

Crucified with Christ: The *Ego* and the *Omega*

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Abstract: In the second chapter to his Galatians letter, Paul makes some striking statements. He says that he has been “crucified with Christ,” and indeed that he no longer lives but that Christ lives “in” him. Such claims raise fascinating exegetical and metaphysical issues that are important for theology. Just who is this “I”, and what is the relation of this “I” to Christ? How are we to understand union with Christ – indeed, is the relation spoken of here something stronger than mere union? Is it identity? In this essay, I offer an analytic engagement with traditional and more recent “apocalyptic” interpretations of this passage, and I argue that a traditional account is preferable.

I. INTRODUCTION

Paul’s declaration at the conclusion of the second chapter of his letter to the Galatians is arresting. It is also rather unsettling, and it raises some very interesting exegetical and important theological issues.¹ After saying that those persons (and here he uses Ἡμεῖς to include himself) who are of Jewish ethnicity know that they are “justified” not through the works of the law but by faith in Christ, after testifying that “we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ” (Gal 2:15-16), and after adamantly denying that justification through such faith somehow legitimizes sin (μὴ γένοιτο), Paul makes this statement:

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body (ἐν σαρκί), I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:19-20).

¹ This passage is challenging at several levels (including exegesis). As N. T. Wright says, these are “deliberately rich and dense formulations” (Wright, 2015, 105). It is also central to Paul’s theology. To quote Wright again, he says that this is the “decisive climax” of Paul’s teaching (2015, 342–343). Martinus C. de Boer concurs: this is “the theological high point of the first two chapters” (de Boer, 2011, 159).

Strikingly, Paul claims, “I am crucified with Christ” and “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” What does he mean? Grant Mackaskill says that this text is “suggestive of an absolute transformation of identity” (Mackaskill, 2013, 221). But just who is this “I” who no longer lives? Who is the “I” who is said to now live? What is the relation of these “I’s” to one another? And how are the themes of union with Christ—and, indeed, participation in Christ—to be understood? Indeed, is the right account of the relation of the “I” to Christ somehow even stronger than what can be captured by language of “union” and “participation?” Is it identity?

In this essay I offer a closer look at this text and some of the issues raised by it. I do so as a sort of analytic intervention into a debate among the so-called “apocalyptic” interpreters of Paul, and my aim throughout is to work toward a better understanding of Paul’s account of these matters. Accordingly, I begin by comparing the interpretations offered by what I refer to as the “Modest Apocalyptic” (MA) and “Radical Apocalyptic” (RA) interpretations of the text. I then offer some analysis of these claims and some of the entailments of the claims, and I raise some theological concerns about the RA proposals. I then revisit a traditional reading with an eye toward the possibilities of *ressourcement*.

II. THE APOCALYPTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF PAUL

A. *The Apocalyptic Paul*

So-called “Apocalyptic” interpretations of Paul have seen great gains in popularity and influence (within scholarly circles) over the course of the past few decades. Such interpretations differ sharply from older “Protestant” or “Lutheran” readings. But they also differ—and in some cases they differ very sharply—from more recent “New Perspectives” on Paul (NPP). For all their important differences, both the older “Lutheran” and NPP interpretations share a basic and fundamental understanding of strong continuity between the “old” that has become soiled and poisoned and ruined by sin and the “new” that is revealed and inaugurated in Christ. The big story, as told by both traditional Protestant interpreters and the proponents of the NPP, strongly emphasizes the place and prominence of *covenant* within that story. Traditional and NPP interpreters commonly insist that what was marred and broken and ruined by sin is reclaimed and repaired and reconciled by God’s decisive action in the work of Jesus Christ. Traditional theologians and the advocates of the NPP have serious disagreements among themselves about important issues within that broad understanding. Famously, the older “Lutheran” readings see Jewish “legalism” and the accompanying efforts to somehow merit or earn salvation through good works as the culprit, while the proponents of the NPP typically aver that the older theologies rest upon misunderstandings of Second Temple Judaism and instead insist that Jewish thought was committed to “covenantal nomism.” But despite such

disagreements—however serious and sharp they may be—there is a general sense of shared agreement that what God is doing in Christ maintains important continuity with the covenant that God made with Israel for the sake of the world.

Apocalyptic interpretations of Paul question—and often reject—this basic assumption of continuity. Instead, apocalyptic readings of Paul insist that the gospel is a in-breaking that disrupts all that came before. Apocalyptic theologians insist that the “full scope, depth, and radicality of the gospel of God” demands that we account for the “actual and manifest contradiction of that gospel” by the world (Ziegler, 2018, 26). This world, the world as it is—indeed, “*the world*” in Pauline usage of the term—is something that has been taken over and is now controlled by sin. As J. Louis Martyn puts it, “we would not be totally wrong to say—with the poetic language of tragedy—that Sin is virtually the *creator of this world*” (Martyn, 2005, 120). This world, as it is, is something that is “not under the immediate and exclusive hegemony either of God or of human beings;” instead, it is under the control of evil powers and is thus “the frightening, horrifying scene of genuine and profound disaster” (2005, 122). In direct response to this disaster, God has acted decisively—indeed, *apocalyptically*—in Christ. God’s work in Christ is a truly radical invasion. In Christ, God “is not merely repairing *this world*” but instead is creating a completely new one that is “in fundamental contrast to *this world*” (2005, 126). Such a radical rupture means that God’s revelation in Christ is a “break with the ultimate authority of the Torah,” as John M. G. Barclay puts it, for “the cross of Christ shatters every ordered system of norms, however embedded in the seemingly ‘natural’ order of ‘the world’” (Barclay, 2015, 394).²

All genuine knowledge of God is disclosed in Christ.³ Indeed, for some very influential proponents of apocalyptic Pauline theology, any claims to knowledge of God that do not both begin and terminate in Christ are to be held at arm’s length. The worry here is that such claims are not only mistaken but indeed idolatrous. In other words, any claims to knowledge of God via “natural theology” are both false and dangerous. Douglas A. Campbell, for instance, energetically polemicizes against what he refers to as “Justification Theory” (JT) (Campbell, 2009, 11-218). As he sees things, JT has exerted massive influence in the history of Christian theology. The term “justification” seems to be doing double duty for Campbell here, for he uses it in reference to epistemology as well as soteriology. Epistemologically, JT relies upon a kind of foundationalism according to which both the basic (or “foundational”) facts about God and sin are known through natural theology (along the lines of what Campbell takes to be the all-too-common misreading of Rom 1:18-32). From “nature” we are to learn that God exists and that humans are responsible and legally or forensically guilty before God for their sins; we learn about the problem from natural theology, and the gospel is the solution to that problem. Campbell protests against

²Barclay continues: “All other criteria of value have been discounted by their superordinate worth of belonging to Christ” (2015, 429).

³See the discussion in Ziegler (2018, 27).

this approach, and he insists as well that the legal account of salvation (“justification” in the soteriological sense) is skewed from the outset. Campbell resists such an approach as overly individualistic and “contractualist” (as well as foundationalist).⁴

Campbell reads the opening chapters of Romans (and similar passages scattered elsewhere in the Pauline corpus) as “speech-in-character” that actually articulate the views of the opponents of the gospel, and he mounts an extended and very vigorous argument that the true gospel is radically opposed to such notions (Campbell, 2009, 313-466). Where the older readings (either Roman Catholic or Protestant, and whether “old” or “new” perspective) saw the gospel as the solution to a problem that was revealed and understood prior to the in-breaking of God’s gospel in Christ, Campbell’s genuinely apocalyptic reading will have none of that. Where the older views took the gospel to be about the legal status of individuals who had done bad things, Campbell’s account proclaims a good news that is communitarian and participatory. And where the older doctrines maintain that some part of a God-human contract must be fulfilled or completed from the human side (either in perfect obedience to the law or in the exercise of faith), Campbell insists that the authentic gospel rejects all such contractual arrangements in favor of genuine grace that is covenantal and thus non-conditional. The upshot of this should be clear (or, at least, clear enough for present purposes): Paul’s gospel is radical and radically apocalyptic. It upends all prior conceptions of what God—and, indeed, all proper concepts of everything else in relation to God—is really like. It confounds all worldly wisdom. It abolishes any idolatrous notions about the adequacy of human agency. And it demonstrates the finality of God’s authentic revelation in Christ. The gospel is something that is new, and it proclaims a new creation, a new life that is in Christ.

With this brief background in mind, let us now turn to the exegesis of Gal 2:19-20. Some of the leading apocalyptic interpreters seem rather unsure of what to make of the striking claims made by Paul in Gal 2:19-20. Not surprisingly, they generally are not attracted to the older and more traditional interpretations, but some are hesitant to endorse a more thorough-going or even “literal” understanding of Paul’s claims. Thus Martyn takes Paul to be using the verb in a “nonliteral manner” (Martyn, 2005, 278). Paul is, he says, not merely a follower or disciple of Jesus but someone who is co-crucified, but Paul’s claim is to be understood in something less than a literal sense. The “main accent” of Paul’s statement “‘to be ‘crucified with Christ’ lies, therefore, on incorporation into the Christ whose own path determines the destiny of those who are bound to him” (2005, 279). Martinus C. de Boer is struck by the force of Paul’s “extreme language of crucifixion with Christ” (de Boer, 2011, 161). But he says that Paul’s claims “cannot be taken literally,” for while this is “realistic and serious” (cf. 5:24; 6:14), nonetheless the “language is metaphorical and hyperbolic” (2011, 160). On his view, “to ‘die to something’ is metaphorical and means to be separated from it (cf. Rom 6:2, 10, 11; 7:6).” And in this case, “Paul’s ‘I’ (*ego*) has

⁴The terms “individualist” and “contractualist” feature prominently in Joshua W. Jipp’s overview of Campbell’s work. See (Jipp, 2010, 183–197).

ceased to exist” *in reference to its orientation to the law*; what is gone is not the person known as Paul but instead the “nomistic ‘I’—the ‘I’ that finds its identity and its hope of justification (5:5) in (the observance of) the law—that has died” (2011, 159). It is the “nomistically determined ‘I’” who is gone, the “‘I’ that was a zealot for the ancestral traditions and persecuted God’s church (1:13-14)” (2011, 161) In place of this old “I” is the “new identity, a new self” that is delighted and energetic in the apostolic proclamation of the singularity and finality of the gospel of Jesus Christ (2011, 161).

Let us refer to these readings as “Modest-Apocalyptic” interpretations. But other apocalyptic interpreters are not satisfied with such readings.

B. Radical Apocalyptic Options

Some of the claims made by apocalyptic interpreters suggest much more radical readings of Paul’s claim. We will, then, call these “Radical-Apocalyptic” readings. For instance, Beverly Roberts Gaventa forcefully emphasizes the discontinuity between the old and the new. She insists upon the “singularity” of the gospel of Christ; by this she means not only the fact that there is only one gospel (cf. Gal 1:6-9) but also “its singular, all-encompassing action in the lives of human beings” (Gaventa, 2014, 188). The gospel—the one and only true gospel, *the* gospel of Jesus Christ—“claims all that a human is; the gospel becomes the locus of human identity; the gospel replaces the old cosmos” (2014, 188). When we come to the “radical and radically troubling” message that is encapsulated in Paul’s claim about co-crucifixion, we are taken into the “heart” of Paul’s “understanding of the gospel” (2014, 188, 193). Paul’s claim is not merely that Christ is teacher or example, nor is it even that Jesus is Lord. (2014, 193) Rather, it is that he is *crucified with* the Christ who is teacher and Lord; he shares in Christ’s brutal execution as Christ bears the full weight and force of evil and sin.

Gaventa protests against the moves made by de Boer. For in this context, she exclaims, “there is no sign that this death and life are the death and life of the nomistic self only (although that is included)” (2014, 193) No indeed. It is nothing less than “the whole of the *ἐγώ* that is gone” (2014, 193) Gaventa follows Campbell when he says that Paul is “speaking of the execution of his own identity, and his immersion in Christ’s” (Campbell, 2009, 848). Gaventa understands “that there is still life in a human body, of course” (Gaventa, 2014, 194). But she also insists that “by moving to the language of ‘death’ and ‘life,’ Paul has again shifted his discourse” (2014, 194). The gospel is not only about legality, for the “canvas on which Paul depicts the gospel has enlarged from legal language to existential language” (2014, 194). The gospel is not merely about justification or “rectification”—instead, “from Paul’s perspective,” it is “singular in that it is all-consuming: there is no more *ἐγώ*” (2014, 195).

Gaventa is not alone. Paul Nadim Tarzi insists that the radical change is no “mere psychological shift,” and he insists that “our ‘I’—that is, our very *self*—does not live anymore, It is truly dead,” and “Pauline terminology fully equates life with Christ”

(Tarzi, 1994, 89). John M. G. Barclay (2002) makes similar claims. As Gaventa (2014) notes, he says that “Paul refers to the real and total demolition of the self, as previously constituted” (Barclay, 2002, 143). Barclay is certain that the crucifixion marks a “radical disjunction” with what has come before (Barclay, 2015, 386). Paul’s statement about Christ living “in” him “gestures to the resurrection (1:1), which founds a radically new existence” (2015, 386). Barclay goes on to say that out of the newness of this resurrected Christ-life, “every value is newly evaluated and every norm reassessed” (2015, 386). Beyond this, however, he goes on to say that “Paul depicts the believer’s agency as both replaced (‘It is no longer I who live...’) and remade (‘the life I now live...’)” (2015, 386). He argues that “Paul uses multiple expressions to indicate the creation, in baptism, of a new subjectivity generated by, and dependent on, the Christ-event: believers are ‘baptized into Christ,’ have ‘put on Christ,’ constitute one person ‘in Christ,’ and henceforth ‘belong to Christ’ (3:27-29)” (2015, 396). Notice the strength of the claims: not only is there a “new subjectivity” (that apparently is singular), but those who are baptized “into Christ” are said to “constitute one person.” Barclay recognizes that his reading of Gal 2:20 (along with 3:27-29 and 4:19) “complicates notions of agency in Pauline thought” (2015, 441). The agency of those who belong to Christ and are “in Christ” “is by no means self-generated or independent, let alone autonomous” (2015, 441). “At the same time,” as Barclay notes, “Paul has no hesitation in speaking of believers as agents” (2015, 441). The result of co-crucifixion is not only a network of “new social relations” but indeed “the reconstitution of each individual self (Gal 2:19-20)” (2015, 568).

Taking a position similar to that of Gaventa, Jonathan Linebaugh resists the strategy offered by de Boer. It cannot be the case that it is merely the “nomistically-determined ‘I’” who is put to death with Christ, and to read Paul’s statement as “metaphorical and hyperbolic” is to miss Paul’s main point. Indeed, Linebaugh (2020) claims that “it is just this assumption” (that the claim should be read metaphorically rather than literally) that “Paul’s confession resists” (Linebaugh, 2020, 92). For “Galatians 2:20 is not an analogy between Christ’s death and a death-like experience of the I. Galatians 2:20, rather, is an announcement that Christ’s death is the death of the I. To retreat to the language of non-literal and hyperbolic is to miss the radical reframing required by Paul’s language” (2020, 92). Linebaugh refuses to accept any easy “domestication” of Paul’s “confession of death” (2020, 94). He is especially concerned to resist the temptation offered by traditional interpreters such as Aquinas. As Linebaugh reads him, what dies on Aquinas’s interpretation is not the *person* but the inclination to sin that corrupts the person. Aquinas’s maxim that *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit* (“grace does not destroy but perfects nature”) means that the “new creature” is “not so much new as renewed” and that “the ‘I,’ in other words, survives their salvation” (2020, 94). Against traditional interpretations such as those of Aquinas, Linebaugh closely links “God’s unconditioned grace” in “three radical forms: *creatio ex nihilo*, *resurrectio moruorum*, and *iustificatio impii*” (2020, 97). He links these together to form a “confession of *creatio ex nihilo* in the language

of salvation *sola gratia*: ‘out of nothing’ means ‘by grace alone...’ (2020, 97). The one who is justified is thus “constituted as ‘a new creature,’” and this new creation is something that happens “*ex nihilo*” (2020, 98).

Linebaugh is, however, bothered by a worry that is raised by Daphne Hampson. Hampson is concerned that an account of strict identity with Christ would result in the evaporation of the “I.” If the believer and Christ are really “one person,” then does not the “otherness” of the “I” in the “I-Thou” relationship collapse? And if there is no “I,” then how could there be an “I” to give or receive love? If “the self does not survive salvation,” then what—and *who*—are we talking about? (Linebaugh, 2020, 103). Who is doing the talking? And what sense can we make of “saving” something or someone that does not survive? Linebaugh wrestles with this worry: “Does the announcement of the death of the I eliminate the possibility of God’s love for the I? If I am only outside myself and in Christ, does God ever look at and love me?” (2020, 103). So is there continuity between the “no longer living and the now living I?” (2020, 104). Linebaugh is deeply skeptical of any attempts to ground the continuity in creation or “nature;” he remains stoutly opposed to Aquinas’s view. As we have seen, he has little patience for the hesitations of Martyn and de Boer, and certainly there is no possibility of going back to the older views. But he also sees the need to maintain some genuine continuity between the “I” that is in Christ and the “I” that preceded it. He finally opts for the view that “Paul’s ‘strange and un-heard of confession requires a dialectical conclusion...’” (2020, 105). So on one hand, the answer is a clear and unambiguous “No: death and life divide the no longer and the now living I and the life of the latter is gifted, ex-centric, and in Christ.” (2020, 105). But on the other hand, the answer is an unequivocal and emphatic “Yes: though I no longer live, there is a me that is ever and always loved.” (2020, 105).

III. TOWARD THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A. Replacement Theories

As I said earlier, such claims suggest a quite radical interpretation of Paul’s claim. Some of them seem to be saying nothing less than this: the person or the “I” is actually destroyed or demolished but then a new person is made in place of the old. Some expressions of the RA approach seem to be saying this but then also going on to claim that there indeed *is* also *some* continuity between the “old I” and the “new I.” So there both is and is not continuity between “them.” Despite appearances, perhaps these claims are not—at least in all cases—intended as claims about the sober metaphysical truth.⁵ But they surely *seem* to be making such claims, and what they say is, minimally,

⁵ Despite Linebaugh’s forceful protest against what he recalls a “retreat” to “non-literal” understandings, it is less than obvious that even he can really take the language *literally*. After all,

at least suggestive of a such claims. So what are we to make of them?

Some statements made by these theological interpreters would seem to suggest that the individual or self or “I”—presumably the *person*—is annihilated but then somehow replaced. As we have seen, theological interpreters of Pauline theology claim that:

- “the whole of the *ἐγώ* is gone” and “there is no more *ἐγώ*” (Gaventa);
 - Paul is “speaking of the execution of his own identity” (Campbell);
 - “Paul refers to the real and total demolition of the self” (Barclay);
 - “the believer’s agency is both replaced... and remade” as a “new subjectivity” that is “the reconstitution of each individual self” (Barclay);
- and – one who is joined in union with Christ is “constituted as ‘a new creature’” who is “made *ex nihilo*” (Linebaugh).

Taken straightforwardly, we might conclude from such statements that the proper meaning of Paul’s teaching includes these elements: first, the self or “I” or person is demolished or annihilated; second, that the annihilated person is replaced with a new creation that bears strong similarities to the former one; and, third, that, despite such similarities, there is no continuity of personal identity between the old and the new, for there is no “I” who “survives their salvation” (Linebaugh, 2020, 104).

It is not immediately obvious just what to make of these claims. Consider again Linebaugh’s appeal to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, and recall that for him, anything “less” (anything that would allow the human nature to be merely “radically altered” and “perfected and healed” rather than destroyed and replaced) is a “domestication” of Paul’s doctrine (Linebaugh, 2020, 94). Taking this seriously, we might opt for something like an occasionalist account of the position.⁶ Speaking strictly and “literally,” the first Paul (call it P1) is something that passes from existence and then is replaced by another Paul (call it P2) in a moment of re-creation. This creation is an act that is *ex nihilo*. Of course this would not be plausible as an instance of a general or what we could call “global” account of occasionalism. For if occasionalism is true as a general or global account, then, at least on common or standard accounts of what occasionalism is, then there would be nothing special (in this sense, at least) about the event of co-crucifixion. For if we accept occasionalism as an overall account of creation and providence, then the world and every (created) entity in it is being re-created out of nothing at every moment. So if occasionalism were true as a general or global account of reality, then there would be nothing radical or apocalyptic or even unusual about the Christ-event and anyone’s co-crucifixion

surely he thinks that the crucifixion of Christ was an actual historical event in which the physical body of Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross—but presumably he does not think that this is also true of either Paul or other believers (including, presumably, himself). See (Linebaugh 2020, 92).

⁶For a helpful account of occasionalism set within the late medieval and early modern contexts, see Freddoso (1998).

relation to it. To the contrary, we would have business as usual: sure, Paul is being re-created out of nothing at the moment of his union with Christ in the crucifixion, but, on occasionalism, Paul is *always* being re-created out of nothing. And so is everyone and everything else.

So global occasionalism would not seem to be an attractive option, and in point of fact it might be bad news for the apocalyptic interpretations if occasionalism were true as a general or overall account of reality. But something *like* occasionalism, or what we might call “local occasionalism,” might be the right way to go. On this proposal it is not the case that *everything* is being re-created at every moment, nor is it the case that *Paul* is continually being re-created out of nothing. But at one decisive moment—the moment of Paul’s being joined in union with Christ—there is complete replacement of P1 with some divinely-created P2. From here the metaphysical options open up. If one is a physicalist, then what is replaced by the *de novo* creation is Paul’s body; the body that is P1 is replaced by the body that is P2.⁷ If some version of hylomorphism is the right way to think about such matters, then what is replaced by the new creation is the particular body-soul composite that is—or was—Paul. If one is a mind-body dualist of more Cartesian commitments, then perhaps what is replaced is actually only the *soul* that is P1. Perhaps the body that happens to be inhabited by P1 remains the same, or maybe not. Either way, the important point is that the *real* P1—whatever exactly that is—is replaced by the radically new P2. It does not seem that just any metaphysical accounts could map on to the theological claims, and some would seem to offer less cause for optimism (on Lockean accounts of personal identity, for instance, if psychological continuity is maintained then it is less than obvious that P2 would be distinct at all from P1— even if created out of nothing). But perhaps—at least for the theologian who is willing to pay the metaphysical price—some local version of occasionalism offers a way forward.

Whatever we are to make of the RA view with respect to such matters, however, we are faced with some important theological concerns and challenges. The challenges come from several angles. At one level, the RA reading is deeply counterintuitive, both as a general account of reality and as an interpretation of Galatians. Immediately, it seems clear that Paul is not reticent to talk about his own life from pre-conversion escapades to post-conversion union with Christ in terms of a stable and continuous personal identity. He recalls his own former way of life as someone who persecuted the ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ and tried to destroy it (1:13)—and he owns it *as his own*. From those days to own stunning conversion to his meetings with Peter in Jerusalem and then to his own journeys as an evangelist and apostle of Jesus Christ, he recounts the story as one with undivided personal agency and apparent continuity of identity.

A concern stems from theological anthropology. For whatever we are to make of the more controverted elements of the passage, we must not lose sight of Paul’s

⁷Accordingly, we would read Paul’s references to “the old person” (παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) and “the body of sin” (σῶμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας) literally (Rom 6:6).

insistence on the importance of the *body*. As Paul puts it, the new life in Christ is life that is lived *in the flesh* (ἐν σαρκί). And it is a life that is lived *now* (νῦν). In other words, the body—*this* flesh, *this* life lived in the body—matters to Paul. On the RA proposal, however, it would seem that the body fades in importance. For some versions of RA (including both physicalist and some dualist accounts), the body not only fades in importance but actually fades away entirely. The body that is the body of P1—for physicalists, the body that just *is* P1, and at any rate the body in which Paul (or any person) lives as a sinner—is simply annihilated. It would seem that this body is either not worth saving or, strictly speaking, is not salvageable.⁸ This is a remarkably un-Pauline conclusion, and thus should be unwelcome to apocalyptic (as well as NPP and more traditional) interpreters.

A Christological concern is closely related. It plagues those apocalyptic interpreters who also think that Christ assumed and has (or, during his incarnate earthly career, *had*) a “fallen” or “sinful” human nature, and it is especially intense for those who would also opt for a physicalist Christology. Here is the problem in a nutshell, if Christ has a “fallen” human nature (whatever exactly that means), and if the human body (σάρχ) is destroyed and replaced (as either not worth saving or not salvageable), then it would seem that Christ’s human body would also be left behind and replaced at his resurrection and glorification. But if it is true that “the unassumed is the unhealed,” then the fact that Christ leaves behind his original human body would be very bad news indeed. Moreover, on physicalist and occasionalist assumptions, the Christ who is raised from the dead would not be the Christ who died for us. For, again, while the Christ who suffered on the cross had a fallen or sinful human nature, the new Christ would presumably be sinless, and his humanity would be re-created *ex nihilo* after his old and sinful flesh has been annihilated. On any plausible criteria of identity, it is not easy to see how they might be identical. But Paul is absolutely convinced of the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ, and clearly he thinks that the person who is the resurrected and exalted Christ is identical to the person who took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient to death on a cross (1 Cor 15:12-28; Phil 2:5-11).

The RA proposal also raises some perplexing questions and worries related to soteriology. Recall Linebaugh’s anxiety over the criticisms of Hampson. He asks if “soteriologies of death and resurrection—that is, accounts of salvation like we encounter in Galatians and Luther’s reading of it—[are] finally opposed to the human person? Does the announcement of the death of the I eliminate the possibility of God’s love for the I? If I only am outside myself and in Christ, does God ever look at and love me?” (Linebaugh, 2020, 103). Linebaugh’s question is an important one. Linebaugh’s

⁸On the other hand, if one were to adopt a more Cartesian version of the “local occasionalism” approach, the body might remain (even as the “person” or the “I” was replaced). But on such a scenario it is again hard to see how the body really matters all that much, for the “real person” (the immaterial soul) is completely replaced even though still stuck in the same body. Again, on this view it would seem that the body is either not worth saving or not salvageable.

own approach, as we have seen, merely asserts a “dialectical” conclusion: there both is and is not an “I” that is loved and saved by God. As we have also seen, this approach is unsatisfactory, for to assert that in the same sense there both *is* and *is not* an “I” that is continuously loved and finally saved is only to assert a contradiction. Since contradictions are necessarily false, this is not a good option. The question itself remains, however, and it is troubling. So is there—or is there not—an I that is always loved and finally saved? If the answer is No, then there is no hope of salvation. If the answer is Yes, on the other hand, then it is hard to see how the RA proposal can be right.

Further questions arise. Am “I” joined in union with Christ—or am “I” not? Earlier the concern had to do with the identity of the incarnate Christ, but here we have a similar worry about the identity of the person who is said to be joined to Christ. Paul claims to be crucified *with* Christ. Is the Paul who has new life the one who was co-crucified with Christ? The verb used (συνεσταύρωμαι) is in the perfect tense. Some commentators take this to indicate that Paul’s statement refers to a once-for-all act of committed faith that joins the believer in union with Christ with “results and implications for the present” (Longenecker, 1990, 92).⁹ Other scholars take the force of the perfect tense to signal something rather stronger; thus Andrew Das takes it to refer to an “on-going state of co-crucifixion with Christ” (Das, 2014, 268) and James D. G. Dunn says that the one who is co-crucified continues “in that state, still hanging on the cross” (Dunn, 1993, 120). Dunn (1998) explains his view:

Paul did not think of crucifixion with Christ as a once-for-all event of the past. Nor was he thinking in these passages of the believer as already taken down from the cross and risen with Christ. On the contrary... I have been nailed to the cross with Christ, and am in that state still; *I am hanging with Christ on that cross*. The implication for the process of salvation is clear: since the resurrection with Christ comes at the end point, then in a sense (in terms of soteriological effect) Christ remains the crucified one until the parousia, and those crucified with Christ continue to be crucified with Christ throughout the period of overlap. (Dunn, 1998, 485)

But either way we take it, either as a once-for-all event with continuing impact or as a continuing activity, the claim does not sit well with the RA proposal. For if we take it in the stronger sense suggested by Dunn, the process described in continuous and ongoing. Thus there must be direct and straightforward continuity of the person throughout the entire process and indeed all the way until the parousia. Suppose, on the other hand, that we opt for the view that this expresses a once-for-all event. On this reading too, however, what happens in this once-for-all event has ongoing

⁹See also Tarzi (1994) and Witherington (1998).

significance for the present precisely because it is the same person or “I.” So either way, the RA proposal faces an exegetical challenge.

It is worth noting that such exegetical and doctrinal concerns are accompanied by some pressing pastoral and existential worries. Campbell says that the fact that Jesus Christ “had to die, executing our *condition*, then resurrecting human nature *in a new form*, suggests that there was something irredeemably corrupt and contaminated in the old one,” and he concludes that “our problem goes down into the very roots of our nature” (Campbell, 2020, 116 n7). With this claim in mind, let us return to the concerns expressed by Hampson. Hampson is opposed to notions of co-crucifixion and, more broadly, surrender and death; on behalf of people who have been oppressed and abused, she protests that such persons are further damaged by any theology that tells them that what they need is to be broken and replaced. She is convinced that such doctrine only brings further damage to those marginalized and oppressed persons who have been robbed of any proper sense of self.¹⁰ Such concerns are important for more traditional theologians and the proponents of the NPP too, and they deserve a hearing. But it is not easy to see how the RA proposal has much in the way of resources for responding to it. After all, if the *I*—the *self* or the *person*—is annihilated, then she loses her identity. She might not want to hear that she *needs* to be saved in any case, but it is not hard to understand how she might conclude that this “gospel” tells her that she is “irredeemably corrupt and contaminated,” either not worth saving or not salvageable.

B. Fusion Theories

There might be another option for apocalyptic theologians who insist on such radical discontinuity between the old and the new. Some statements from various apocalyptic interpreters might be taken to suggest something rather different and perhaps even more radical yet; instead of an annihilation and replacement, we might have something more like absorption or fusion with Christ. Recall Barclay’s claim that those who are baptized “into Christ” now “constitute one person.” And consider further Das’s claim that Paul is not talking about an “I” [that] operates alongside the agency of Christ, “but that Christ operates in and even as the human agent” (Das, 2014, 270). Taken with metaphysical seriousness, this might be taken to suggest a kind of fusion. On such a proposal, perhaps there are many persons who exist as individuals before the co-crucifixion event, but at this event they lose distinct identity and instead become one person. Indeed, they become the one person who is Christ. Accordingly, after the co-crucifixion event the person of Christ is now the *only* person,¹¹ for the person of Christ is now a sort of super-person who has temporal parts that once were

¹⁰ See Hampson (2001, 237–241) and (1988, 334–342).

¹¹ At least for those proponents of RA who are also universalists with respect to salvation. Alternatively, all of the redeemed come to constitute one person by fusion with Jesus Christ.

personally distinct.¹²

The Theory of Final Assumptions

One option—probably the best option—for fusionists is the “theory of final assumptions” (TFA) that has been offered by Thomas P. Flint.¹³ Galatians 2:20 is not offered as any sort of “proof-text” of the theory (although Flint does mention it as possible support), and it is offered only as speculation (Flint, 2011, 199). The theory is summarized neatly by Flint: “The ultimate end of all human beings who attain salvation is to be assumed by the Son” (2011, 198). Flint is clear about what he means by “assumption,” he intends to affirm nothing less than that God actually becomes incarnate in each human person who is redeemed by God. As he explains, TFA is the view that

for the elect, this union will ultimately become as metaphysically real as is the union between CHN [Christ’s human nature, commonly understood as the body-soul composite of the incarnate Son] and the Son. During our lives on earth, most of us make fitful and imperfect progress toward this union. But the grace of God is stronger than our weakness, and can eventually (if we do not resist its influence) re-make us more completely in this image and likeness of God. When this process has reached the appropriate stage, after many struggles here on earth (and perhaps further purgation after death), God sees that we have been made worthy of our final goal. At that point, the Son assumes us, and we become united to him as truly and completely as CHN has always been united to him. God becomes incarnate in each of us. (2011, 198)

Flint notes that this assumption happens “at the appropriate stage,” and, as he explains it, this stage is reached when the “process of sanctification” reaches a point at which the redeemed person no longer sins and will not sin again (2011, 198).

Too Many Persons?

While intriguing, the TFA is not without challenges. Here are three: the “too many persons” worry, the “too many natures” worry, and the “too many sinners” worry. The “too many persons” worry is concerned that the TFA leaves us with too many incarnate persons. The TFA can, of course, deny that there is more than one incarnate person. And the TFA *should* do so, at least if it wants to maintain consistency

¹² Such an approach would have a nice symmetry with “fission” versions of realist doctrines of original sin, on which see Michael C. Rea (2007) and Hudson (2009).

¹³ Thanks to Oliver D. Crisp for suggesting this as a possibility.

with conciliar Christology.¹⁴ After all, Chalcedon decrees that there is “one Person” in the incarnation.¹⁵ However, the theory does not claim that there are multiple incarnate human persons, but that the one incarnate person assumes multiple human natures (where those are understood “concretely;” again, for much of the tradition, as a unique body-soul composite). So, in addition to CHN, the Son assumes Paul’s human nature (PHN).¹⁶ Incarnate only as Jesus Christ, what we have is CHN+Son; this is one person. Once Paul is assumed, what we have is CHN+PHN+Son, but still as one person.

Or do we? With the assumption of PHN, do we still have *Paul*, or do we not? If Paul is no longer in the picture, we are left to wonder just who it is that continues to refer to himself as Paul (cf. Phil 1:1; and assuming the standard critical view that Philippians postdates Galatians). If it is not Paul, then is it PHN? How can PHN do the talking if already de-personalized? At this point, we do not know enough. If Paul is in the picture, then just what is Paul? If Paul is a person—while making the claims of Gal 2:20 and thus, on this theory, incarnate—then we have too many persons. On the other hand, if the co-crucified “I” is really the person who is CHN+PHN+Son, then the only *person* here is the Son. But then who is talking to whom when Paul prays to Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; 16:22)? If the co-crucified “Paul” is a de-personalized PHN who nonetheless acts as an agent and prays to Jesus and talks about being co-crucified, then it is hard to distinguish PHN from plain old Paul. “They” look like the same dude—indeed, the same person. To make progress here, it seems that we need a supporting story to tell of how Paul is de-personalized (perhaps a sort of *exhypostasis* to accompany the traditional distinction between *anhypostasis* and *enhyposstasis*). For without that, it is really hard to distinguish Paul as a person acting as a speech-agent from PHN acting as a speech-agent.

Peter van Inwagen holds that persons “are those things to which personal pronouns are applicable: a person can use the word ‘I’ and be addressed as a ‘thou.’”¹⁷ For those whose intuitions align with van Inwagen on this point, any alleged distinctions between some PHN who can use personal indexicals and Paul himself will likely look like a distinction without a difference. Moreover, as Flint himself observes, TFA entails that persons are not essentially persons. Flint also notes it is very counterintuitive (some might say *wildly* so) to think that a person is not a person essentially. Alfred J. Freddoso (1986) says that he finds this “extraordinarily implausible;” it is a “manifest repugnancy which flouts our deepest convictions about ourselves” and is “utterly bereft of merit” (1986, 37). Flint disagrees, of course, and the debates over this issue would take us far afield. But those who are on Team Freddoso on this point will see this as a serious problem with the proposal.

Now perhaps the proponents of RA will not be dislodged by such objections

¹⁴ On “conciliar Christology,” see Pawl, 2016, especially pp. 11-28.

¹⁵ See “The Chalcedonian Decree,” in Hardy (1977, 373).

¹⁶ And—hopefully, on this theory—many, many others as well.

¹⁷ See the discussion in van Inwagen (1995, 265-267).

based on appeals to intuitions (even intuitions about identity and modality that are both common and powerful). Perhaps some proponents of RA will even take extraordinary implausibility as a badge of honor. After all, if it is true, as Barclay claims, that “the cross of Christ shatters every ordered system of norms, however embedded in the ‘natural’ order of ‘the world,’” then we should not be at all surprised or dismayed by the fact that the apocalyptic gospel of Christ “flouts our deepest convictions about ourselves” (Barclay, 2015, 394). To be “utterly bereft of merit” is a good thing, for both revelation and salvation are completely by grace.

To be clear, I have presented the “too many persons” worry as just that—a worry. I do not serve this up as a fatal objection or as a charge of heresy. But it is a worry that should, I think, really concern the proponents of RA who might be attracted to the TFA. For those who think of persons as van Inwagen does, it is not easy to know the difference between the person who is Paul and the non-person who is PHN but looks and sounds and acts just like Paul. For those who think of persons as the kind of things that are essentially persons (as does Freddoso), then the alignment of TFA with RA will be a complete non-starter. And, more broadly, the TFA does not seem to align well with what Paul is saying here. When Paul refers to the “life I now live in the flesh” (ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί), the verb he uses is a present active indicative. Again, just who is this? It can’t be the person who is Paul, for then we would have two incarnate persons and thus would violate conciliar Christology. So is it the person who is the Son (+CHN+PHN)? But then who is he talking to? Or is it PHN—but then how is this any different than the person who is Paul? Minimally, we need more explanation.

Too Many Natures?

Famously, conciliar Christology holds to the “double *homoousion*,” the incarnate Son is both consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with humans. This means that the Son is to be “acknowledged in two natures.”¹⁸ Some of the familiar challenges to classical Christology (e.g., adoptionism, Eutychianism) threatened this affirmation by reducing the number of natures to one. On the TFA, however, it appears that we have a different problem. It looks like we have more than two natures. Indeed, it turns out that the incarnate Son has *many* natures. With respect to this passage (interpreted along the lines of RA bolstered by a fusionist TFA), there are three natures on display: the divine nature of the Son, CHN, and PHN. On the face of it, at least, this is one nature too many.

A defender of the RA-TFA view might respond by saying that what the venerable ecumenical statement means is “*at least* two natures,” so that a position that holds to “two-or-more” natures might be acceptable. But of course this is not what the official statement says, and I know of no major patristic or medieval

¹⁸ See “The Chalcedonian Decree,” in Hardy (1977, 373).

interpreter of the creed who took it this way. At best it is implausible. Alternatively, one might say that what the creed demands is only the confession that the incarnate Son has an *abstract* (rather than concrete) human nature. If so, then, by being incarnate, the Son has exactly two abstract natures—one divine and one human—and he has the abstract human nature by exemplifying multiple concrete human natures. Accordingly, the desideratum of the creed is satisfied so long as Christ has at least one concrete human nature, and it does not really matter (for purposes of satisfying the creed) how many of those he has. This may be a way forward (the debates between concretists and abstractists are longstanding, of course), but it seems to me that anyone who takes this view of the creedal statements loses significant support for concretism. At any rate, again, more explanation would be helpful.

Too Many Sinners

So far we have faced concerns about both the possibility that the TFA leaves us with too many natures, and further that thinking of those natures as agents leaves us with too many persons. There is a further worry, and the concern here is about just what those agents (whether understood as persons or de-personed natures) are *doing* with their agency. This is the “too many sinners” worry. Flint is aware of this concern; as he expresses it: “If we let X stand for some human nature, it will be true to say in heaven that X sinned. And if X has been assumed by the Son, it follows that it will also be true to say that the Son sinned” (Flint, 2011, 201). He thinks that this is an “intriguing objection,” but he thinks that it can be handled the way that one handles other seemingly incompatible christological predicates. As the Son is limited in knowledge (according to CHN) but omniscient (according to the divine nature), so also the Son can be said to have the property of necessary goodness (and thus impeccability) according to the divine nature but also the property of *having sinned* (according to PHN). Thus, on TFA it is “true to say that the Son sinned, but only in a borrowed sense” (2011, 202). Flint thinks that this is enough to avoid any heterodox or otherwise untoward consequences.

Flint may or may not be correct about this worry when applied to the TFA in a stand-alone sense.¹⁹ It may be that the “too many sinners” worry threatens not a stand-alone TFA proposal but only the alliance of TFA with RA as a reading of Galatians 2:20 (as Flint suggests).²⁰ The reason that it may threaten an alliance of TFA but perhaps not TFA itself has to do with timing; Flint’s TFA seems to assume an eschatological terminus for redeemed humans as incarnate, but Paul’s statement is about what is happening “*now*.” The challenge should be obvious: if anyone who is joined in union with Christ is the same person as Christ and then commits sin, then

¹⁹ For reasons that would take us afield, I am not convinced that his proposed strategy does enough.

²⁰ More precisely, Flint suggests that this passage might provide support for TFA, but he does not mention apocalyptic theology.

the person who is the divine Son sins. This is hardly a property that is “borrowed” in the sense that it attaches to something that happened earlier in the life of a formerly-hypostasized nature (or a property that attaches to the whole in virtue of being a property of an earlier temporal part); this is something that happens *now* and is currently the action of the person. Whatever we are to make of Flint’s metaphysics, the conclusion we are left with appears to contradict creedal and biblical statements. For Chalcedon says that the incarnate Son is “like us in all things *except sin*.”²¹ And Chalcedon is only echoing Hebrews 4:15 at this point: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”

At any rate, it is not obvious that TFA will be attractive to the proponents of the RA position. For Barclay himself also says that Paul has “no hesitation in speaking of the believers as agents” (Barclay, 2015, 441). Das adds that nothing in the process is “obliterating their capacity to act” (Das, 2014, 270). Campbell says that Paul “is still distinguishable as a person within this progress” (Campbell, 2009, 848). So while it is an fascinating proposal and may offer the best way forward for RA, it is beset with challenges.

IV. A TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION RECONSIDERED

Apocalyptic interpreters are often dismissive of traditional interpretations. Linebaugh, as we have seen, rejects Aquinas’s account as a misguided effort to “domesticate” the true gospel. The basic interpretation offered by Aquinas, however, is not at all unique to him. To the contrary, it shares much in common with views that are much older.

Moving from such generalities to more focused exegetical considerations, let us consider John Chrysostom’s interpretation of the passage. Chrysostom seems to take Paul’s claim to have “died to the Law” through or by means of the Law to be nothing short of autobiographical. He also finds the claim rather ambiguous, and he lays out three possible interpretations. First, dying *to* the Law by means of the Law might refer in the first use of the term to the Mosaic law and in the second use to the “law of grace,” to what Paul refers to elsewhere as “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2). The second option is this: dying to the Law by means of the Law might refer to the fact that the Mosaic law itself points beyond itself and indicates that we should obey Christ rather than the law. A third option is to understand this as the recognition that the law places all those who do not fulfill it completely under sentence of death while also showing us that no one fulfills it completely (cf. Rom 3:23). Chrysostom explores these options but then seems to incline toward the third. He notes that Paul does *not* say “the Law is dead to me;” instead he says “I am dead to the Law,” and he takes the meaning of this to be that “as it is impossible for a dead corpse to obey the

²¹ See “The Chalcedonian Decree,” in Hardy (1977, 373).

commands of the Law, so also is it for me who have perished by its curse, for by its word I am slain.”²²

Chrysostom takes the death to refer primarily to spiritual death (although with what he takes to be obvious implications for physical life and death), and he takes the new life now “lived unto God” to be immortal and thus spiritual life (although, again, with what he takes to be obvious implications for physical life and death). Paul’s claim to be co-crucified is understood by Chrysostom to refer to union with Christ in baptism, and the words “nevertheless I live, yet not I” refer to “our subsequent manner of life whereby our members are mortified.” When Paul says that Christ lives in him, he means that he does nothing of which Christ would disapprove. For as Paul’s reference to “death” here “signifies not what is commonly understood” but a “death to sin,” so also by “life” he means “a delivery from sin.” Chrysostom explains that someone “cannot live to God, otherwise than by dying to sin, and as Christ suffered bodily death, so does Paul [undergo] a death to sin.” Chrysostom takes this to be an event that is in some sense past and settled, for at baptism the “old man” (παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) was crucified” (Rom 6:6). But he also takes it to be something that continues to involve our active commitment and participation. Thus Paul calls upon believers to put to death fornication, uncleanness, passion (Col 3:5); one remains alive to God so long as one is dead to sin, but to allow sin to live again is to bring ruin to the new life. Chrysostom calls upon his readers to recognize the perfection of Paul’s walk with Christ, for Paul’s “universal obedience” to God’s will enables him to say “not, ‘I live to Christ’ but, ‘Christ lives in me.’”

How does this interpretation compare to the RA proposal? We can see differences in several respects. First, and fundamentally, it maintains straightforward ontological continuity between the “I” who lived before and then was crucified with Christ and the “I” who now lives in union with Christ. Where the RA proposal posits a sharp and definitive break between the old and the new, Chrysostom never doubts that there is a robust continuity. Thus he feels no need to struggle with the qualms that bother Linebaugh; he simply knows that God loved *him*, that Christ died for *him*, and that *his* new life is found in union with Christ. Second, Chrysostom’s interpretation understands this “I”—the one that retains identity from old to new—to be decisively transformed. He takes the “death” referred to by Paul to be the cessation of the former way of life and the new life to be a life that is now “dead to sin” and instead vivified by God. He notes that Paul’s claim is not “I live to Christ;” it is not as if this is an effort at self-renovation. It is not something that can be reduced to moralism. Instead, Chrysostom points out, Paul’s astounding claim is that “Christ lives in me.” Third, Chrysostom also understands this new life to be just that—an ongoing, full-orbed, robust *life*. He is not thinking of some sort of static or legal condition. The older views are sometimes criticized by their apocalyptic critics for

²² See John Chrysostom, “Commentary on Galatians,” in Schaff (ed., 1994) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* Vol. XIII. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All quotes from Chrysostom in the following paragraphs can be found on pp. 22–23.

narrowing down salvation to a legal declaration. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the RA view raises questions about the place of human agency and the transformation of human agents. Chrysostom's view is different; his is an optimism of grace, and it is deeply theological and Christological in its basis and transformational in nature. For he sees crucifixion with Christ as something that involves and transforms the entire person; affections are transformed and actions are changed. Finally, his view takes the work of God in Christ and the new life provided by it to be both universal and particular as well as unconditional in one sense but conditional in another. Some versions of the older (especially "Reformed") views are the focus of criticism for limiting the extent of God's work in Christ, and, conversely, some expressions of the RA proposal raise concerns about the place and importance of human response. Chrysostom's interpretation differs from both in important ways. He clearly thinks of God's work in Christ to be, in important senses, both universal and unconditional. What Christ does is intended for, and available to, all. At the same time, however, in another sense what God does in the event of Christ's crucifixion is both particular and conditional, for it both invites and requires a response. As the "Golden-Mouthed" preacher puts it, "the sacrifice was offered for all... and sufficient to save all, but those who enjoy the blessing are the believing only."

V. CRUCIFIXION WITH CHRIST: A MODEST PROPOSAL

What are we to make of all this? I began with a comparison of what I have called the "Modest" and "Radical" apocalyptic interpretations of Paul. I confess that I am convinced by the Radical proposal that the "nomistic" interpretation offered by the Modesty crowd does not do justice to the point that Paul makes with such force and passion. But I have also argued that the Radical reading runs into serious difficulties. I think that these difficulties make it untenable. On the other hand, I find that the older interpretation represented by John Chrysostom avoids such problems while also steering clear of the merely "nomistic self" interpretation. Briefly, I shall summarize the main points.

First, it seems obvious that there is ontological continuity of the self; however exactly we are to account for this metaphysically, there is real personal identity of the pre-conversion Paul and the post-conversion Paul.²³ As Susan G. Eastman puts it, "the power of God works in his life without obliterating his 'self' (2:20)." To the contrary, as she rightly notes, "the power of God frees Paul to be an agent, an acting subject" in ways that he was unable to before (Eastman, 2007, 60).

Second, the death referred to here is not total annihilation. It is not a cessation of being or the loss or replacement of personal identity. Instead, to "die" here refers

²³ For present purposes, we need not endorse any particular view; whether one opts for, say, four-dimensionalism over other proposals will depend upon other factors.

to the surrender of the former and sinful way of life.²⁴ As Wright says, “dying to something” means “repudiating it” (Wright, 2013, 1430).

Third, the new life that is lived in union with Christ is life that is morally transformed. As Michael J. Gorman observes, Paul places great importance on the reality of life that is transformed in light of the resurrection (Gorman, 2009, 67). There are, as Walter Hansen points out, both passive and active elements to Paul’s teaching (Hansen, 2010, 76). The ethical elements are holistic in nature; Paul insists that this is life that is lived now (*vuv*). And it is life that is lived in the “flesh” (*σαρξ*). “Flesh” here does not carry the negative connotations that it does elsewhere in Paul. In fact, it is striking that Paul opts for this word to describe the new life that is lived “now.” His view of the power of the crucified and resurrected Son of God is so strong that he believes that even our “flesh” is redeemed and restored and eventually perfected. In Paul’s usage here, “flesh” is, as de Boer puts it, merely “the substance that covers a human being’s bones” (de Boer, 2011, 162). As such, this fleshly, embodied existence may still be mortal and weak, but it is not sinful as such. As Eastman says, Paul is referring “simply to human, corporeal existence” (Eastman, 2007, 168). The importance of this is profound: Paul is not saying that deliverance from evil comes only at the last day or at some point when those redeemed by God will have different bodies or completely new identities. No, he is saying that the life that is lived now—the life lived in *this* flesh—is life that is lived in union with Christ.

As such, this life that is lived in union with Christ shares the “mind of Christ.” Recent work on “joint attention” is relevant here. What Paul gestures toward here is not merely a collection of third-person statements *about* Christ, but nor, as Eastman points out, does Paul mean to indicate that his union with Christ is “an extension of first-person self-awareness” (Eastman 2018, 157). It is, instead, something more like “joint attention.” As such, it includes both what Eleonore Stump refers to as “dyadic joint attention” and what she calls “triadic joint attention.”²⁵ Dyadic joint attention refers to the mutual closeness and shared presence of two persons in relation to one another; in our case, it would refer to the shared attention whereby Paul and Christ know one another to such an extent that Paul and Christ come to share the same affections and intentions. Thus Paul comes to know—even if imperfectly, yet more and more—what Christ values, what Christ loathes, and what Christ loves. Paul’s knowledge of this is *personal* knowledge, and Paul comes to know this about Christ only as he comes to *share* the affections and intentions of Christ. For Paul to be joined in union with Christ is for Paul to know and share Christ’s own passion for justice and mercy. It is to know and share the “wrath of the Lamb” against all that despoils God’s good creation and especially those creatures made in God’s image. It is to know and share Christ’s love for those who have been bruised and busted and broken by sin.

Such joint attention that comes with union with Christ also involves a triadic dimension. This is shared focus and mutual intentions toward a third party or person;

²⁴ See Longenecker (1990, 91).

²⁵ Stump (2010, 113-119). See also Stump (2013, 29-53) and Eastman (2013, 125-144).

in our case, it would refer to the shared attention that Paul and Christ direct toward *another*. Thus Paul comes to know—even if imperfectly, yet more and more—Christ’s devotion to God and his intentions for the creation. Again, Paul’s knowledge of this is *personal* knowledge, and Paul comes to know this as he comes to actually *share* Christ’s affections and intentions. With Christ, Paul comes to know and share the communion of the Son with the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. With Christ, Paul comes to know and share Christ’s compassion for his creatures and indeed in his willingness to suffer for the sake of his enemies. As Paul comes to know Christ’s love more and more, so also he comes to share Christ’s desire not only for the good of the other but also a desire for union with the other.

The proposal I am offering here coheres well with the deep-seated and widespread intuitions that morality is central to notions of personal identity. As Nina Strohming and Shaun Nichols have argued, very common intuitions pump out the conclusion that “moral traits are considered more important to personal identity than any other part of the mind” (Strohming and Nichols, 2014, 168).²⁶ Indeed, these intuitions are so strong that it is natural to refer to someone who has been renovated and remade morally and spiritually as a “new person” (understood, of course, in a loose and popular sense). On the proposal that I am forwarding, the same person or self or “I” has been renewed so thoroughly and sanctified so wholly that she can be said to be a “new creature” in a crucially important sense (2 Cor 5:17).

Despite these strengths, however, does such a proposal—one that looks backward to go forward—somehow “domesticate” the gospel? Does my admittedly traditional reading somehow undercut the “singularity” and “radicality” of the one true gospel proclaimed by Paul? I cannot see how it does. To the contrary, I am awestruck by the power and radicality of it. I take it that what Paul is talking about here is his account of his own personal experience, but it is more than that. It is, as Wright points out, a “paradigm case” (Wright, 2015, 344). As such, and in a Pauline register, it means that God loves *me*. God loves me as a sinner who lives in rebellion against God and all that God loves. God loves me as a sinner—but far too much to leave me as a sinner in a state of rebellion. Instead, God takes *me*—the same me that has turned away from God and God’s ways—and God loves me enough to reclaim me and restore me and renew me, and then eventually to perfect me. Now, what is ultimate about me is not, say, identity politics or even personal history. As Eastman says, “When the “I” is crucified with Christ, the ego is unmoored from any prior sources of identity, worth, direction, or conversely, all sources of shame, dishonor, and despair...” (Eastman, 2017, 174). What is ultimate about me is the fact that I am joined in union with Christ. And, as Chrysostom recognized so long ago, this fact has truly radical consequences for my life, the life I “now live” in “the flesh.”

²⁶ I should note that “widespread” and “very common” is indexed to empirical work among North Americans in the early twenty-first century.

VI. CONCLUSION

If I am joined in union with Christ, then this life—the life that I live *now*, in this *flesh*, *this* life—is lived by faith in the Son of God, the incarnate Son who loved me and gave himself for me.

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