of salvation, that since by it the soul becomes linked with God, it is the flesh which makes possible the soul's election by God," for example, in baptism, laying on hands, anointing, etc.¹⁵⁰ To the question of why the flesh is needed in resurrection, given that he conceives the resurrection body will be like that of the angels who make no use of flesh, he simply replied that "You will have no right, on the ground that the member will in the future be inactive, to deny the possibility of its existing anew. For it is feasible for a thing to exist anew and none the less be inactive."¹⁵¹ Methodius was also in favor of a fleshly resurrection body, because his soteriology conceptualized the eternal life to be the earthly life being restored to incorruptibility and immortality.

Origen was a lone voice who vigorously stressed the Pauline "spiritual body" upon resurrection. He rebuked the idea of a fleshly resurrection by insisting on "the resurrection in a way worthy of God," saying that "our hope is not one of worms, nor does our soul desire a body that has rotted." [*Principles* II.x.8.] In addition, Origen suggested that the nature of the risen body will depend on the spiritual state of the person.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 86.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 104.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 112.

The 4th Century: Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine

Having gained imperial recognition, the church during this time was concerned more with topics related to Christology and the Trinity. For those authors who did become involved in the resurrection controversy during this period, a main reason was the fear that the extreme asceticism of certain monasticisms at the time may lead to a disdain towards the body. Gregory of Nyssa suggested the idea of “reassembly by markings the soul put on the materials that previously formed its body” to alleviate the fear of loss of identity upon resurrection.¹⁵²

Augustine’s repeated struggles with the question of the nature of the resurrection body are thought-provoking. As Dewart explains, Augustine attempted to find the proper role for the body to play in human salvation. The dilemma he wrestled without resolution is this: on the one hand, Augustine held strong conviction about the intrinsic goodness of the human body, which he advocated tirelessly in the polemic against the Manichees; on the other hand, he cannot quite articulate the necessity of the risen body in the meeting with God. And so, according to Dewart, “No writer of the patristic age tried harder than Augustine to explain the mediating Pauline phrase, ‘spiritual body,’ to describe what changes the earthly body will undergo.”¹⁵³ Augustine was certain that “The contrary-minded are clearly those who believe that the risen body will be corporeal and that God will, therefore, be seen materially.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid, 147.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 174.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 177.

Some Key Christian Doctrines Understood within Berkeley's Idealism

In this section, I show how Berkeley's Idealism seems to be a more coherent framework for understanding central Christian doctrines on the nature of Jesus, the Trinity, and God's act of creation. I also address the question of whether Berkeley's Idealism is biblical. Overall, Berkeley appears to be correct in claiming that his Idealism better demonstrates the truths in the Christian faith—the primary aim he in fact attributed to all of his philosophical endeavors.

Eschatological Concepts

As explained above, Berkeley's Idealism seems to be the only metaphysical framework which renders a coherent account of a bodily resurrection. The “spiritual body” is understood simply as a different set of perceptual ideas the mind experiences after death.¹⁵⁵ The same goes with the beliefs in heaven and hell.¹⁵⁶ As Marc Hight points out, in the *Siris* Berkeley comments approvingly of the Platonists' claim that “heaven is not defined so much by its local situation as by its purity,” for it is those who are pure in heart that can see God face to face.¹⁵⁷ Hight comments that “on Berkeley's account, neither heaven nor hell are properly speaking locations, but rather shorthand locutions for felicitous or infelicitous orderings of ideas perceived by finite minds. The resulting

¹⁵⁵ Marc A. Hight, “Berkeley and Bodily Resurrection,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, no 3 (July 2007): 443-458.

¹⁵⁶ Marc A Hight, “Preserving the Torments of Hell: Berkeleian Immaterialism and the Afterlife,” *Science et Esprit* 63, no. 2 (2011): 179-192.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 186.

picture is both consonant with Christian dogma and makes it more amenable to reason.”¹⁵⁸

Christological and Trinitarian Concepts

Marc Hight observes that a number of Christian doctrines appear intractable or at least difficult to comprehend without the Idealistic framework.¹⁵⁹ The doctrine of Incarnation is one of them. Hight explains:

As an individual, Christ is supposedly both fully human and fully divine. The problem for materialists is that such a description is difficult to understand given that the divine nature of Christ the Son must be immaterial yet the human nature of the Son is clearly bodily. Since materialists interpret “body” as material while denying that the divinity of God is material, we have the difficult outcome that Christ is composed of distinct even incommensurable substances.¹⁶⁰

The answer Berkeley’s Idealism can offer seems more understandable: “Bodies in Berkeley’s system are collections of sensory idea. Thus he needs only to account for why and how Christ qua divine can perceive passive sensory ideas associated with bodies like those finite human beings typically possess.”¹⁶¹ The concept of Trinity is another central Christian mystery better illuminated by Berkeley’s Idealism. Hight explains:

The doctrine of the Incarnation reveals that the Son is essentially at least partly a bodily being. For a materialist or a standard substance Dualist, that entails that the Son is at least partly material. God, however, is consistently depicted as an immaterial being. The mystery is thus deepened by the apparent claim that the Holy Trinity involves the numerical unity of beings that are composed of distinct, incommensurable substances. That claim appears to be simply

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 180.

¹⁵⁹ Marc Hight, “How Immaterialism Can Save Your Soul,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’etranger* 200, no. 1 (2010): 109-122.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 117.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 117. Also, see Marc Hight and Joshua Bohannon, “The Son More Visible: Immaterialism and the Incarnation,” *Modern Theology* 26, no. 1 (January 2010): 120-148.

incoherent. ... For materialists there is no escaping the worry that believers are forced to accept the unity of incommensurable substances when everywhere else they are told to keep them separate.¹⁶²

In comparison, Berkeley's Idealism avoids the awkward assertion that God is a unified entity and yet with two distinct and incommensurable substances within. Hight sees it to be the overall advantage of Berkeley's Idealism that "when it comes to most of the Christian mysteries, the deep problems are theological and not logical or metaphysical, just as they ought to be for members of the faith."¹⁶³

Creation ex nihilo

Interestingly, two self-identified non-Berkeleians detect that the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and continuous sustenance logically implies Berkeley's Idealism—just as Berkeley himself claimed, even though their aim is to show that these Christian beliefs about creation are false. As P. A. Byrne argues, "we could not conceive of a substantial nature of independently existing, enduring things being created out of nothing by the mere will of a spiritual being. Only the sort of world Berkeley describes can be imagined to have come into existence out of nothing as the direct result of the volition of a mind, for it is nothing other than a series of volitions of a mind."¹⁶⁴ To the question "How can something material be thought of as coming into existence simply as the result of the deliberate thought of mind (without interposing physical means)? His reply is simple: only if the thing thus created is in reality something mental, a part of the

¹⁶² Hight, "How Immaterialism Can Save," 118.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 118.

¹⁶⁴ P. A. Byrne, "Berkeley, Scientific Realism and Creation," *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1984): 456-457.

furniture of the mind which does the creating.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, Byrne thinks that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* entails the dependence of the world upon God’s continuous sustenance of it every moment of its existence; this radical degree of complete dependence is much more adequately captured in Berkeley’s Idealistic framework.

Similarly, Nicholas Everitt thinks that the radical degree of dependence the world is said to have upon the will of God and the omniscient amount of knowledge God is said to have regarding the world resemble the dependence of mental states on a mind and the knowledge content of a mind on the mind—both of which are best captured under Berkeley’s notion of the world as divine ideas.¹⁶⁶ Everitt concludes that theism implies Idealism; to that extent, Berkeley’s position is certainly more consistent than that of his theistic critics.

Appreciating Berkeley’s Idealism in Light of the Mind-Brain Debate

In this section, I demonstrate the relative rigor of Berkeley’s Idealism by examining the recent mind-brain debate in the philosophy of mind. As Vadim V. Vasilyev describes, this philosophical investigation was brought to a new intensity when David Chalmers raised the “hard problem of consciousness” during a 1994 conference.¹⁶⁷ Chalmers’ point is this, comparing to the relatively easy problem of identifying psychological mechanisms of conscious states, the more difficult problem is: *why* and *how* do physical activities in the brain give rise to mental states? To me, the “hard

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 457.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholas Everitt, “Quasi-Berkeleyan Idealism as Perspicuous Theism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 3 (July 1997): 353-377.

¹⁶⁷ Vadim V. Vasilyev, “‘The Hard Problem of Consciousness’ and Two Arguments for Interactionism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (Special Issue 2009): 514-526.

problem of consciousness” is the litmus test of all theories in philosophical anthropology. As Fredrick Ferre rightly emphasized, a satisfactory portrait of the human person must be both *adequate* enough to capture the essential features of subjective experience, and *coherent* enough to honor the intuition of human wholeness.¹⁶⁸ I argue in this section through what we learn from the mind-brain debate that such an adequate and coherent portrait of the human person seems possible within Berkeley’s Idealism, according to which the brain is a set of sense ideas in the mind (the “how” question), which perceives them for the purpose of person-making (the “why” question).

Recall from above that John Hick objects to the Physicalist’s mind-brain identity theory because no positive evidence for it seems possible or even conceivable beyond merely begging the question. Also, he objects to calling mental states “epiphenomena” of the brain without independent causal power, because arguments for this view are self-refuting and cannot be logically made. To add to Hick’s points for a more complete picture of the mind-brain debate, in this section I begin by discussing difficulties in the Physicalist position. After that, I discuss main issues in the Dualist position. I finish by discussing problems associated with the middle position between the two in three versions of “dual-aspect Monism.” In a nutshell, the Physicalist’s account of the human person lacks adequacy for human subjectivity, the Dualist’s account of the human person lacks coherence for human wholeness, and the dual-aspect Monist’s account in the middle lacks clarity. In comparison, Berkeley’s Idealism overcomes their issues while preserving their insights—namely, the ontological unity of the person as emphasized by

¹⁶⁸ Frederick Ferre, “Review Essay of ‘Dueling over Dualism’,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2010): 72-87.

the Physicalist, the spiritual essence of the person as emphasized by the Dualist, and the necessity of having them both as emphasized by the dual-aspect Monist.

Problems in the Physicalists' Portrait of the Human Person

In this segment, I present the main issues in the Physicalist's portrait of the human person. To begin with, even though the Physicalists hold that the human being is entirely physical, their portrait has features unrecognizable according to common understandings of what it means to be purely physical. As Victor Reppert points out, by having to include reason and purpose in its anthropology, Physicalism attributes "to matter powers and liabilities when it is part of a mind that it lacks when it is, say, part of a rock. From the point of view of materialist orthodoxy, this is simply not acceptable."¹⁶⁹ More damagingly, Physicalism leaves out main features of human consciousness, including indivisibility, the subjective perspective, qualia, intentionality, meaning-seeking, and the causal influence of mental concepts. After explaining these issues, I introduce the most sustained attempt in the Physicalist camp to preserve the genuineness of mental life, called "Non-reductive Physicalism," and I give the reasons why it does not accomplish this goal. I wrap up this segment by discussing how the discipline of theoretical mathematics and the belief in divine causality bring serious challenge as well to the Physicalist's portrait of the human person.

¹⁶⁹ Victor Reppert, "Review of *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*," *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (July 2004): 395.

The Fundamental Incommensurability between the Mental vs. the Physical

Attributes

Hans Bynagle describes in detail the fundamental incommensurability between attributes of the mental and of the brain states, termed “non-isomorphism”.¹⁷⁰ For example, a violin note as the object of the mind may be smooth and continuous, whereas its associated brain states are structured and discontinuous. Spatial perceptions are the most obvious case in point. Even though these perceptions have to do with space, “the ‘spatial’ features of the objects of consciousness are not ‘in,’ or features of, the space occupied by the brain—nor are they even spatially relatable to that region of space.”¹⁷¹ Bynagle concludes that “The very existence of these heteromorphic ‘spatial’ features and relations—features and relations that are not in or of the physical space of the brain and its processes—indicates there is more to reality than what is comprehended by our ordinary concepts of the physical.”¹⁷²

Attributes of Consciousness Unaccountable within Physicalism

So many key attributes of consciousness are unaccounted for and unaccountable within Physicalism that a group of Physicalists decided to call themselves the “new mysterians,” because they have more or less given up on explaining consciousness and treated it instead as an unexplainable mystery.¹⁷³ For example, a key feature of

¹⁷⁰ Bynagle, “Debating Soul.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 128.

¹⁷² Ibid, 128.

¹⁷³ C. Stephen Evans, “Separable Souls: Dualism, Selfhood, and the Possibility of Life after Death,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 34, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 327-340.

consciousness is *intentionality* or “aboutness.” As Steven Evans explains, mental states carry meaning; it is unfathomable how a purely physical entity or the states of it can provide that meaning to itself without a mind. A completely physical process is not about anything; it just is.¹⁷⁴ Another constitutive feature is the subjective or felt character of mental experience, the sense of *internality* unknown to a purely physical entity. As Frank Dilley points out, this paradigmatic difference “is not merely an empirical problem but a conceptual one.”¹⁷⁵ Still another mental feature is *rationality*. As William Hasker points out, this mental operation of deciphering right versus wrong or pros versus cons presupposes certain interests and preferences and, most importantly, it presupposes a central entity to which these teleological considerations matter in an integrative way. And so, a holistic self rather than a mere bundle of particles must be posited behind these mental operations, “since we cannot reasonably suppose the behavior of elementary particles to be influenced directly by norms and objectives.”¹⁷⁶

This leads to another crucial attribute of the mind, i.e., its *indivisibility*. This mental feature has been discussed under several other names, e.g., “simplicity,” “wholeness,” “unity,” “oneness,” and “singularity.” They all refer to the fact that our self-awareness is unified with no divisible parts that could be separated from it and still exist, like all physical things are known to have. Stewart Goetz calls this fact the “simple

¹⁷⁴ See also Alvin Plantinga, “Against Materialism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (January 2006): 3-32.

¹⁷⁵ Frank B. Dilley, “Taking Consciousness Seriously: A Defense of Cartesian Dualism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 55 (2004): 136.

¹⁷⁶ Frank Dilley, “A Critique of Emergent Dualism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (January 2003): 40.

argument” for the non-physicality of the self.¹⁷⁷ Goetz supports his view by pointing to the “binding” problem in neuroscience: researchers have tried without success to locate a single point in the brain where diverse stimuli to numerous cells and regions of the brain are unified into a singular effect that corresponds to the singular nature of the first-person perspective. Goetz thinks that “the mere fact that the binding problem exists is confirmation of the reality of the apparent standard simplicity of the self.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly, William Hasker is convinced that a purely physical entity is incapable of integrating multiple pieces of information from different parts of the brain into a unified experience. In his words, “A person’s being aware of a complex fact does not consist of parts of the person being aware of parts of the fact, nor can a complex state of consciousness exist distributed among the parts of the complex object. Once we this we see that materialism is in deep trouble.”¹⁷⁹

Frank Dilley captures the situation summarily that the non-physicality of the self has been argued for based on the fact that “its contents (qualia, feelings, thoughts, etc.) cannot be located in the physical world (inside or outside the [physical] self) and that its ways of responding (reasoning, free will, intentionality, etc.) are not ways that material bodies operate. ... the data of consciousness, including qualia, mental content and intentionality, cannot be reduced to physical properties.”¹⁸⁰ He reviews and reports that

¹⁷⁷ Stewart Goetz, “Substance Dualism,” in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, eds. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 33-60.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁷⁹ William Hasker, “On Behalf of Emergent Dualism,” in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, eds. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 92.

¹⁸⁰ Dilley, “Taking Consciousness Seriously,” 135.

“The roster of the dissatisfied in contemporary philosophy of mind is impressive, as the following observations will show. Many of those I cite had hoped to find solutions more compatible with materialism, such as dual-aspect/panpsychist pictures of mind or as property Dualism and new forms of epiphenomenalism, but they are unhappy with their results, as they tell us.”¹⁸¹ As the result, there exists “a ‘qualitative gap,’ ‘an impassable chasm’ between mental states and brain processes that no one knows how to bridge from the materialist side.”¹⁸²

As Dilley points out, if the Physicalist’s portrait of the human being is true, much is at stake. For example, there would be no persistent self who exists over time, not to say beyond death; content of beliefs and rationalities would be inconsequential; notions of freewill and moral responsibility would be nonsensical.¹⁸³ What’s more, as John Hick points out, Physicalists themselves would have to stop arguing for their case, because they reduce all causality to the particle level which is mindless and deny any genuine causal power of mental events, including reasoning. Fredrick Ferre catches the irony by pointing out that “Science is, above all, a purposive, norm-guided, mentally initiated activity. Philosophy joins it, when at its best, in manifesting just these qualities, whose effectiveness is denied by naturalists. Such denials, in sum, would entail the death of both philosophy and science.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 136.

¹⁸² Ibid, 137.

¹⁸³ See also Alvin Plantinga, “A New Argument against Materialism,” *Philosophia Christi* 14, No. 1 (2012): 9-27.

¹⁸⁴ Ferre, “Review Essay,” 76.

Non-reductive Physicalism: A Physicalist's Attempt to Adequately Capture the Mental Life

The most sustained effort to bring the Physicalist's portrait of the human person closer to a genuine mental life is "Non-reductive Physicalism" developed by Nancy Murphy.¹⁸⁵ Her theory belongs to Physicalism, because it denies any non-physical element in the human person. The mental is nothing but the physical assembling in certain complex ways. But she claims her theory to be non-reductive in that it tries to preserve meaning, freedom, and responsibility; it does so by acknowledging them as functions of the physical brain influenced by environmental factors including society, culture, and God. More specifically, Murphy conceives the mental as "supervening" upon the physical, which means the mental depends on the physical and yet is not reducible to it. She thinks that the "supervening" relation does not mean that the mental is determined by the physical upon which it supervenes, because the mind can exercise "downward causation" from the higher level.

According to James Stump's analysis, however, the "downward causation" in Murphy's theory cannot be genuinely causal.¹⁸⁶ Stump explains, since "supervening" entails that the higher level is completely dependent on the lower level, the higher level cannot be other than what the lower level determines it to be. And so, "the causal efficacy of the higher levels is empty if, once the analysis is pushed back a step, it turns out that

¹⁸⁵ For example, see Nancy Murphy, "Non-reductive Physicalism," in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, eds. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 115-138.

¹⁸⁶ James B. Stump, "Non-Reductive Physicalism—A Dissenting Voice," *Christian Scholar's Review* 36, no. 1 (2006): 63-76.

any difference in the higher levels must have been effected by a difference in the lower level—how else would there have been a difference for the Physicalist [who denies anything that is not physical]?”¹⁸⁷ This means that “I have not made the decision; it was made by my neurons.”¹⁸⁸ Steven Evans critiques “downward causation” from another angle, saying that if the mental is not completely determined by the physical, the mind should no longer be called an entirely physical entity, for it has causal power which cannot be fully explained by laws of physics, chemistry and biology and it possess capacities such as freewill and moral reasoning which are not associable with mere configurations of particles, no matter how complex these configurations are.¹⁸⁹

What’s more, Stump thinks that connecting the mental with the physical by the vague label “supervening” is asserting a fictional relation which turns out to be inconceivable upon closer examination. His reason is this. For “supervening” to be an explanation offered within Physicalism, it must be a “materialistically acceptable fact.” Notably, “A fact is materialistically acceptable if it is a fact about physical things, or is a fact about non-physical things which strongly supervene on physical things.”¹⁹⁰ It turns out that a Physicalist cannot really use the latter option, because that would be an infinite regression; she cannot use the former option either, because facts about physical thing

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 73.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 72.

¹⁸⁹ Evans, “Separable Souls.” See also Kevin Corcoran, “The Constitutive View of Persons,” in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, eds. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 153-176.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 69.

would not be able to bridge the explanatory gap between the mental and the physical.

Hence, the term “supervening” suffers the classic “reflexivity” problem.

Two More Challenges Physicalism Faces—from Mathematics and from the Understanding of Divine Agency in the Physical World

Outside these anthropological considerations, there are still two major challenges against the Physicalist’s portrait of the human person regarding its physicalistic commitment in general.

Mathematics

This is a metaphysical critique. Ben Carter suggests that Physicalism cannot be rationally argued as an accurate account of the universe and, insofar as it attempts to do so, it is self-refuting.¹⁹¹ The self-contradictoriness resides in the Physicalist’s inevitable reliance on mathematics to establish his case. Specifically, the Physicalist considers all phenomena in the universe to be particles in motion; since physical events occur as contingent facts, the Physicalist must utilize mathematics which deals with necessary truths as the principle criteria to evaluate and generalize about material things.

Mathematical truths are absolute standards in that they are unaffected by the particular configurations actualized in the material domain. Notably, it is this necessary character of mathematics which propels it into the eternal and sacred category in the eyes of Plato and Galileo. And yet, the use of mathematics by the Physicalist suggests that reality cannot be completely captured under the physical. Mathematical reality is “bigger” than physical reality, “since ‘mathematical existence allows anything to exist,...but what is logically

¹⁹¹ Ben M. Carter, “Mathematics and Metaphysics,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55, no. 3 (2003): 159-165.

possible need not exist physically.”¹⁹² Consequently, “the materialist is tossed on the horns of a dilemma. If he is right, he cannot prove it. If he can prove it, he is wrong.”¹⁹³

Similarly, mathematical physicist John Polkinghorne suggests that the physical world obeys a much larger mathematical blueprint. Like Ben Carter, Polkinghorne thinks that mathematics deals with eternal truths which already exist. He reports that mathematicians across the board believe that theoretical mathematics is not a human contrivance but a discovery of existing truths. Polkinghorne reasons, “The prime numbers and the Mandelbrot set (frequently discussed in relation to fractals and chaos theory) have always been ‘there.’ But ‘*where*’ have they been? If these convictions of the mathematicians are correct (as I believe them to be), then in addition to the physical world that the scientists investigate, there must be an everlasting *noetic* world of mathematical entities that the mathematicians investigate.”¹⁹⁴ Some object that the world appears mathematical only because the mind imposes mathematics on the world like a Procrustean bed would do to its guest; mathematics in fact is a grossly exaggerated tautology. Polkinghorne answers by pointing out that “Kurt Godel proved that all axiomatic systems rich enough to incorporate the natural numbers (the integers), contain stateable but undecidable propositions and that their self-consistency cannot be

¹⁹² Ibid, 162.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 164.

¹⁹⁴ Polkinghorne, “Eschatological Credibility,” 20.

established. Mathematical truth is found to exceed the proving of theorems and to elude total capture in the confining meshes of any logical net.”¹⁹⁵

The question of divine agency in the physical world

This is a theological critique by Dennis Bielfeldt.¹⁹⁶ It is particularly worth the attention of Christian theologians who claim to be Physicalists. Bielfeldt reminds us that Physicalism not only conceives the ultimate reality of the world we live to be particles of physics, it also commits to the assumption of “causal closure” of the physical to non-physical causalities. The principle of “causal closure” entails a causally inert God, because God is not physical. Bielfeldt denies the effectiveness of the Physicalist’s strategy to protect the robustness of divine agency through hypotheses of “information transfer without energy transfer” or “downward causation between two layers of one ontic domain.” As far as he can see, both claims are unsubstantiated as well as covertly Dualistic and so are afflicted by issues in Dualism discussed in the next segment.

Specifically, the first strategy claims that divine agency can be carried out through inputting information into the physical system, for example, at the micro level that is objectively undetermined; such information transfer does not violate the causal-closure requirement because it is done without energy transfer and so without violating the energy conservation principle. Bielfeldt finds this theory problematic because “we currently have no way to conceive how information could be propagated without energy transfer. All information transfer appears to require a causal realization in physical

¹⁹⁵ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1989), 127.

¹⁹⁶ Dennis Bielfeldt, “Can Western Monotheism Avoid Substance Dualism?” *Zygon* 36, no. 1 (March 2001): 153-177.

systems.”¹⁹⁷ The fact that computer hardware operates according to programming does not validate the theory, because what ultimately causes the actual operation of various circuits is still an input of energy into the hardware. Bielfeldt also shares Willem Drees’ discomfort about attributing a metaphysical cause to physical activities at the quantum level, because “Quantum mechanics as currently formulated certainly requires no metaphysical supplementation, and to give it any seems to threaten its very integrity.”¹⁹⁸ Not to say that situating God’s action in moments of quantum indeterminacy or chaotic randomness means “God would still be in the business of intervening through ‘law-suspending-miracle’”¹⁹⁹ which is not fitting for a God believed to act with omnipotent causal power.

The second defense strategy of the Physicalist is divine agency through “downward causation.” In addition to the problem pointed out above that the “higher entities” do not really have causal primacy in this setup, Bielfeldt raises the crucial question of empirical evidence. He reports that “we have no empirical support for such a real top-down causation in nature. ... in fact, the advent of quantum mechanics has challenged the very intelligibility of downward causal explanations, for it can account for those higher-level actualizations which previous theory had relegated to the effects of the ‘emergent’ (McLaughlin 1992, 89-91).”²⁰⁰ Moreover, “We do not have empirical

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 163.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 163.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 164.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 171.

evidence for the existence of real irreducible causal power at the higher level that is not finally determined by events and processes at lower levels.”²⁰¹

Problems in the Dualists’ Portrait of the Human Person

The fact that the Physicalist’s portrait of the human person has many defects does not mean that the Dualist’s portrait is acceptable. In this segment, I discuss the issues of Dualism in three areas: the ontological unity of the human being (the “what” question for Dualism), the intimate association of body and mind (the “why” question for Dualism), and the inconceivability of substantive interaction (the “how” question for Dualism). I finish by analyzing the most sustained but unsuccessful effort from the Dualist camp to repair the fragmented picture, called “Emergent Dualism.” Before that, I want to quickly address a frequently heard objection against Dualism, that is, the issue of individuation. The objection is something like this: each person is individuated through the body; without a body, as the Dualist posits for the postmortem life, the person would become unidentifiable. In my view, that does not seem to be an issue. As Taliaferro and Goetz explain, each soul is individuated “intrinsically or *per se*” as a numerical particular, since if a person is *essentially* nonphysical—which is precisely what I try to argue through this entire chapter—then personal identity is ontologically *prior to* having a body, not the other way around.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid, 173.

²⁰² Charles Taliaferro and Stewart Goetz, “The Prospect of Christian Materialism,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 311.

The “What” Question for Dualism—Regarding Human Nature and Its Essential Unity

The first challenge to the Dualist’s portrait of the human person is the “what” question: what is the conception of human nature? Like many have protested, by positing two independent and ontologically distinct substances in the human makeup, it drives an unseemly and unbridgeable wedge in the middle of the unity of human nature. As alluded to above, inserting such an ontological duality into the essentially unified human nature generates grave difficulties for central Christian doctrines such as Incarnation and Trinity. What’s more, the supposed physical element in the human being seems to obstruct its eschatological union with God, given that God is essentially non-physical.

The “Why” Questions for Dualism—Regarding the Mutual Dependence We Observe between Body and Mind as well as Their Gradual Evolution Together

There is also the question of “why” the two supposed substances are juxtaposed in the way we observe, especially the extensive dependence of the mind on a particular body and the general evolution of biological life “if the soul is held to be capable of existing, and of carrying on a meaningful conscious life, apart from this or any other body.”²⁰³ To me, the Dualist’s answer to the “why” question of duality in the human being is reasonably satisfactory. That said, this answer makes the most sense when heard within the Idealist’s framework, not only because the Idealist’s framework assigns the proper role to the physical, i.e., not substantive but derivative and pedagogical, but also because unresolvable issues associated with the “what” question above and the “how” question below for Dualism threatens the credibility of the answer to the “why” question as well.

²⁰³ Bynagle, “Debating Soul,” 134.

The Dualist's answer to the "why" question of duality boils down to the purpose of person-making. For example, Taliaferro and Goetz state that being embodied in a material world is the opportunity God gives us to choose to live in a good and just way, so that we may attain beatitude. The soul joins a body for this pedagogical purpose, because the privacy of the soul entails that the soul needs a body to gather information and to interact with other souls; more importantly, the soul needs the body to grow and develop. The fact that a soul is increasingly more dependent on a particular body—called the "pairing problem"—is explained under the notion of "soul structure" coined by Richard Swinburne. Under this concept, the soul takes on a particular "structure" as the result of its development over time, meaning that "at any present moment there is a set of memories, beliefs, desires, perceptions and other mental states present to the self which affect the set of memories, beliefs and desires which develop in the future and which, to a great extent, influence what these future sets will be, but without determining them."²⁰⁴ The "structure" the soul accumulates over time entails its growing attachment to a particular body. For example, a Chinese soul would find an Indian body relatively difficult to use.

The "How" Question for Dualism—Regarding the Feasibility of Interaction between Two Ontologically Different Substances

The question of how the two supposed substances interact with each other is troublesome for two reasons.

Problem #1: The necessity of ontological sameness between cause and effect

As Berkeley points out, an effect is necessarily of the same ontological nature as its cause. One may say that, modern day Physicalists' insistence on the "causal closure"

²⁰⁴ Dilley, "Taking Consciousness Seriously," 146.

of the physical is not only a methodological constraint, but also a metaphysical dictate. The truth in Berkeley's statement may be seen through the so-called "causal joint conundrum."²⁰⁵ We encountered this issue above when unpacking the notion of "supervening." For the same reason, Bielfeldt calls the Dualist's assertion of substantive interaction "notoriously difficult philosophically."²⁰⁶ Specifically, again, it seems impossible to offer a coherent account of the nature of that causal "link" which connects two ontologically different orders of being. Bielfeldt reflects when discussing the problem of divine agency, "what could be the nature of such a cosmic pineal gland mingling the humors of the infinite and the finite? ... God/universe substance Dualism is embarrassing for the same reason as mind/body Dualism."²⁰⁷ The "causal joint conundrum" helps us see that, the substantive dissimilarity the Dualist posits between the physical and the spiritual entails that the two are not ontologically bridgeable.

Problem #2: The requirement of accessibility for interactions to take place

Even if substantive interaction were possible in theory, there is still the technical question of accessibility. As Stewart Goetz explains, according to Descartes, any entity that is extended is divisible into substantive parts, like all physical things are; since the soul is indivisible, it must not be extended, which means that the soul is non-spatial. And here lies the problem: "for any two entities to interact causally, they must stand in a relation to each other which is such that the substance acted upon (the patient) is accessible to the agent's exercised causal power. And it is simply impossible to conceive

²⁰⁵ Bielfeldt, "Western Monotheism," 165.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 154.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 154.

how a spatial substance and a non-spatial substance can stand in the requisite accessibility relationship.”²⁰⁸

Non-Cartesian Dualist William Hasker attempts to solve this issue by redefining the soul as spatial. However, there is the “occupancy” problem with this conceptualization of the soul. As Jaegwon Kim explains, spatial occupancy requires that no more than one entity occupies a location at any time, “something like the impenetrability of matter;” but if the spatial “soul” fits this criterion, why are such “souls” considered non-physical?²⁰⁹ There is also the problem of “incompatible attributes.”²¹⁰ As Frank Dilley explains, physical attributes like spatiality are foreign to the soul with consciousness and freewill, which is the very reason why the soul is historically considered non-physical in the first place. In Dilley’s words, “Something seems amiss when elements like spatiality and energy and qualia and rationality are combined.”²¹¹ The brain and the mind are seen as non-identical precisely because mental properties are not found in anything studied by physics.

Emergent Dualism: A Dualist’s Attempt to Coherently Account the Mind-Body Relation

Because of these puzzling issues, defenses of Dualism are often in an *ad hoc* fashion, claiming it to be something “learned from experience,” or the best conclusion possible, or “ultimately mysterious.” Fredrick Ferre rejects these *ad hoc* defenses by pointing out that, “*Tu quoque* arguments are rightly classified as fallacies, because their

²⁰⁸ Goetz, “Substance Dualism,” 54.

²⁰⁹ Reppert, “Review.”

²¹⁰ Dilley, “A Critique.”

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

premises may be true (you may indeed have done just as badly as I have done) without requiring the conclusion that my position is better (both our positions may be false and a third position, neither yours nor mine, may be best).”²¹² Notably, as I have been trying to argue, that third position which best captures the human being is Berkeley’s Idealism. William Hasker’s Emergent Dualism is an exception in its arduous efforts to fix the Dualist’s divisive picture. Specifically, while holding onto the substantive distinction between the physical and the mental, Emergent Dualism claims that the mental emerges out of the physical as the result of the physical coming into certain complex functional configurations. What emerges is a new individual entity with causal power of its own. Hasker thinks that, compared to traditional Dualism, his theory better incorporates the empirical facts of bio evolution and the mind’s intimate dependence on the biological organism.

Objections to Hasker’s theory are several. Besides the interaction problem we just discussed, another objection raised by traditional Dualist Stewart Goetz is similar to Berkeley’s point that a thing cannot give to others what it itself does not have. Goetz argues that, the power to cause something into existence is such a great creative power that it seems unlikely to exist in physical things *per se*. In his words, “It is what philosophers think of as a great-making property, and it seems to me that such a power is and can only be exemplified by the greatest possible or most perfect being. ... it does not strike me as intuitively plausible insofar as it implies exemplification of a great-making property by entities whose nature as material is constituted by non-great-making

²¹² Ferre, “Review Essay,” 81.

properties.”²¹³ In addition, non-reductive Physicalist Nancy Murphy objects on the account that, Hasker cannot define the mental to be substantively different from the physical and then claim that the mental nonetheless emerge from the physical; it is impossible to have it both ways.²¹⁴

Problems in the Dual-Aspect Monists’ Portrait of the Human Person

There have been some efforts to articulate a middle position between Physicalism and Dualism, characterized by their common assertion of only one substance with both a physical and a non-physical aspect. In my view, these theories face the common question of “One *what?*”—What exactly is the nature of this single substance they hypothesize? It is clear that none of the dual-aspect Monists intend their theories to be categorized under Idealism, and so the “oneness” in their theories appears ambiguous if not equivocal; to the extent that their definitions of it lean towards either Dualism or Physicalism, they share the same issues with them.

Thomas Aquinas’ Hylomorphism

The hylomorphism of Thomas Aquinas defines the human being as a composite substance which unifies body and soul. Aquinas rejects the Dualist’s portrait of the human person by stipulating that the soul and the body are not two actually existing substances, but from these two things one actually existing substance is made. According to Aquinas, the soul relates to the body extremely intimately, i.e., as its form.

Nonetheless, the soul is an exceptional form, in that, unlike other material forms which

²¹³ Goetz, “Substance Dualism,” 102.

²¹⁴ Murphy, “Non-reductive Physicalism,” 107.

dissolve when the matter they form dissolve, the soul subsists apart from the body after death and will be reunited with the body at the resurrection.²¹⁵

Charges of incoherence and equivocation have been brought against the notion of the human nature as a “composite substance” and the notion of the soul as a “subsisting form.” For example, Christopher Conn comments,

Surely we cannot have it both ways: we cannot say both (a) that we are the product of this union, and (b) that it is possible for us to survive the dissolution of this union. ... If the composite theory is true, then we are not presently identical with our souls, since objects which are distinct at any time must be distinct at all times. If the composite theory is true, then we shall never be identical with our souls. So even if our souls should continue to exist after we have died, since our souls will not be us, it follows that we will not exist during this time.²¹⁶

That is to say, if the human nature is essentially a composite, then the de-composition of this composite in death is by definition the end of it; the person did not really survive. Notably, the assertion of a composite substance causes problem not only for the belief in survival, but also for the belief in postmortem purgation, both beliefs of which Aquinas affirms.

Regarding Aquinas’ definition of the “soul,” Hans Bynagle thinks that it is an equivocation to call the soul a “form,” which in the regular sense of the term denotes configuration and arrangement; because “soul is identified as that form whose imposition on or union with certain matter accounts for that matter being a living human body rather than a mere mass of matter. Though ‘form’ suggests configuration or arrangement, it

²¹⁵ For a recent advocacy of Aquinas’ theory, see Christina van Dyke, “Not Properly a Person: The Rational Soul and ‘Thomistic Substance Dualism’,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (April 2009): 186-204.

²¹⁶ Christopher H. Conn, “Human Nature and the Possibility of Life after Death: Why Christian Orthodoxy Requires Compositional Substance Dualism,” *Philosophy and Theology* 20 (2008): 143.

must in this instance comprise something *more*, for it takes more than just a particular configuration of matter to make it a living human body. But what this ‘more’ must be is not easy to identify. ... Whatever it is, it serves to constitute the soul (or at least allows the soul to be) not simply a ‘state’ of some matter.”²¹⁷ Similarly, William Hasker objects by saying that “according to them there are certain mental activities involving abstract reasoning that are performed only by the soul with no assistance from the body. Clearly, this would not be possible if the soul was understood *merely* as a pattern or structure of the body.”²¹⁸

Alfred Whitehead’s Account of the Cosmos with a Physical as well as a “Mental”

Pole

Some claim that Alfred Whitehead’s bipolar cosmology, by positing a mental as well a physical pole on the elementary level of the universe, avoids the pitfalls of Dualism without losing the reality of a genuine mental life.²¹⁹ According to Fredrick Ferre, informed by knowledge from post-Einsteinian physics, Whitehead “holds that the basic energetic occasions of the universe have the capacity to receive and incorporate characteristics (e.g., wave patterns) into themselves in an internal way that is similar in kind only to the way mentality connects to its immediate environment ... Thus at the root of all things is something functioning sufficiently like prehensive human mentality to justify positing a ‘mental pole’ in the most elementary quanta of energy.”²²⁰

²¹⁷ Bynagle, “Debating Soul,” 114.

²¹⁸ Hasker, “Emergent Dualism,” 95.

²¹⁹ For example, see Ferre, “Review Essay.”

²²⁰ Ferre, “Review Essay,” 83.

However, as mathematical physicist John Polkinghorne points out in several occasions, Whitehead's assertion of a "mental pole" in the elemental units of the physical universe in fact is "difficult to reconcile with our scientific knowledge" discovered by modern physics.²²¹ Polkinghorne explains that, for Whitehead, "Events are basic to his metaphysics and each event is held to have a quasi-subjective phase (prehension) followed by an objectification (conrescence), a sort of wedding of the material and mental in the marriage bed of occurrence. This seems to me to be *an unhappily literal way of seeking a synthesis*. It is not the case in quantum theory that every particle has a little bit of undulation in it, which when added together gives a wave. The mixture is more subtle."²²²

John Polkinghorne's "One World Stuff"

John Polkinghorne himself has been trying for years to sketch out some sort of dual-aspect Monism, "a complementary world of mind/matter in which these polar opposites cohere as contrasting aspects of the world-stuff."²²³ Inspired by the notion of "complementarity" in quantum physics, Polkinghorne envisions the one "world stuff" being manifested by entities like stones whose nature is located entirely at the material pole, by entities like mathematic truths whose nature is located entirely at the mental pole, and also by entities like humans whose nature includes both. His aim is to "acknowledge the fundamental distinction between experience of the material and

²²¹ John Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science, and Understanding* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 151.

²²² Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 73.

²²³ *Ibid*, 71.

experience of the mental but which would neither impose on reality a sharp division into two unconnected kinds of substance nor deny the psychosomatic unity of human beings.”²²⁴ As I have been trying to argue, Berkeley’s Idealism accomplishes exactly this—it differentiates the fundamental distinction between experiences of the material and the mental, without imposing an ontological divide into the fundamental unity of the reality in general or the human nature in particular. What’s more, in comparison to Polkinghorne’s mixed notion of “one world stuff,” Berkeley’s idealistic Monism seems much more substantive, rigorous and effective for achieving these aims.

However, in Polkinghorne’s opinion, “the classical metaphysical strategies of materialism, Idealism and Cartesian Dualism all exhibit a bankruptcy in the face of the many layered, and yet interconnected, character of our encounter with reality.”²²⁵ As to the reason why Polkinghorne maintains such a low assessment of Idealism, I suspect that it has much to do with his passion for the study of the physical world. In his words, “so marvelously patterned is that [sense] experience that I for one cannot doubt that it is the discernment of an actual reality. I refuse to join the Idealists in assigning an ontological priority to the mental over the material. ... The natural convincing explanation of the success of science is that it is gaining a tightening grasp of an actual reality. ... The terms of the understanding are dictated by the way things are. There is a material world we can learn about.”²²⁶ Polkinghorne’s reservation against Idealism is likely to be representative. However, as I have tried to clarify in the above, Berkeley’s Idealism does not at all deny

²²⁴ Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science, and Understanding*, 95.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 95.

²²⁶ Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 71.

the reality or the actuality of the physical; it only denies it to be independent from the mind, especially the Mind of God. And so, it does not take away any of the reality Polkinghorne studies. What's more, as I will show in the next section, the challenge Polkinghorne sees mathematics to be for Physicalism leads some physicists to arrive precisely at the position of Berkeley's Idealism.

“Matter” According to Those Who Study It the Best:

Metaphysical Reflections on the basis of Quantum Physics

Given that Berkeley's Idealism makes ontological claims regarding the physical, insights generated from the philosophy of science regarding both the nature of “matter” and the nature of the discipline of physics seem quite relevant for assessing the validity of Berkeley's views. It is particularly so for our time, when studies in modern physics unveiled for us unexpected knowledge regarding the most basic building blocks of the physical reality that literally turned the world upside down. In a nutshell, knowledge of modern physics helped illuminate the truths in Berkeley's Idealism.

The Old World Turned Upside Down

John Honner succinctly captures the profound impact modern physics carries for metaphysics:

In the past few decades, there has been a surge of interest in the implications of quantum physics for our worldview. We live in an epoch in which something quite dramatic in human awareness is happening. What quantum physics may demand of us is a new habit of thought. Earlier generations learnt to think that the earth is round rather than flat, even though it seems flat on a restricted horizon. Another generation learnt to think of the earth as moving around the sun, even though the sun seems to move around the earth. ... Microphysics today produces metaphysical consequences. This is something rare in the history of the

relationship between experimental science and philosophy, and it must be allowed to have its impact on the ontologies we use in theology.²²⁷

During an interdisciplinary dialogue on the resurrection, Robert John Russell expressed the same view, saying that we must be prepared to reconstruct current work in eschatology in light of contemporary physics—especially relativity theory and quantum physics.²²⁸ Specifically, there came this earth shattering realization that “Our understanding of matter, as understood by modern physics, is far more complex and obscure than any conception we might have of the soul.”²²⁹ I think Berkeley would be happy to know that quantum discoveries have shaken the long-held view that “a sharp and absolute distinction can be made between a subject (observer and observing system) and an object (the external thing), and between one object and another (a materialist principle), so that the external world is seen to be a collection of independent and quite separable objects;” they have also qualified the view that “objects have the properties we attribute to them whether we are observing them or not.”²³⁰ Based on knowledge from quantum physics, some philosophers of the mind even suggested that, the reason why the brain cannot function normally without subjective experience is because, as the

²²⁷ Honner, “A New Ontology,” 35.

²²⁸ Robert John Russell, “Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology,” in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 3-30.

²²⁹ Reppert, “Review Essay,” 396.

²³⁰ Honner, “A New Ontology,” 37.

underlying substratum, “subjective experiences were a condition of the very existence or efficacy of the physical events making up brain activity.”²³¹

In the rest of this section, utilizing Ken Wilber’s anthology, I introduce metaphysical writings by modern physicists.²³² Wilber’s volume is a condensed collection of original essays by founders of modern physics regarding the nature of the discipline of physics as well as the nature of the physical reality. Authors he reviewed include Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, Arthur Eddington, Wolfgang Pauli, Louis de Broglie, James Jeans, and Max Planck. The mere fact that so many founders of modern physics were inspired enough by their scientific discoveries to produce philosophical works on these topics is in itself quite remarkable, not to mention that the intellectual weight these thinkers carry as a group is unparalleled. As we shall see, mathematic physicist John Polkinghorne’s observation of the “unreasonable success” of mathematics in capturing the physical reality is very typical among modern physicists.²³³ The inferences they drew from this fundamental significance of mathematics for physics are: first, studies in physics do not and cannot speak about “substance,” but only about relations and regularities; second, the reality of the world is not physical, but Idealistic. Notably, these insights convey the metaphysical gist of Berkeley’s Idealism.

²³¹ Vasilyev, “The Hard Problem,” 515. This theory was once entertained, interestingly, by Physicalist David Chalmers.

²³² Ken Wilber (ed.), *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World’s Great Physicists* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1984).

²³³ John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 20.

“At the heart of nature ... we find mathematical symmetries” (Werner Heisenberg)

Ken Wilbur summarizes the recently recognized status of mathematics for modern physics this way: “every physicist in this volume was profoundly struck by the fact that the natural [material] realm ... obeys in some sense the laws or forms of mathematics, or, in general, obeys some sort of archetypal mental-forms ... Heisenberg and Pauli looking for the archetypal forms which underlie the material realm; de Broglie claiming mind-forms have to precede (ontologically) matter forms; Einstein and Jeans finding a central mathematical form to the cosmos.”²³⁴ In James Jeans’²³⁵ own words, “what we are finding, in a whole torrent of surprising new knowledge, is that the way which explains them [physical realities] more clearly, more fully, and more naturally than any other is the mathematical way, the explanation in terms of mathematical concepts. It is true, in a sense somewhat different from that intended by Galileo, that ‘Nature’s great book is written in mathematical language.’”²³⁶ Similarly, Wolfgang Pauli²³⁷ articulates his Platonic-Pythagorean worldview in his essay “the influence of archetypal ideas on Kepler’s construction of scientific theories” written in collaboration with Carl Jung.

Werner Heisenberg²³⁸ wrote extensively on the mathematical core of the physical reality. To motivate his case, Heisenberg explains,

²³⁴ Wilbur, *Quantum Questions*, 145.

²³⁵ James Jean (1877-1946), mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and popular writer and philosopher of science. He was knighted in 1924.

²³⁶ Wilbur, *Quantum Questions*, 129.

²³⁷ Wolfgang Pauli (1900-1958), the 1945 Nobel Prize winner in physics.

²³⁸ Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976), the 1932 Nobel Prize winner for the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principles.

If I endeavor today to take up some of the old problems concerning the structure of matter and the concept of natural law, it is because *the development of atomic physics in our own day has radically altered our whole outlook on nature and the structure of matter*. It is perhaps not an improper exaggeration to maintain that some of the old problems have quite recently found a clear and final solution. So it is permissible today to speak about this new and perhaps conclusive answer to questions that were formulated here thousands of years ago.²³⁹

Heisenberg sums up his point in a nutshell:

To put it in rather general and precise terms, we may hope that a philosophical analysis of recent scientific developments will contribute to a replacement of conflicting dogmatic opinions about the basic problems we have broached, by a sober readjustment to a new situation, which, in itself, can even now be regarded as a revolution in human life on earth.... If I may already anticipate at this point the outcome of such a comparison; it seems that, in spite of the tremendous success that the concept of the atom has achieved in modern science, *Plato was very much nearer to the truth about the structure of matter than Leucippus or Democritus*.²⁴⁰

Heisenberg unpacks his point patiently from ancient philosophy. He explains that, the controversy between the founders of atomism and Plato rose from their search for a universal principle to which all the diversities in the world may be traced. The atomists posited “atom” as the smallest unit of existence, eternal and indestructible, from which all other things are composed. Plato took the strongest exception to that; for him, the most basic foundation of all existence is not “atom,” but Ideas in terms of mathematical forms. After thousands of years of pursuit, quantum physics today finally revealed that mathematics is the only adequate language for describing the physical reality on the elemental level. And so, Heisenberg concludes:

I think that on this point modern physics has definitely decided for Plato. For the smallest units of matter are, in fact, not physical objects in the ordinary sense of

²³⁹ Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, 45.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 46.

the word; they are forms, structures or—in Plato’s sense—Ideas, which can be unambiguously spoken of only in the language of mathematics. ... The unitary principle that governs the course of the world...can be expressed and understood only in mathematical forms. The central problem of theoretical physics nowadays is the mathematical formulation of the natural law underlying the behavior of elementary particles. From the experimental situation we infer that a satisfactory theory of the elementary particles must at the same time be the theory of physics in general, and hence, of everything else belonging to this physics. ... *Plato was right in believing that ultimately, at the heart of nature, among the smallest units of matter, we find mathematical symmetries.*²⁴¹

“The house that Jack built” (Arthur Eddington)

The governing role pure mathematics occupies in quantum physics entails that physics does not and cannot speak about “substance” but only about regularities and relationships because, as Sir James Jeans points out, “a mathematical formula can never tell us what a thing is, but only how it behaves.”²⁴² The fact that the objects of research in physics are symbolic formulas and not “things in themselves” has been underscored by many of these authors; physics studies not reality itself, but mathematical representations of reality. For example, Neal Bohr stresses that “it must be recognized that we are here dealing with a *purely symbolic* procedure.”²⁴³ Sir James Jeans vividly describes the findings of physics as “a sheaf of mathematical formulae,” saying that

we can never understand what events are, but must limit ourselves to describing the patterns of events in mathematical terms; *no other aim is possible*. Physicists who are trying to understand nature may work in many different fields and by many different methods: one may dig, one may sow, one may reap. But the final harvest will always be *a sheaf of mathematical formulae*. These will never describe nature itself ... Thus our studies can never put us into contact with reality.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Ibid, 51.

²⁴² Ibid, 142.

²⁴³ Niels Bohr (1885-1962), the 1922 Nobel Prize winner in physics.

²⁴⁴ Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, 8.

Arthur Eddington²⁴⁵ is particularly articulate in driving the point home with his “shadowgraph” analogy, saying that “in the world of physics we watch a *shadowgraph* performance of familiar life. The shadow of my elbow rests on the shadow table as the shadow ink flows over the shadow paper.”²⁴⁶ “However much the ramifications of physics may be extended by further scientific discovery, they cannot from their very nature entrench on the background in which they have their being ... *We have learned that the exploration of the external world by the methods of physical science leads not to the concrete reality but to a shadow world of symbols, beneath which those methods are unadapted for penetrating.*”²⁴⁷ Therefore, “Physics most strongly insists that its methods do not penetrate behind the symbolism.”²⁴⁸ Eddington reports that “The symbolic nature of physics is generally recognized, and the scheme of physics is now formulated in such a way as to make it almost self-evident that it is a partial aspect of something wider.”²⁴⁹

Notably, the “shadowy” character holds true for all types of physics—ancient, Newtonian, Einsteinian, and quantum. In the words of Erwin Schrodinger,²⁵⁰ “please note that the very recent advance [of quantum and relativistic physics] does not lie in the world of physics itself having acquired this *shadowy character*; it had ever since

²⁴⁵ Arthur Eddington (1882-1944), theoretical physicist, knighted in 1930 for his contributions in physics. Eddington led the expedition that photographed the solar eclipse which offered the first proof of Einstein’s relativity theory.

²⁴⁶ Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, 9.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁵⁰ Erwin Schrodinger (1887-1961), the 1933 Nobel Prize winner in physics for Schrodinger’s wave equation.

Democritus of Abdera and even before, but we were not aware of it; we thought we were dealing with the world itself.”²⁵¹ This profound revelation by the new physics regarding the symbolic nature of physics is so monumental, that Arthur Eddington thinks that “The frank realization that physical science is concerned with a world of shadows is one of the most significant of recent advances.”²⁵² Similarly, James Jeans declares

the essential fact is simply that all the pictures which science now draws of nature, and which alone seem capable of according with observational fact, are mathematical pictures. ... They are nothing more than pictures—fictions if you like, if by fiction you mean that science is not yet in contact with ultimate reality. *Many would hold that, from the broad philosophical standpoint, the outstanding achievement of twentieth-century physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quantum with its present apparent negation of the law of causation, or the dissection of the atom with the resultant discovery that things are not what they seem; it is the general recognition that we are not yet in touch with ultimate reality.*²⁵³

That even the most complete account of things physical amounts to no more than a set of symbols is made clear by Arthur Eddington’s explanation on the *cyclical* nature of definitions in physics. In his words,

The definitions of physics proceed according to the method immortalized in “the House that Jack built”: this is the potential, that was derived from the interval, that was measured by the scale, that was made from the matter, that embodied the stress, that ... But instead of finishing with Jack, whom, of course, every youngster must know without need for an introduction, we make a circuit back to the beginning of the round: that worried the cat, that killed the rat, that ate the malt, that lay in the house, that was built by the priest all shaven and shorn, that married the man ... we can go round and round forever.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, 9.

²⁵² Ibid, 9.

²⁵³ Ibid, 9-10.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 173.

That is to say, knowledge generated through physics is about *regularities* and *relationships* among entities, and not about the intrinsic nature of these entities. This is because:

*Whenever we state the properties of a body in terms of physical quantities we are imparting knowledge as to the response of various metrical indicators to its presence, and nothing more. After all, knowledge of this kind is fairly comprehensive. A knowledge of the response of all kinds of objects ... would determine completely its relation to its environment, leaving only its inner un-gettable nature undetermined. In the relativity theory, we accept this as full knowledge, the nature of an object insofar as it is ascertainable by scientific inquiry being the abstraction of its relations to all surrounding objects.*²⁵⁵

Thus, contrary to what we thought we knew about “matter,” which was supposed to be made up of tiny billiard-ball like “atoms,” we now realized that the “physical atom is, like everything else in physics, *a schedule of pointer readings.*”²⁵⁶ Consequently, physics uncovers the linkage of pointer readings with other pointer readings, leaving unspecified the nature of the entities beneath these pointers. And so, “*The supposed approach [to the world-stuff] through the physical world leads only into the cycle of physics, where we run round and round like a kitten chasing its tail and never reach the world-stuff at all.*”²⁵⁷

The principle *openness* of knowledge from physics regarding the intrinsic nature of things is noteworthy. As Arthur Eddington clarifies,

If today you ask a physicist what he has finally made out the ether or the electron to be, the answer will not be a description in terms of billiard balls or fly-wheels or anything concrete; he will point instead to a number of symbols connected by

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 170.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 171.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 187.

a set of mathematical equations which they satisfy. What do the symbols stand for? The mysterious reply is given that physics is *indifferent* to that; it has no means of probing beneath the symbolism. To understand the phenomenon of the physical world, it is necessary to know the equation which the symbols obey but not the nature of that which is being symbolized.²⁵⁸

In Eddington's view, the scheme of symbols physics lays bare "proclaims its own hollowness. It can be—nay it cries out to be—filled with something that shall transform it from skeleton into substance, from plan into execution, from symbols into interpretation of the symbols."²⁵⁹ He feels that "It is almost as though the modern conception of the physical world had *deliberately left room* for the reality of spirit and consciousness."²⁶⁰ In the next segment, I present the argument that the studies of physics point towards the mental as the ultimate reality.

"The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine"

(James Jeans)

Arthur Eddington made the pithy statement that "*the stuff of the world is mind stuff*."²⁶¹ By this, he means that

the nature of all reality is spiritual, not material or a Dualism of matter and spirit. The hypothesis that its nature can be, to any degree, material does not enter into my reckoning, because as we now understand matter, the putting together of the objective "material" and the noun "nature" does not make sense. ... My answer does not deny the existence of the physical world ... Only we do not get down to the intrinsic nature of things that way.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 181-182.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 181.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 181.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 184.

²⁶² Ibid, 180.

He explains it vividly, “The realistic matter and fields of force of former physical theory are altogether irrelevant—except in so far as the mind stuff has itself spun these imaginings. The symbolic matter and fields of force of present-day theory [of physics] are more relevant, but they bear to it the same relation that the bursar’s accounts bear to the activity of the college.”²⁶³ Similarly, James Jeans concludes that “*the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine.*”²⁶⁴ Jeans methodically argues for it from the mathematical nature of the universe in a top-down fashion, the incapability of any material presentation to capture the world revealed by modern physics (e.g., the curved universe), and the necessity for the effect to be of the same ontological nature as its cause.

Mathematics from Top down

Jeans reports that, the world uncovered by modern physics appears to operate according to pure mathematics—rules mathematicians formulated out of their own minds without any consideration of the outside world, as it would otherwise be in applied mathematics. Jeans observes in amazement that “Now it emerges that the shadow play that we described as the fall of the apple to the ground, the ebb and flow of the tides, the motion of electrons in the atom, are produced by actors who seem very conversant with these purely mathematical concepts ... which were formulated long before we discovered that the shadows on the wall.”²⁶⁵ He illustrates this at length:

²⁶³ Ibid, 184.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 143.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 131.

for instance, a deaf engineer studying the action of a pianola might try first to interpret it as a machine, but would be baffled by the continuous reiteration of intervals 1, 5, 8, 13, in the motions of his crackers. A deaf musician, although he could hear nothing, would immediately recognize this succession of numbers as intervals of the common chords. In this way, he would recognize a kinship between his own thoughts and the thoughts which had resulted in the making of the pianola; he would say that it had come into existence through the thought of a musician. In the same way, a scientific study of the action of the universe has suggested a conclusion which may be summed up, though very crudely and quite inadequately, because we have no language at our command except that derived from our terrestrial concepts and experiences, in a statement that the universe appears to have been designed by a pure mathematician.²⁶⁶

Some may object that the seeming coincidence between operation of the world and pure mathematics is the result of molding nature into our own preconceived notions. To this, Jeans responds by saying that, if the new mathematical interpretations of the world are all products of our subjectivity we would have seen it long ago. What's more, "it is exceedingly hard to believe that such intricate concepts as a finite curved space and an expanding space can have entered into pure mathematics through any sort of unconscious or subconscious experience of the workings of the actual universe."²⁶⁷ He contends that "the universe now appears to be mathematical in a sense different from any which Kant contemplated or possibly could have contemplated with—in brief, *the mathematics enters the universe from above instead of from below.*"²⁶⁸ It is "from above" and not "below" because, as Polkinghorne explains, discoveries by pure mathematicians through theoretical thinking uncover rules established long before they discovered them. Jeans agrees with Plato's statement that "God forever geometries," in that "geometry sets

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 132.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 136.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 133.

limits to what would otherwise be unlimited;” “the universe of the theory of relativity is finite just because it is geometrical.”²⁶⁹

Key Concepts of Modern Physics Unrealizable by “Matter” in the Traditional Sense

James Jeans argues further that, the universe is not only created *by* thought, but also consists *of* thought, because “all these concepts [used to describe the universe] seem to my mind to be structures of pure thought *incapable* of realization in any sense which would probably be described as material.”²⁷⁰ His explanations of this technical point are worthy quoting in full length:

For instance, anyone who has written or lectured on the finiteness of space is accustomed to the objection that the concept of a finite space is self-contradictory and nonsensical. If space is finite, our critics say, it must be possible to go out beyond this finite space, and what can we possibly find beyond it except more space, and so on ad infinitum?—which proves that space cannot be finite. And again, they say, if space is expanding, what can it possibly expand into, if not into more space?—which again proves that what is expanding can only be a part of space, so that the whole of space cannot expand.

The 20th century critics who make these comments are still in the state of mind of the 19th century scientists; they take it for granted that the universe must admit of material representation. If we grant their premises, we must, I think, also grant their conclusion—that we are talking nonsense—for their logic is irrefutable.

But modern science cannot possibly grant their conclusion; it insists on the finiteness of space at all costs. This, of course, means that we must deny the premises which our critics unknowingly assume. *The universe cannot admit of material presentation, and the reason, I think, is that it has become a mere mental concept.* It is the same, I think, with other more technical concepts, typified by the ‘exclusion principle’, which seem to imply a sort of action at a distance.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 134.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 137.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 137.

Meeting Berkeley from the Other Side

James Jeans begins his argument with the puzzling appearance of disparity between, for example, the occurrence of atomic disturbances in the sun and the subsequent occurrence of poetic thoughts about the sunset. Since cause and effect must be of the same ontological nature, Descartes posits two entirely difference substances running in parallel *without* interaction. In contrast, Idealist philosophers like Berkeley affirm the genuine reality of mind and matter interaction, but they posit that matter must be of the *same* nature as mind. The Idealists made their case for Idealism through the link closest to us along the A-Z causal chain, namely, thoughts in our mind. According James Jeans,

modern [physical] science seems to me to lead, by a very different road, to a not altogether dissimilar conclusion. ... Physical science, troubling little about C, and D, proceeds directly to the far end of the chain; its business is to study the workings of X, Y, Z. And, as it seems to me, its conclusions suggest that the end links of the chain, whether we go to the cosmos as a whole or to the innermost structure of the atoms, are of the same nature as A, B—of the nature of pure thought; *we are led to the conclusions of Berkeley, but we reach them from the other end.*²⁷²

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have tried to argue for postmortem embodiment in a Berkeleian sense. I showed that, related theological and philosophical debates so far have generated some valuable insights and also left some important questions. Given all these, the task is to find a theologically sound as well as philosophically tenable account of postmortem embodiment that adequately conveys the Christian soteriological core of sanctification and is sufficiently rigorous in the light of veritable truths from philosophy and science.

²⁷² Ibid, 139.

Berkeley's Idealism offers this possibility with its seamlessly argued metaphysics and with its central theological insight regarding all bodily experiences as sacramental and pedagogical channels of God. What's more, unlike many might have believed, the Berkeleian postmortem embodiment is not only permitted by relevant Christian orthodoxies from the bible and the earliest church traditions, it is necessitated as a much more intelligible framework to house central Christian doctrines like resurrection, heaven and hell, Incarnation, Trinity, and Creation *ex nihilo*. The strengths of Berkeley's Idealism became even more salient, once we see that it answers the "really hard problem" in the mind-body debate much more convincingly than rival frameworks of Physicalism, Dualism, and dual-aspect Monism. Last but not least, modern physics uncovered for us the symbolic nature of all studies of the physical reality, and so encourages a worldview of the Berkeleian kind.

Berkeley's Idealism not only preserves valid insights from other metaphysical frameworks, namely, the essential oneness of the human nature insisted by Physicalism, and the spiritual core of the human nature upheld by Dualism, it also is very congenial for expressing crucial theological insights, such as the soteriological connection between postmortem embodiment and spiritual renewal according to the scripture, the continuation of the whole person according the earliest Christian traditions, and the formative aim of embodiment according to the theology of the body. It corrects the inaccurate human portraits by the Physicalist and Dualist in the areas of the mental life and the mind-body interrelation, respectively. It helps us understand why martyrs could have intimate communion with and be closer to Christ without the earthly body. It also

helps answer the question Augustine was puzzled by, namely the indispensable role of the body for meeting God face to face—as the formative path. It helps better conceptualize classic concepts like the soul’s “natural inclination to forming a body,” i.e., as its path home.

Arthur Eddington once said that, our world is “the world to be *lived* in,” and not the world to be theorized in an armchair.²⁷³ We might have misunderstood the meaning of our sensations before, but the physical science has helped us understand how things are different than they seem, as it did many times before, e.g., with the misconception of a flat earth. However, the correct common intuition of *non-malleability* beneath the term “physical substance” is completely preserved in Berkeley’s world of ideas. Non-malleability does not require an ontologically distinct “substance;” it is rooted in a Mind.

With the postmortem stage of time and body setup, in the next and also final chapter, I will switch gears and address the theological question of the central plot to be played on this stage. I will look particularly into how Paul’s statement of “the wage of sin is death” may be illuminated by Aquinas’ teleological Ontology.

²⁷³ Ibid, 195.

CHAPTER SIX
FROM DEATH TO ETERNAL LIFE—EXPLICATING THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
OF DEATH VIA A METAPHYSIC OF SANCTIFICATION

Overview

After the soteriological and the philosophical delineations about death in previous chapters, a crucial question remains: what is the cause of death? Recall from Chapter Two that Oscar Cullmann considers identifying sin as the cause of death to be a constitutive element for the Christian faith. As he puts it, “The belief in the resurrection presupposes the Jewish connection between death and sin. . . . Death can be conquered only to the extent that sin is removed.”¹ Along the same line, Roger Troisfontaines names death as the “immanent sanction” for sin: rather than a mere external sanction imposed from outside, death as the “organic” penalty of sin has an intrinsic relation with the offense.² Similarly, Donald Bloesch states that “We need to gain a victory over sin before we gain assurance of life beyond the grave. ‘From sin to righteousness’ proceeds ‘from death to life.’”³ Notably, since scientific discoveries have revealed physical death to be an inherent feature of all biological existences, several authors we reviewed explicitly caution theological speculations to avoid crudely attributing sin as the cause of physical

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, Harvard University, Ingersoll Lecture, 1955 (London: Epworth, 1958), 28.

² Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die*, trans. Francis E. Albert (New York, NY: Desclee Co., 1963), 202.

³ Donald Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 121.

death.⁴ Given that the human essence is not physical, the proper object of theology is not the physical death *per se* but the spiritual death. Hence Jesus teaches to “fear not the physical death of the body, but to be concerned about the eternal death of the spirit.” (Lk 12:4)

In this chapter of my dissertation, I wrestle with the question of the cause of the kind of death we should keep vigilant against. In the first section, I lift out from the scripture a biblical Theology of Death which upholds a salient theme from Genesis to Revelation: that is, death is caused by sin, whereas eternal life awaits the righteous person. With the biblical foundation thus in view, in the next section, I introduce some literature regarding the necessity and the advantage for theology to go deeper than human ethics and conduct its reflections on the level of ontology, on the level of how humans intrinsically are meant to be. Then, as a response, in the following section, I construct a metaphysic for the biblical theology of death, using Aquinas’ ontology of being *per se* as good. In essence, spiritual “death” is an obstruction of being caused by self-centeredness, the root of all sin; selfishness is “death dealing” because the ontologically *proper* way of being human—who is the Image of God—is to imitate its Creator, its Ground of being and the Ground of all beings, which is Self-giving. As the other side of the same ontological coin, the sanctification process is truly immortalizing. We become real “partakers of divine nature” (2 Pt 1: 4) when we reach the epitome of all virtues, i.e., the Agape Love.

⁴ For example, see Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970).

Key Themes in the Biblical Theology of Death

In this section, I go through the Old and the New Testaments to show how the Bible, from three different angles, depicts death as the result of sin: 1) sin as a corruption inevitably leads to death; 2) eternal life results from holiness; and 3) the path from death to eternal life (or “Resurrection”) is none other than the spiritual process of sanctification.

Sin Leads to Death and Death Is Caused by Sin

In Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, we read the genesis of death: even though Adam was explicitly instructed by God that “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gn 2: 16-17), he and Eve ate the fruit from the tree, and so reaped the seed of their disobedience. Remarkably, physical death did not occur “in the day” of their disobedient act, but long after. From this, we can already realize that, the lethal impact of their action was taking place in a non-physical manner. Later, in Deuteronomy, the nature of the “choice of fruit” Adam faced was made explicit—it is a choice between life and death:

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the

land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.⁵

What is the gist of God's commands, which is intended to give us life (Ps 119:93)? Jesus captures it the best with the dual Love Command, i.e., loving God above all and loving others as ourselves (Mt 22:34-40, Lk 10:27, Mk 12:28-31). But the Old Testament already teaches people to "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." (Mi 6:8) And so, according to the Bible, selfless love leads to life; it is the best manifestation of obedience to God (e.g., Col 3:14). In contrast, selfishness is at the core of all forms of disobedience or sin (e.g., Gal 5:19-21); an existence lived with oneself as the center, in disjunction from God the Creator and from caring relations with others, leads to death. Thus, in Proverbs, we read that "wickedness overthrows the sinner" (Prv 13:6). In Psalms, we read that the wicked are "like chaff that the wind drives away" (Ps 1:4); destruction awaits them at the end of their downward spiraling path. Similarly, the New Testament authors frequently portray the life-oppressing nature of sin with images of bondage and slavery (e.g., Jn 8:34), and they are unequivocal about the fatal consequence of selfishness: "one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death." (Jas 1:14-15)

Holiness Leads to Life and Eternal Life is the Reward for the Just

In comparison, "In the path of righteousness there is life, in walking its path there is no death." (Prv 28:28) Needless to say, those who are righteous still die the physical

⁵ Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

death, and so again it is clear that the scripture talks about “life” for the righteous in the spiritual sense. In the Gospels, Jesus is described as proclaiming God’s reward of immortality and “eternal life” for those who give their genuine love and care for the least among us, who feed the hungry and visit the sick and the imprisoned (Mt 25:46), who sacrifice their life so others can hear the Good News (Mk 10: 29), and who follow Jesus’ selfless path of the cross like sheep following their shepherd (Jn 10:28). The crucial connection between selfless love and eternal Life is made the clearest by Jesus during his exchange with a lawyer who tried to test him:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”⁶

The Path from Death to Eternal Life—Resurrection as Sanctification

Besides the scriptural teachings about sin and death, righteousness and eternal life, we can also grasp the core of the biblical theology of death through how the Bible, especially the New Testament, discusses Resurrection—the central event which bridges the chasm between death and eternal life for the Christian faith.

Let us begin with that all too familiar passage from the Gospel of John, which is considered to be such a good representation of the Christian understanding of salvation, that it is the one displayed on highway billboards, in football stadiums, and even on T-shirts for modern day evangelization: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only

⁶ Luke 10:25-28.

Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16) How exactly is this eternal life to be had—as the result of God giving his only Son? Jesus’ own name says it all: “you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Mt 1:21) But in case we misunderstand Jesus’ salvific work of taking away people’s sin and giving them eternal life in a merely legalistic rather than intrinsic way, Jesus’ own response to a man’s question of how to gain eternal life cannot be clearer: to deny themselves and “follow me.” (Mk 10:21) And, as to what is “following” Jesus, he says simply “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:35)

As best exemplified through Jesus’ own life, death, and resurrection, the New Testament theology of death recognizes the path from death to life as the Cross—that is, the inward death by sin is to be overcome via the cleansing of self-centeredness (2 Cor 4:16). And so, our resurrection from the real worrisome death, i.e., of “the inward man,” to the real desirable life, i.e., in the eternal, is the process of sanctification. Just like a grain of wheat which gains the fruit-bearing life by falling into the earth to die, “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (Jn 12:25) The Apostle John describes the passage from death in sin to life eternal as selfless love for others, saying that

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. We know love by this that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.⁷

⁷ 1 John 3:14-16.

The Apostle Paul evokes the washing ceremony of baptism to help Christians understand their rising to new life as “death” to sin:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For, if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.⁸

Moreover, that Christianity understands the deliverance from death in sin to life eternal as the path of sanctification is reflected through the role God the Holy Spirit is understood as playing in this process. Needless to say, the most salient character of the Holy Spirit is his holiness. But, more importantly, the Holy Spirit is introduced as both the Life Giver *and* the Sanctifier. As the Giver of Life (2 Cor 3:6), the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2), “the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), through whom one must be born again in order to see the eternal Kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-8). Also, the Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of Resurrection; and “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Rom 8:11) And, “If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.” (Gal 6:8)

Why does the Holy Spirit have such life-giving power? The scripture explains that “the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Rom 8:10) And, “if you live according to

⁸ Romans 6:3-8.

the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Rom 8:13) This “killing” of our “fleshly” (i.e., selfish) deeds by the Holy Spirit means us being “sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16), evinced by the resulting virtues of “the fruit of the Spirit”: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal 5:22-23) This is precisely “salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” of the Gospel (2 Thes 2:13). Jesus also promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit “will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn 16:8).

The Need for an Ontological Explication of Death, Resurrection, and the Eternal Life

As reviewed in Chapter Two, Henry Novello emphasizes the importance of the Christian understanding of salvation as human beings truly attaining the higher, divine nature, and so also the necessity to construct the theology of death within an ontological (rather than a merely metaphorical or ethical) frame of thinking. Novello’s highlighting salvation as deification, in fact, reflects an increasing appreciation among theologians regarding the crucial soteriological insights expressed by the eastern orthodox doctrine of Theosis.

Orthodox theologian Valerie Karras well captures the nature of the doctrine of deification by calling it “a direct consequence of an incarnational, hence ontological, soteriology.”⁹ That is to say, the Eastern Church understands the Incarnation as accomplishing not only justification, but also sanctification—which makes possible true

⁹ Valerie A. Karras, “Beyond Justification: An Orthodox Perspective,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 118.

union with God through participation. As Church Father Athanasius famously declares, “He [the Logos] became man that we might be deified.” Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus states that “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.” Karras calls this notion of “salvation as sharing” an ontological soteriology: it conceptualizes our salvation as no less than sharing the divine nature, on the confident basis of “humanity’s being one in essence, substance, or nature in our humanity with Jesus Christ, which is in turn *homoousios* with God the Father.”¹⁰ When our eventual salvation is understood as deification, a mere juridical or forensic articulation of sin and redemption is no longer sufficient; the explication must reach down to the most fundamental, the ontological level. As Karras points out:

Human beings are not restored to communion with God through an act of spiritual prestidigitation where God looks and thinks he sees humanity but in fact really seeing his Son. ... Humanity’s justification through forgiveness of sins is not a mere covering over man’s sins, but a real destruction of them. It is not a mere external decision, but a reality. ... We understand this teaching better if we remember the relation between Adam and Christ. As we became not only apparently but really sinful because of Adam, so through Christ the Second Adam we become really justified.¹¹

Admittedly, the talk of “becoming God” may cause the outcry of blasphemy or at least the worry of conceptual intractability; but these negative reactions are not warranted once we realize that the soteriological aim of becoming God is not so much about coveting the glory of God, but about becoming Christ-like in terms of holiness and Agape Love—the Command given to all Christians. In contrast to a mere juridical expression of

¹⁰ Ibid, 113.

¹¹ Ibid, 112.

salvation, the ontological expression of salvation, i.e., in terms of deification, makes clear the drastic degree of genuine transformation which must take place within the human nature. Moreover, as Karras observes, this ontological way of understanding salvation is more “holistic,” in that it stresses the intrinsic connection between immortalization—which is the result of becoming God, and sanctification—which is the process of becoming God.¹²

Similarly, in the field of Christian ethics, Richard Connor voiced the need for a Metaphysic of Sanctification rooted in the human *esse*, so that a deeper ethical commitment may be inspired from people.¹³ Specifically, Connor detects a false ontological profile of the human person as “a self-contained substance.” In Connor’s view, if people live their lives according to this understanding of the human person, they would be “people who do good, but are uncommitted in their deepest selves to the service of God and others ... in its deepest recesses seeking self-fulfillment while performing statistically verifiable deeds of altruism and God centeredness. In a word, they would be a selfish people with a veneer of do-goodism.”¹⁴ Related to this false ontological profile of the person as an essentially self-centered being is “a minimalist ethic,” according to which the average individual “finds himself called merely to avoid evil;” sanctity is

¹² Karras, “Beyond Justification.”

¹³ Richard Connor, “Relation, the Thomistic *esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 455-464.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 455.

expected only for the elite few who are so inclined.¹⁵ Connor observes that such understandings of the human person and of ethics cannot offer a convincing support to Vatican II's universal call to holiness. Notably, in my view, the issue goes way beyond Vatican II's call; ultimately, it has to do with the universality of our common humanity and the universality of God's saving will—if God's salvific plan is intended for the entire human race, it seems necessary that God's plan has to be rooted above all in the very essence of this common human nature, in the human *esse*.

As the result, Connor invites “a fully-developed Metaphysic of Sanctification” which explicates the “onto-logic of holiness” in connection with the very essence of being human.¹⁶ And he sees Aquinas' profile of the human *esse* as an “expanding act” to be an expedient candidate for appreciating sanctity and loving relations with others in the very definition of the human person. In his words, “If *esse* is expanding act, then it will be relational by that very fact: it will be transcendental. Relation will not be considered exclusively as an accident, but will be one of the dimensions of *esse*.”¹⁷ Even though I would not myself describe Aquinas' notion of the human *esse* as an “expanding act,” I completely agree with Connor's keen observation of the need to explicate holiness through the metaphysical understanding of human nature and its fulfillment. Furthermore, I agree with Connor that Aquinas' metaphysics offer an effective ontological explication of the biblical teaching about sanctity, i.e., to have life is to give oneself as God intends

¹⁵ Ibid, 463.

¹⁶ Ibid, 464.

¹⁷ Ibid, 460.

us to; to do the opposite is death. Admittedly, a theological project that aimed to treat sanctification as thoroughly as entailed by the concept of Theosis is inconceivable without the possibility of postmortem time or postmortem embodiment in a Berkeleian sense. But, with both obstacles removed in the previous chapters, we may now attempt such a project.

*Sanctity as Existential Vitality—Bringing Forth a Metaphysic of Sanctification from
Thomas Aquinas’ Teleological Ontology*

In this section, on the basis of Aquinas’ teleological ontology articulated in *Summa Theologiae*, I present a metaphysic which recognizes sanctity as existential vitality. I want to establish that the actualization process depicted in Aquinas’ ontology is, for humans, none other than the process of sanctification. Moreover, the fruition of this ontological becoming—through which a potential being becomes a full being—can be reasonably understood as the perfect existential vitality which the Bible describes as the “eternal life” in store for the just. To some, however, the causal linkage between sin and ontological thwarting and, vice versa, between sanctity and existential vitality may not be that obvious in the *Summa*. Even though it is commonly known that the content of the *Summa* is organized along the cosmic movement of “procession and return”—the First Part deals with God and creations proceeding from God, the Second Part deals with ethics as the human striving towards their Final End, and the Third Part deals with Christ and the Sacraments as the God-given path back to God—this schematic structure,

especially the connection between human ethics and their Return to God, is usually viewed as prescriptive and systematic rather than descriptive and “organic.”

For example, a Thomistic scholar made the claim that Aquinas’ ontological notion of “goodness” is entirely different from the moral sense of goodness.¹⁸ As another example, Karl Barth raises the criticism that, Aquinas perceives the human being primarily as a “knower” who is the Image of God on the account of the intellect. In Barth’s view, this anthropological depiction by Aquinas betrays an over-confidence in the human reason and, relatedly, an insufficient assessment of the serious need of salvation from sin.¹⁹ I want to show instead that beneath the Aristotelian terminology Aquinas adopts in the *Summa* is a theistic ontology quite consistent with the Christian understandings of God as Agape Love, human beings as moral agents, and salvation as sanctification. What’s more, I want to show that Aquinas’ teleological ontology deeply situates morality in the very core of being human, which in essence is the type of “metaphysics of sanctity” Richard Connor earnestly solicited for the purpose of inspiring genuine ethical commitment. The main dots are already there in substance; they only need to be connected and the connections be made explicit. Even though Aquinas himself seems to be not so vocal about a completely immanent causal link between sanctity and Eternal Life, that could be the result of conceptual hurdles like the “finality” of death and

¹⁸ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, trans. J. Strathearn McNab, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Scott, Ltd, 1957). Barth’s criticism of Aquinas may seem reasonable based on the fact that, in the *Summa*, Aquinas repeatedly defines the Beatitude as the intellect’s perfect contemplation of God. See, for example, First Part of the Second Part, Question 3, Article 5.

the nature of “embodiment,” the possible refinements of which have been proposed in my previous chapters.

Existence Is Inherently Good Because It Is the Preordained Means for
Ontological Actualization

Aquinas’ ontology is distinctive for its categorical declaration that being and existence *per se* are good. It is a concept rooted in Aquinas’ overall understanding of finite existence as “driven”—a dynamism set in motion by God towards the eventual fulfillment in God. Tellingly, Aquinas opens the *Summa* by describing the divine attributes with the help of Aristotle’s philosophical language of causality: as the First Cause and the Efficient Cause of all, God brought all things from the state of potential being into the state of actual being, and continually sustains all finite forms of existence during their grand processions of becoming. Against this thoroughly theistic and teleological background, being and existence are valued as the very path through which finite entities progress from mere potentiality to actual but imperfect being, and then ultimately arrive at perfect being. Being and existence *per se* is good, because it is the divinely ordained mechanism for ontological fulfillment. In Aquinas’ own words:

Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; ... The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. ... it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore, it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for *it is existence that makes all things actual*.²⁰

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, First Part, Question 5, Article 1.

“Goodness” in an Ontological Sense Is Substantively the Same as
Moral Goodness or “Virtue”

That being the case, Aquinas’ notion of ontological “goodness” in terms of instrumentality for existential fulfillment is not unrelated to or an equivocation of the meaning of “goodness” in the moral sense, as some asserted. For example, in a debate about the issue of theodicy, Brian Davies states that Aquinas understands “goodness” primarily in terms of ontological “desirability” rather than morality. Davies thinks that “God’s goodness for Aquinas is not moral goodness” because, for Aquinas, goodness is always accessed against a certain standard “But God . . . is wholly good as the source and pattern of all creaturely goodness, from which it follows that there are no standards over and against him in the light of which he must conduct himself.”²¹ In other words, whatever God does is called “good” because God is the ultimate standard setter for evaluating “goodness.”

It is true that in Part One of the *Summa* Aquinas uses Aristotle’s philosophical terminology of causality to define God’s essential “goodness” as God’s universal “desirability.” Specifically, since God is the First Cause of all, God must be perfectly actual in an ontological sense, and so God is sought after by all those which are caused into existence by God in their self-actualizations, because their perfect models are contained in God their perfect Maker. And yet, it is important to remember that the *Summa* begins with God and ends with Christ. And so, despite all the philosophical language, it does not explicate that impersonal First Cause of the Greeks which brought

²¹ Davies, *The Thought*, 97.

forth finite existences by *inevitable* “overflowing,” but by the personal God of Jesus, our Abba Father. Aquinas’ “First Cause” with ontological perfection and full actuality is the Creator who *intentionally* caused all finite things into existence, preordained the path and the perfectly fulfilling End for them, and continuously assists them in their strivings through natural principles and supernatural grace. As Aquinas himself emphasizes, “We must hold that the will of God is the cause of things; and that He acts by the will, and not, as some have supposed, by a necessity of His nature.”²²

The significance of the willful nature of divine causality is made clear by the modern day Thomist, Karl Rahner. According to Rahner, “that man is the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God is the innermost center of the Christian understanding of existence.” By “self-communication of God,” Rahner means in an ontological sense that “God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man.”²³ God gives all their existence and, most remarkably, God “the Giver himself is the gift”! We know that God loves and forgives unconditionally, because the very existence of finite beings attests to the fact that God gives Godself—which is being itself—indiscriminatingly, continuously, out of God’s will, to all that which absolutely depend on Him. This utterly self-giving nature of the Creator is captured under the biblical term Agape Love—which is moral goodness *par excellence*. And so, we see that in Aquinas’ ontology the goodness and perfection of God in the

²² *Summa*, First Part, Question 19, Article 4.

²³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978), 116.

ontological sense are substantively consistent with the moral sense, in fact, to the most perfect degree. Notably, Rahner's theology is described by some as a "theology of grace" because of the effectiveness of his work in demonstrating the entire created reality as being overwhelmingly saturated and sustained by the Creator's self-giving goodness.

Moreover, in a corresponding fashion, ontological "goodness" is also substantively consistent with moral goodness when Aquinas uses the word to describe humans—who are the best image of the Creator by the token of their intellect and will, and so who by definition fall under moral considerations. A good evidence for this may be Aquinas' discussion of human virtues as having their best exemplar in God:

As Augustine says (*De Moribus Eccl.* vi), "the soul needs to follow something in order to give birth to virtue: this something is God: if we follow Him we shall live aright." Consequently, the exemplar of human virtue must needs pre-exist in God, just as in Him pre-exist the types of all things. Accordingly, virtue may be considered as existing originally in God.²⁴

An even more helpful example of the substantive consistency between ontological goodness and moral goodness can be found in how Aquinas explicates virtue—ontologically and teleologically, as perfection of a certain power of action such that it best disposes a being towards its proper end. To see this more clearly, we may unpack "virtue" in three increasingly revealing layers in terms of its ontologically teleological nature. First and most basically, virtue is a "habit."²⁵ According to Aquinas,

habit implies order to act. ... For it is essential to habit to imply some relation to a thing's nature, in so far as it is suitable or unsuitable thereto. But a thing's nature, which is the end of generation, is further ordained to another end, which is either

²⁴ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 61, Article 5.

²⁵ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 55, Article 1.

an operation, or the product of an operation, to which one attains by means of operation. Wherefore, habit implies relation not only to the very nature of a thing, but also, consequently, to operation, inasmuch as this is the end of nature, or conducive to the end.²⁶

And so, being a “habit,” virtue implies an *order to act*, a certain relation to operation.

Second, “habit” for Aquinas means a “disposition,”²⁷ and so virtue also has the key property of “disposition,” which is the thing “whereby that which is disposed, is well or ill-disposed either in regard to itself, that is to its nature, or in regard to something else, that is to the end.”²⁸ Notably, for a thing to be disposed to something else, one necessary condition is that “that which is disposed should be distinct from that to which it is disposed; and so, that it should be related to it as potentiality is to act.”²⁹ This entails that virtue not only implies order to act, but also a *directional* order to act.

Third and most importantly, virtue is the *perfection* of a certain principle of act.³⁰ On Aquinas’ account, “Every power which may be variously directed to act, needs a habit whereby it is well disposed to its act.”³¹ While the intellectual and the appetitive powers are the subjects of habits, the primary subject of a “habit” is the will. Virtue is a certain perfection of the power to act in that it perfectly disposes actions towards the teleological end preordained for the human nature. So, taken together, virtue is a

²⁶ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 49, Article 3.

²⁷ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 49, Article 1.

²⁸ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 49, Article 3.

²⁹ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 49, Article 4.

³⁰ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 55, Article 1.

³¹ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 50, Article 5.

perfection of a certain power of action such that it best disposes human being's existential movement towards its proper end.

To put it more explicitly, for the proper existence of human beings, morality is intrinsically relevant. The ontological "goodness" of human existence does not merely denote instrumentality for ontological fulfillment; more fundamentally, human existence is ontologically "good" because it is the instrument for this particular kind of ontological fulfillment, namely, by perfectly imitating the ontological perfection of God through moral virtues. The ontological perfection of the human beings, who are in essence beings with intellect and will, is moral perfection. From this ontological understanding of virtue, we can further deduce that just as the existence of fish by nature requires water for it to thrive, the existence of human beings, who are the best image of the Creator who willingly gives Himself, is preordained to thrive through virtuous living. Again, for the human being with intellect and will and so an essentially moral agent, ontological goodness has to be goodness in the moral sense as well; ontological progress results from virtue living.

Correspondingly, Ontological "Evil" Is Substantively the Same as

Moral Evil or "Vice"

Corresponding to his definition of being *per se* as good, Aquinas defines ontological "evil" as non-being, "For since being, as such, is good, the absence of one implies the absence of the other."³² It does not mean that evil in the ontological sense is a

³² *Summa*, First Part, Question 48, Article 1.

fiction, but that evil in the ontological sense is *a privation of some sort of being which should have been there*. Following Augustine, Aquinas particularly underscores the fact that, as a privation of being, evil does not and cannot have ontological autonomy, existing independently by itself; instead, it must have being—which is ontologically good—as its subject.³³ Consequently, there can never be an evil First Principle, or an evil Efficient Cause; neither can evil take hold of any being in its entirety or become the essence of it. Notably, these stipulations by Aquinas help uncover the parasitic, corrosive and lethal nature of ontological evil—it is the aberration of being, it is a derailment of being from the right track, it hinders and halts existential becoming. Ontological evil as a “privation” of that which should have been there thwarts and diminishes existence.

Regarding moral evil or “vice,” Aquinas defines it in substantively the same way as he defines ontological evil—it is the opposite of how things should be according to teleological providence. Specifically, when describing the ontological nature of vice, Aquinas contrasts it with virtue in terms of how they each relate to the nature of things: in essence, “the virtue of a thing consists in its being well disposed in a manner befitting its nature,” whereas “the vice of any thing consists in its being disposed in a manner not befitting its nature.”³⁴ Therefore, moral evil is ontological evil, because by it the human being is ill disposed according to its nature; it causes the human being to stray away from the teleological end. Aquinas explains further that, even though inordinate act resulting from vice (or “sin”) cannot completely destroy the fundamental human nature created by

³³ *Summa*, First Part, Question 48, Article 3.

³⁴ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 71, Article 2.

God, sin *diminishes the natural inclination to virtue*.³⁵ Considering that virtue is the perfection of the active principle which guides human beings' existential movement, such diminishment of the proper drive is ontologically fatal. It renders a lost existence, a wandering being, heading towards nonbeing.

Notably, from individual psyche to the health of the society, there are already ample evidences for the erosive impact of moral evil. But Aquinas' ontology helps us recognize the lethal nature of moral evil on the most constitutive level. Even though ontology deals with "the way things *are*" in terms of their fundamental nature, whereas morality deals with "what *should* we do" in terms of choices available to the human will, logically speaking, what we should do is determined by what we are, and so morality properly construed is not a mere human construct but has its ultimate foundation in ontology. Thanks to Aquinas' metaphysical unpacking of ethics, we see why moral evil rooted in self-centeredness is not just disruptive interpersonally to the others, but also destructive personally to the self: examined on the ontological plain, moral evil is a form of human existence in contradiction to the preordained teleological nature of imitating divine self-giving.

Beatitude Requires Rectitude of the Will

The ontological significance of moral goodness may be further demonstrated by seeing how Aquinas explains the necessity of moral rectitude for the Final End. On Aquinas' account, the universal Last End for all human beings is perfect happiness or Beatitude when we are finally united with God the Uncreated Good, "Who alone by His

³⁵ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 85, Article 1.

infinite goodness can perfectly satisfy man's will.”³⁶ And he quotes the scripture to insist that rectitude of the will is necessary for attaining the Last End: “It is written (Mt 5:8): ‘Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God’: and (Heb 12:14): ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness; without which no man shall see God.’³⁷ He reasons that, without being fully rectified, the will is not properly oriented toward the Last End, which is Perfect Goodness itself, and so it cannot arrive at the Last End; moreover, if the will is not fully rectified, it would not find perfect satisfaction and happiness in God, even if it were able to come into union with God—because an unrectified will does not and cannot enjoy such close presence of God, who is Perfect Goodness. In Aquinas’ own words:

Rectitude of will is necessary for Happiness both antecedently and concomitantly. Antecedently, because rectitude of the will consists in being duly ordered to the last end. ... Concomitantly, because... final Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, which is the very essence of goodness. So that the will of him who sees the Essence of God, of necessity, loves, whatever he loves, in subordination to God; ... And this is precisely what makes the will right.³⁸

The Moral Law Is the Operative Principle for the Ontological Fulfillment of Human Beings

Lastly, the ontological importance of moral goodness may be demonstrated by seeing how Aquinas describes the way human beings’ Final End is attained—by following the moral law. Specifically, according to Aquinas, different creatures must attain the Final End through actions suited for them. Given that the human creatures are best

³⁶ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 3, Article 1.

³⁷ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 4, Article 4.

³⁸ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 4, Article 4.

characterized by intellect and will—the two necessary and sufficient parameters for moral considerations, Aquinas declares that “moral acts are the same as human acts.”³⁹

Logically, for human beings, the existential operation for ontological fulfillment is repeating good actions for the cultivation of virtue; sanctification is that suitable path of existential actualization preordained for the human beings. And so, Aquinas considers his elaborate discussion of ethics as none other than describing by what acts we may obtain the beatific Final End, and by what acts we are prevented from obtaining it, since “*Man is perfected by virtue, for those actions whereby he is directed to happiness.*”⁴⁰

On Aquinas’ account, there are both internal and external “laws” governing human actions; these are principles to be understood by the intellect in guiding the human being into the eventual Happiness,⁴¹ “because it is by law that man is directed how to perform his proper acts in view of his last end.”⁴² Externally, there is the “eternal law,” which refers to the unchanging providence of God that regulates the entire universe;⁴³ and also the “divine laws,” which signify God’s supernatural revelations through the Old and the New Testaments.⁴⁴ Internally, there is the “natural law” which is the “imprint” of

³⁹ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 1, Article 3.

⁴⁰ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 62, Article 1.

⁴¹ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 90, Articles 1 and 2.

⁴² *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 91, Article 4.

⁴³ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 91, Article 1.

⁴⁴ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 91, Article 6.

God's eternal law on the human reason, "whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end" and "whereby we discern what is good and what is evil."⁴⁵

Comments on the Strengths of Aquinas' Teleological Ontology for a
Metaphysic of Sanctification

From the above, we see from the ways Aquinas' ontology defines goodness and evil, understands the Final End, conceptualizes the process of actualization that, his metaphysic is substantively a Metaphysic of Sanctification. Admittedly, even though Aquinas states several times that, aided by grace, the human being can be made into a partaker of the Divine Nature,⁴⁶ he stops short of describing the eternal life for human beings as the immanent culmination of their holiness. Instead, Aquinas acknowledges the utter inadequacy of human merits, and depicts eternal life only as a gracious "reward" given to them by God.⁴⁷ I wonder whether this absence of explicit identification of existential vitality (or "eternal life") with holiness is due to the lack of a robust par-eschatology, something like John Hick proposes. As discussed in the previous chapters, Aquinas' assertion of the "finality" of death and his body-soul dualism make it difficult to envision a post-mortem sanctification process that is thorough in extent and intelligible metaphysically. Without these conditions, a gaping chasm exists between the very limited

⁴⁵ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 91, Article 2.

⁴⁶ For example, see *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 50, Article 2; and The First Part of the Second Part, Question 114, Article 3.

⁴⁷ *Summa*, The First Part of the Second Part, Question 114, Article 1.

degree of sanctity accomplishable during a single lifetime and the perfect existential vitality “eternal life” represents.

That said, these issues are removable “glitches” that should not prevent Aquinas’ ontology from being an illuminating Metaphysic of Sanctification that truly does justice to the life-giving significance of morality and goodness for human existence. In fact, Aquinas’ ontology seems particularly remarkable here on two accounts—it deepens metaphysics with morality, and it grounds morality in metaphysics. On the one hand, Aquinas’ teleological ontology of being *per se* as good enables us to better detect the moral momentum beneath human existence, which is set in motion in the beginning and perpetually draws all human beings towards the Good End. In other words, human existence is created for and geared towards the eventual moral perfection from day one. As another theologian puts it, Creation is for salvation and sanctification; ontology is to be annotated by ethics.

On the other hand, Aquinas’ ontology helps us recognize morality as the very ontological blueprint for the proper way of being human. As a contrast, ethicists like Karl Barth delineate ethics primarily as an external mandate, even a divine mandate, and so do not make clear the immanent nature of morality for being human, and the immanently life-giving effect of moral precepts for the ontological vitality of human existence. As the result, ethics appear substantively arbitrary rather than immanently consequential and constantly binding. Notably, this immanent root of ethics in ontology is particularly underscored by the Natural Law tradition in ethics, which approaches ethics

metaphysically following Aquinas' "natural law" notion discussed above. Despite their interpretive variations, Natural Law ethicists all agree that morality is grounded in ontological reality, in how things *really* are, rather than in social or cultural customs—hence the word "Natural." And they value the strength of Aquinas' metaphysics for conveying the universal applicability and the steadfast governing power of morality—hence the word "Law." Putting it vividly, the moral law is "pegged to nature in its broadest sense."⁴⁸

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter of my dissertation, I attempt to drive home the soteriological importance of sanctification by recognizing it from the very fabric of being and reality. I began by presenting the biblical theology of death which consistently attributes sin as its cause and, correspondingly, promises righteous living with eternal life. Then, I introduced the eastern orthodox doctrine of Theosis and Richard Conner's petition for a Metaphysic of Sanctification in order to show the need for understanding morality and sanctification ontologically. Lastly, I discussed how Aquinas' ontology can be reasonably understood as a Metaphysic of Sanctification: in a nutshell, sanctity truly brings life; the existential process of ontological becoming is for humans the process of sanctification.

In his demonstration of the center of Christian life as self-giving, Michael Himes makes it clear how the moral command epitomized by self-less love is indeed a matter of life and death for the human existence:

⁴⁸ Alexander Passerin D'Entreves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 32. As another example, see Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1989).

“the one who holds onto life loses it; the one who gives life away sees it become everlasting life” ... That statement is, in fact, the key to the whole gospel story. For a long time when I heard or read that line, I interpreted it as a commandment. Only gradually did it occur to me that it is not a commandment but a description. Jesus is not telling us, “This is how you ought to live,” but rather, “This is how the world is. This is what it is like to exist.” If you give your life away, it becomes everlasting life, but if you hold onto it, you lose it. *To be is to be for others*. ... This is obviously true if one begins from the claim that God is perfect self-gift. If the very source and ground of being, God, is self-gift, then it follows that if you really want to be human, give yourself away. To the extent that you choose not to give yourself away, to that extent you do not fully exist. ... *existence is proportional to self-gift.*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Michael Himes, Andrea S. Shappell, Jan Pilarski, Stacy Hennessy, Katie Bergin, and Sarah Keyes, *Doing the Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships, and Service* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1995), 77.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Review of Chapters

Chapter One, “Introduction,” of my dissertation begins with a report on the urgent need in our time to address the topic of human mortality theological, and the lack of investigations on this topic from the field of Christian theology. It then describes the methodologies I employ in my dissertation, and presents the thesis of my dissertation.

In Chapter Two, “A Review of Current Literatures in the Theology of Death,” I review eleven sustained works in contemporary theologies of death, plus related developments in eschatology. I schematize the literatures around the dual themes of time and space within the postmortem context. My aim here is to paint the current landscape of this discourse, to capture major insights gained so far, and to identify significant issues waiting to be addressed.

The first group of works I review revolves around the question of whether death ends once and for all the process of salvation for a person. Our moral imperfection at death is obvious. To conceptualize the triumph of salvation within the traditional assertion of the finality of death, theologians like Ladislaus Boros proposed the “final decision” hypothesis which, in various ways, assigns decisive import to the very moment of death. Theologians like Joseph Ratzinger strongly disagreed. The main reason behind their objection is the Christian understanding of time as a teleological process of human

becoming. They pointed out that, Christianity as a historical faith understands human temporality to be the stage upon which the plot of salvation unfolds. As epitomized in the historical event of Jesus Christ, God saves us through time. Even though the claim of the finality of death may be intended to underscore the seriousness of temporal life, ironically, since death intrudes life randomly in time, it seems impossible to accord real significance to life if death were allowed the final word. Theologians like Jürgen Moltmann also pointed to the divine attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence, arguing that the all-loving and all-powerful God would not permit death to thwart his salvific plan of becoming “all in all.” Despite of the soundness of these anti-finality arguments, the claim of the finality of death is still dominant in mainstream Christianity today. In Chapter Four of my dissertation, I will try to strengthen the case against the finality of death with the help of recent advancements in theology.

The second group of works I review revolves around “body” in postmortem life. There is an emerging consensus that the Doctrine of Resurrection goes beyond human physicality and speaks about the human person as a whole; it speaks about God preserving the entire history of a lived personal reality beyond death. There is also an increasing recognition of the need to keep moral and spiritual issues front and center when reflecting upon postmortem existence, rather than the merely “technical” concern of surviving death. In addition, more thoughts have been given to the person-making purpose of embodiment in the afterlife. The biggest disagreement among this group of works has to do with the state of the body in the final eschaton: some insist on the

resurrection of the flesh, given its goodness as God's creation and the universal scope of God's saving plan; others think that the physical body occupies no part in the eternal, given our scientific understanding of the constantly changing and inherently perishable nature of all material realities. In my view, this disagreement is caused by the ambiguity of our current conceptualization of "matter." In Chapter Five, with the help of Bishop Berkeley's sacramental idealism, I will tackle the question of how to understand "body" in a way that does not contradict science and yet adequately conveys the importance it is given by the Christian tradition.

The third theme touched upon in this literature, albeit not extensively, is the relationship between death and sin. As Oscar Cullmann points out, the deepest contrast between Christianity and Platonism regarding death is Christianity's constant spotlight on sin; according to Christianity, "Death can be conquered only to the extent that sin is removed."¹ Similarly, Donald Bloesch comments that "We need to gain a victory over sin before we gain assurance of life beyond the grave. 'From sin to righteousness' proceeds 'from death to life.'"² Roger Troisfontaines names death as sin's "immanent sanction."³ Unfortunately, little explanation has been given as to why Christianity insists on an immanent connection between death and sin, except occasional cautions against simplistically calling Original Sin the cause of our physical death. In Chapter Six, with

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, Harvard University Ingersoll lecture, 1955 (London: Epworth, 1958), 28.

² Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 121.

³ Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die*, trans. Francis E. Albert (New York, NY: Desclee Co, 1963), 202.

the help of Thomas Aquinas' teleological ontology, I will try to unpack the biblical insights related to the immanent causation between death and sin.

Chapter Three is titled "John Hick's Theology of Death in *Death and Eternal Life* (1976)."⁴ It is meant to set up a springboard for the major themes to be investigated in the following chapters of my dissertation. Comparing to the other works we reviewed so far, Hick's theology is particularly effective in illuminating the formative function of temporality and embodiment for human existence, which is a grand process of person-making for us to grow and develop into the Image of God.

Regarding temporality, Hick lays out a "par-eschatology" after some intensive explorations of the eastern religions. His par-eschatology may be summed up as "many lives in many worlds," which is a postmortem soteriology under the assumption of the non-finality of death. He emphatically rejects Ladislaus Boros' hypothesis of "final decision," saying that "We cannot be content with a theory which gives meaning to death by depriving this life of its meaning."⁵ Hick thinks that rejecting the finality of death will help draw attention to par-eschatology, which avails Christian theology what he considers the much needed possibility of dealing with the topic of universal salvation. Hick's universalistic concern seems particularly pertinent for our ever more globalized context today. He reasons that, the state of sin and imperfection in which most people die entails that more time must be granted beyond our earthly sojourn, "if a divine purpose of

⁴ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

⁵ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 238.

person-making through the human being's free responses is to continue to its completion."⁶

Regarding embodiment, Hick also offers some helpful insights. Specifically, he conceives human embodiment under the overarching purpose of person-making. Embodiment is a means of delimitation for us humans who have only limited cognitive capacities. Embodiment also furnishes the medium for human interaction and communion. Hick especially highlights the expedience of "matter" for establishing an orderly environment. This setting of concrete externalities provides us with both the epistemological distance needed for exercising freewill, and also the fixed existential parameters to wrestle with for survival. Through the collective life in the material environment, human intelligence is developed and moral characters formed. Hick conjectures that each postmortem embodiment of a person will be tailored to the specific laws of the world(s) the person is to live through in order to reach the eventual union with God.

In addition, valuable insights on postmortem embodiment are gained from the heated debates over Hick's "replica" theory. His theory is an attempt to come up with a survival scenario within the physicalist's framework, which defines the human being as entirely physical without remainder. The controversy helps us realize that, genuine survival of the human person requires that the unique aspect of being human: namely, as a subject of internal experiences—must be preserved. Since subjective experiences by nature are the product of a particular subject, they are not really transferable to another subject. One crucial implication is that, unlike completely physical entities such as rocks

⁶ Ibid, 239.

and trees, a human being cannot be brought back to existence after its subjectivity ceases, even only instantaneously—that, in short, is the Dualists’ objection to Hick’s theory. The other crucial implication is that true survival of the human person presupposes certain concepts of subjectivity which are qualitatively foreign to “matter” described by physics—that, in short, is the Physicalists’ objection to Hick’s theory.

In Chapter Four, “Postmortem Purgation—A Theological Corollary of the Centrality of Sanctification in the Christian Understanding of Salvation,” I present support for the case against the asserted finality of death. I begin by introducing a very recent Protestant scholarship on purgatory which concludes that, if sanctification is indispensable for salvation, we must embrace its corollary, i.e., opportunities for postmortem purgation.⁷ The main portion of this chapter is then dedicated to deploying an extensive survey of recent developments in areas like New Testament and early Christianity, Reformation studies, the “faith-alone” polemic in Protestantism, and ecumenical dialogues. Scholarships covered here include exegesis and biblical theology related to the Apostle Paul, historical theology related to Luther and Calvin, constructive theology on Theosis, as well as joint declarations by the Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Protestant churches. All in all, we witness an unprecedentedly wide recognition of the soteriological centrality of sanctification: for salvation captured under the word “heaven” to be genuine, it must be an ontological truth rather than a mere legal fiction, and so it must be a thorough transformation rather than a mere declaration. No doubt, this

⁷ Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

converging insight emerged in recent decades from multiple directions is a considerable step forward.

And yet, “justification” advocates are quick to offer us a reality check lest we may be naively optimistic for achieving sanctification. So we see that, in the justification-sanctification debate over salvation, the toughest opponent of the sanctification advocates is not the justification advocates, but death—ruthlessly mocking sanctification with its always unpredictable and always uncompromising interruption. If the sanctification process ends at death, all the arguments recently reached for the centrality of sanctification collapse when confronted by death—sanctification seems to be soteriologically inconsequential after all. To solve this issue, sanctification advocates usually count on death to be the moment of moral perfection. But, if so, why should people agonize over sanctification during life? Why does Christianity concern itself so much with something that at death would be taken care of for us perfectly by God? If it were possible for God to instantly achieve sanctification for us, why wouldn’t God do it at the beginning of time, instead of sending Jesus “in the fullness of time”? Given the soteriological centrality of sanctification clarified in recently theology, it seems that death is better conceived not as a breaking-point in the process of sanctification, but as a potential breakthrough point into vastly new horizons for continuous person-making.

Chapter Five is titled “Postmortem Embodiment in Light of George Berkeley’s Sacramental Idealism.” As physicist John Polkinghorne points out, there exists an innate

connection between time and matter.⁸ If, as argued in the previous chapter, death is not final and postmortem time seems necessary, how does postmortem embodiment look like? In this chapter, I argue that postmortem embodiment conceived within George Berkeley's sacramental idealism is the most coherent way for envisioning our bodily existence after death. More importantly, Berkeley's sacramental conceptualizations of materiality in general and of embodiment in particular are most conducive for grasping the person-making role of "body" in the grand scheme of salvation. As a theologically sound and philosophically tenable account of postmortem embodiment, it not only effectively conveys the soteriological centrality of sanctification in Christian soteriology, but is also sufficiently rigorous in the light of veritable truths reported from philosophy and modern science.

I begin the chapter by reporting on recent attempts by physicalists and dualists alike to produce a persuasive account of the Christian doctrine of "resurrection." None of them seem convincing. Then, using Berkeley's "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous," "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge," and "An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision," I introduce his sacramental Idealism as a much robust but seldom noticed alternative. Berkeley's distinct brand of Idealism is characterized by his conceptualization of the material world as divine communication to us. Substantively, it is very much in line with the long string of Sacramental Theology (e.g., from St. Augustine to Karl Rahner); it is also very congenial to the Theology of the

⁸ John Polkinghorne, "Eschatological Credibility: Emergent and Teleological Processes," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 43-55.

Body inaugurated by John Pope II. Moreover, Berkeley's Idealism resonates quite interestingly with recent theological reflections on "virtual reality."

The above strengths noted, though, how does Berkeley's idealism score under the criteria of related Christian orthodoxy? To address this question, I review New Testament passages and church Fathers' works on "resurrection" and postmortem embodiment. I show that the Berkeleian definition of postmortem embodiment not only does not contradict related Christian orthodoxies, it often is most effective in expressing the theological insights originally motivated them. In addition, I recount the intriguing arguments by some that Berkeley's idealistic understanding of the material reality is necessary for rendering intelligible several other core Christian doctrines, such as Incarnation, Trinity, and Creation *ex nihilo*.

To more thoroughly establish Berkeley's Idealism as the proper framework for conceptualizing all embodiments, I broaden my investigation further by introducing current philosophical literatures on the mind-body relation, known as the "philosophy of mind." Overall, while the Physicalist's portrait of the human person is inadequate for depicting a genuine mental life, the Dualist portrait is incoherent in explaining the mind-body interaction, and the dual-aspect Monist's portrait as an attempt to have it both ways is a fragmented and blurred patchwork. In comparison, the human portrait under Berkeley's Idealism captures the key features of them all, while avoiding the flaws of them all.

In the last section of this chapter, I broaden my investigative scope even further by bringing in metaphysical writings of founders of modern physics, in order that we may

learn about the material reality from those who study it the best. Arguably, in and of itself, it is already quite thought-provoking to find that, so many of the founders of modern physics were inspired and urged by their own scientific discoveries to pen down some metaphysic insights. Perhaps still unbeknownst to many, during the past century, paradigm-shifting discoveries of quantum physics and relativity unveiled pure mathematics to be the most basic foundation of all material realities. With that, came the shocking realization that empirical regularities found in physics are symbolic in nature: that is, they are descriptions of relationships, not “substance;” more importantly, given the fundamentally “circular” (i.e., symbolic) nature of studies in physics, scientific investigations of “materiality” can only speak about relationships, never about “substance.” And so, unexpectedly, modern physics seems to encourage a worldview of the Berkeleian kind.

Chapter Six is titled “From Death to Eternal Life—Explicating the Biblical Theology of Death via a Metaphysic of Sanctification.” Lucy Bregman points out that “‘death,’ for Christian spirituality, has never been exclusively the physical death and dying of scientific medicine or thanatology. Death is a pervasive imagery linked to Christ’s death, to our own sacrifice of self, to a life ‘hid with Christ in God.’”⁹ Along the same line, Wolfgang Schoberth states that “Death is not a proper theme in dogmatics or an object in confessional statements. It is theologically relevant only in relation to sin, the

⁹ Lucy Bregman, *Beyond Silence and Denial* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 187.

last judgment, the resurrection, and so forth.”¹⁰ That is to say, the kind of death that properly concerns Christian theology is spiritual death.

In this constructive chapter of my dissertation, I first trace from the scripture a biblical theology of death with a salient thread running from Genesis to Revelation: namely, the connection between death and sin, holiness and eternal life. The scripture consistently associates corruption and death with evil and sin, and links sanctity and righteousness with vitality and eternal life. Moreover, New Testament authors repeatedly depict God’s salvific work in the life of the believers under the theme of “death and resurrection” through the Holy Spirit, who is the Power of Resurrection and the Giver of Life.

Are these just primitive concepts of physical death or metaphorical language for spiritual death? To unearth the crucial insights contained in the biblical theology of death, I utilize Thomas Aquinas’ teleological ontology in *Summa Theologiae* shed light on the ontologically imminent connection between sin and death, sanctity and life. I attempt to show that, Aquinas’ ontology is built upon St. Augustine’s notion of evil as “non-being.” It is a grand teleological drama of the entire creation being drawn towards its own perfection in the union with God the Creator who, as the First Cause of all existence, is best characterized by ontological perfection and complete goodness. Creaturely existence is none other than a dynamic momentum set in motion by God; it is intended to be a journey from non-being, through being and, eventually, to perfect being. All beings, in so far as they exist, exist in varying stages on this journey towards perfection, and so are

¹⁰ Wolfgang Schoberth, “Death,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 783.

good; to the extent that a being is good, to that same extent that this being truly exists as intended by God. Sin, given its corrosive and destructive nature as moral evil, is a privation and annihilation of being; thus, in a concrete and real sense, sin lead to death. Therefore, unlike some Aquinas scholar claimed, God's ontological goodness and perfection according to Aquinas is none other than God's moral goodness and perfection. Tellingly, Aquinas depicts the ethical process of growth in virtues as a process of cultivating the divine disposition of Goodness and *agape* Love, which is rewarded by God with none other than Eternal Life.

Intended Contributions

Rebecca Housel and Jeremy Wisnewski observe that our cultural frenzy over *Twilight* the vampire-themed romance novels betrays a universal human longing that death is not inevitable and the purest form of love has been found.¹¹ It may be said that, Christianity, being a faith engendered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, affirms precisely this perennial longing of the human heart. As a theology engaging the Christian tradition with contemporary culture, my dissertation is aimed to contribute in the following ways.

First, I want to show that, upon closer examination, the widely-held assertion of the finality of death is unwarranted. This assertion overshadows the centrality of sanctification in the Christian understanding of salvation, with harmful consequences ranging from pseudo theological impasses, to falsely conceived "shortcuts" to heaven, and to self-righteous disdain and even mockery of the Gospel message of salvation. More

¹¹ Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisnewski (eds.), *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).

than forty years ago, Michael Simpson called for a responsible renewal of eschatology by cleansing away concepts that do not resonate with our deepest moral instinct.¹² He underscores the necessity to proclaim the Christian Hope in a way that is morally inspiring and life transforming, in order that Christianity may continue to be a lively saving force in our society today. After decades of deliberation, it seems reasonable to say that the assertion of the finality of death is one of those concepts needing theological cleansing, in order that Christianity may continue to inspire hope and transform lives in our culture today.

Second, by advocating Bishop Berkeley's sacramental idealism as the proper framework for envisioning postmortem embodiment, I intend to contribute by improving the coherence of our articulation of the Christian Hope. Without such a robust metaphysics regarding "matter" and the material body, eschatological proclamations like the Resurrection lack intelligibility and so cannot credibly inspire hope. For example, as Candido Pozo points out, it appears puzzling as to why Christian eschatology insists that "the material body can contribute to a more intense possession of God"—who is essentially Spirit.¹³ Notably, when searching for the proper concept of postmortem embodiment, I pay particular attention to Hans Bynagle's dual-emphasis of compatibility with Christian orthodoxy and tenability with established philosophical and scientific truths.¹⁴ In this way, I may better recover crucial insights from scripture and tradition, and

¹² Michael Simpson, *The Theology of Death and Eternal Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1971).

¹³ Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's, 2009), 315.

¹⁴ Hans E. Bynagle, "Debating Soul, Body, and Survival—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 109.

also better demonstrate the logic and credibility of the Christian understanding of life after death.

Third, I intend to contribute by spotlighting the immanent connection between death and sin on the ontological level, so that the lethal nature of sin can be fully grasped, and the life-giving nature of holiness thoroughly appreciated. Decades ago, Richard Connor points to the urgent need that, Vatican II's universal call to holiness must be complemented and underpinned by a metaphysical conceptualization of the human person which understands holiness as the very essence of human fulfillment. Without such metaphysics, morality tends to become "a veneer of do-goodism" without the deepest human self being committed to the service of God and of others.¹⁵ Connor calls this moral frame of mind a minimalist ethic where "sanctity has typically been a graduate course for those so inclined ... for the few and the elite."¹⁶ Now, with the removal of the "finality" of death, a formidable conceptual barrier to a thoroughgoing conceptualization of sanctity as human fulfillment, we are liberated to attempt such a metaphysical notion, according to which sanctity is none other than life to the fullest, being at its perfection. It illuminates the "onto-logic" of sanctity as true life, sin as true death. Death is examined against the background of true life, so that, as Martin Luther declared in *The Freedom of Christians*, death may be unmasked, disarmed, and turned into a servant for our salvation.

¹⁵ Richard Connor, "Relation, the Thomistic *esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity," *Communio* 17 (1990): 455.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 464.

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