The Graced Body

Toward a Theology of

Human Sexuality

A Thesis submitted to Charles Sturt University
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By

The Reverend Bruce William Shaw
(Brother Bruce-Paul, SSF),
BA (Monash), BD (MCD, Melbourne), STM (GTS, New York)

March, 2011
# Table of Contents

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP ................................................................. 5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................ 6

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................. 8

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................. 9
  1.1 Engaging the Whole Body .............................................................. 9
  1.2 Stating the thesis .......................................................................... 16
  1.3 Embodiment and grace ............................................................... 19
  1.4 Theological background: 1940–1990 ........................................... 22
  1.5 Recent theology: 1990–2010 .......................................................... 32
  1.6 Scripture and sexuality ............................................................... 40
  1.7 An inclusive interpretation of grace ............................................ 52
  1.8 Bodily boundaries ..................................................................... 60

CHAPTER 2: EMBODYING HUMANITY ............................................... 68
  2.1 Karl Barth’s theological anthropology ........................................ 69
  2.2 The Holy Spirit as the life of the human soul and body ................ 92
  2.3 Barth’s struggle with pneumatology and anthropology ............... 96

CHAPTER 3: APPRECIATION AND RETRIEVAL OF KARL BARTH’S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY ......................................................... 98
  3.1 Equality and Subordination in Barth’ analogy of relations .......... 100
  3.2 Resolving the Tension of Equality and Subordination ............... 102
  3.3 Barth’s Difficulty with Human Nature ....................................... 110
  3.4 The Difficulty of the Absence of the Spirit from Embodied Practices ...... 115
  3.5 Toward a fresh engagement with theological anthropology and pneumatology .... 117
CHAPTER 4: EMBODYING SPIRIT ................................................................. 119
4.1 Moltmann’s theological anthropology: embodiment .................................................. 123
4.2 Moltmann’s theological anthropology: the “imago Dei” ............................................... 124
4.3 Moltmann’s Social Trinity .......................................................................................... 132
4.4 The Holy Spirit and embodiment ................................................................................. 146
4.5 Nature, grace and glory ............................................................................................... 148
4.6 The Eschatological Body — raised and transfigured ..................................................... 156

CHAPTER 5: CRITICAL RETRIEVAL AND APPRECIATION OF MOLTMANN’S THEOLOGY ........................................................................... 161
5.1 Humanity, sexuality and eschatology ........................................................................... 164
5.2 Moltmann on sexuality ................................................................................................ 167
5.3 Implications for persons of same-sex orientation ......................................................... 171
5.4 An Embodied Human Future ....................................................................................... 177

CHAPTER 6: DIVINE EMBODIMENT—TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE AND EMBODIED THEOLOGY ................................................................. 180
6.1 Bodily Wholeness ........................................................................................................ 182
6.2 Valuing difference ....................................................................................................... 184
6.3 Integrating Body and Spirit ......................................................................................... 192
6.4 Inclusive Contributions from Three Theologians ........................................................ 198
   Rowan Williams ............................................................................................................. 198
   Eugene F. Rogers Jr. ....................................................................................................... 200
   Graham Ward ................................................................................................................. 205
6.5 Belonging in the Body of Christ ................................................................................... 206

CHAPTER 7: HOLINESS AND THE GRACED BODY ........................................ 209
7.1 Marriage ....................................................................................................................... 217
7.2 Celibacy ........................................................................................................................ 223
7.3 Friendship ..................................................................................................................... 228
7.4 Grace embodied .......................................................................................................... 235

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................. 241

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 246
Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.
Acknowledgements

Researching and writing a part-time and distance thesis that is concerned with the themes of grace, the body and the Holy Spirit and an inclusive sexuality has been an arduous and risky enterprise for a Franciscan friar during the past eight and a half years. Many people have shared in these years of research and writing and responded positively and hopefully to the theme of the thesis. I thank them all for their time, their gifts and their patience. I acknowledge specifically:

St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra and the Centre for Research and Graduate Training of Charles Sturt University enabled my work financially and practically. I thank the Right Reverend Dr Tom Frame, Associate Professor and Director of St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Associate Professor Dr David Neville, Head of the School of Theology at CSU, the Faculty and students at St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra, and the Reverend Professor James Haire of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture who provided welcome spaces for research and writing. No research is possible without a library, and as a distance student, my work has been greatly facilitated by the librarians at St Mark’s Library, especially Susan Phillips and Kaye Malins.

My Principal Supervisors have been the Right Reverend Dr Stephen Pickard and since 2006, Dr Heather Thomson of St Mark’s. Co-supervisors have been the Very Reverend Dr Don Saines, the Reverend Dr Graeme Garrett, and Associate Professor, the Reverend Dr Scott Cowdell. For their encouragement, exacting standards, challenging questions and invigorating discussions I give heartfelt thanks.

The community of Post-Graduate Scholars at St Mark’s provided encouragement, critical interest and support. It has been a privilege to work alongside Matthew Anstey, Cliff Bird, Marilyn Clark, Jane Foulcher, Jonathan Geddes, the late David Hunter, Chris Ledger, Jeanette Mathews, Alice Murray and John Robinson.

Thanks to the Reverend Dr Barry Rogers of Melbourne and Brother Kentigern John SSF in Leeds, UK, for reading and responding to the thesis.

The Brothers of the Society of Saint Francis (the Anglican Franciscan Brothers) in the Australia New Zealand Province have given unstinting support and encouragement for which I am immensely grateful; special thanks to Brothers Alfred BoonKong, Christopher John, Colin Wilfred, Daniel, Donald Campbell, Joseph and Nathan James. In 2009, the Brothers of St Francis Friary at Alnmouth, Northumberland in the European Province of SSF welcomed me there for some months of dedicated research and writing and gave me warm and generous hospitality. Canon John Townroe of Saint Boniface Theological College, Warminster, UK gave a generous gift toward the purchase of books early in the project.

Many friends and communities have provided me with hospitality and encouragement during the intermittent travelling between Stroud and Canberra, and elsewhere, especially Chris and Pam.
Albany, Theresa and John Angert-Quilter, John Ballard and Ted Reid, Thomas Andrew Baxter and Ben Mawston, Paul Black and the St John’s Student Community, Craig Blockley and Geoff Mansell in Auckland, NZ, Pirrial Clift, Scott Cowdell and Lisa Carley, Stephen Couling, Adrian Evans and Maria Bohun, James and Rose Doery, Elaine and Bill Farmer, Peter and Val Gowland, Graeme Lawrence and Greg Goyarts, Greg and Pip Mills, John and Ingrid Moses, Chris Roper and Laurence Lian, Andrew St John, Adrian Stevens and Jeannie Minnis, Richard and Sarah Webb, and the Dominican Friars of the Blackfriars Priory, Watson, ACT.

My thanks to the Reverend Dr Andrew McGowan, Warden, Trinity College in the University of Melbourne for the invitation to be a Visiting Scholar in Theology in 2005, 2007 and 2010.

Alongside all these, I give thanks for the loving support of my father, the late George Shaw, and my mother, Mary Shaw, and my sisters, Catherine Yap and Marjorie Shaw, and brother-in-law, Chye Yap, and their families.

Finally, I give thanks for the encouragement, inspiration and critical response to this project of a long-time friend and mentor, the late Bishop Max Thomas, sometime Bishop of Wangaratta, and Director of the Theological School at Trinity College in the University of Melbourne during my theological and priestly formation there from 1970 to 1972.

**Editorial Assistance**

I acknowledge with gratitude the generous gift of the editing skills and wisdom of my friend, Alma Ryrie Jones, in Melbourne, Victoria.

Abstract

This thesis develops a theme that is often missing from theological anthropology: the place and value of human sexuality. It contends that sexual love—whether expressed in monogamous other-sex or same-sex unions—can be an embodiment of grace and therefore can and should be recognised as, and expected to be, an occasion of holiness. Human sexuality and sexual union are included in the love of God, come from the love of God, and are a consequence of the love of God.

Through engaging with theologians as diverse as Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Rowan Williams, Grace Jantzen, Graham Ward, Eugene F. Rogers Jr., Gerard Loughlin, Sarah Coakley and James Alison, the thesis tells the story of successive revelation that sets out to link the Trinity, theological anthropology, Christology, and pneumatology to enable a fresh valuing of the human body and human sexual relationships. The approach is inclusive and looks toward the church’s blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian Christians living in monogamous unions. The Graced Body is the unifying theme of the thesis and refers to the personal and the ecclesial dimensions of Christian life.
Chapter 1: Introduction

How I am connected to this body, I do not know, nor do I understand how I can be an image of God, and still be mingled with this filthy clay; when it is in good condition, it wars against me, and when it is itself under attack, it causes me grief! I love it as my fellow servant, but struggle against it as an enemy; I flee it as something enslaved, just as I am, but I show it reverence as called, with me, to the same inheritance. I long that it be dissolved, and yet I have no other helper to use in striving for what is best, since I know what I was made for, and know that I must ascend towards God through my actions.

—Gregory Nazianzus, Orations 14:
On the Love of the Poor.

1.1 Engaging the Whole Body

Gregory Nazianzus (329–389 CE) struggles with his human embodiment because he is a Christian and a human being of his age and thereby influenced by both an ecclesial-theological culture and the pervasive dualistic Hellenist culture of his region. He thus struggles to integrate body and Spirit. How can things earthly and heavenly belong together? How can a human body destined for decay be related to a human soul destined for immortality? Yet, Gregory recognises that he is an image of God and that, like it or not, whether as friend or foe, he cannot be divorced from his body, however much he desires to be.¹ Gregory’s reflections are found in Oration 14: “On the Love of the Poor” and this context reminds us that he is equally influenced by the demands of the Gospel life of compassionate service. He chooses to live within the tension of human embodiment neither resolving it in favour of the body nor the soul. Human body and human soul belong

together as part of God’s good creation. Gregory recognises that he cannot ascend to God without his body.

Escape from embodiment has long been a temptation of human existence and sometimes too of Christian life. The desire to be set free from the tensions of bodily life has been partly fuelled by a theological anthropology that understands the human soul or spirit as being more closely related to the divine world than the created, earthly world. To counter these influences that continue to this day, negatively influencing Christian understandings of human being and of the physical body and sexuality, I propose a more holistic theology. This is supported by a biblical anthropology in which the body and soul are seen to be indivisibly connected. The purpose of this thesis is to engage the body rather than exclude it from our thinking.

The discipline of theological anthropology is part of the Christian doctrine of creation. It is concerned particularly with the Christian understanding and experience of what it means to be a human creature alongside all other creatures. It does this in the light of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, of the Incarnation and resurrection of Christ (Christology), of the work and gift of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) and of the doctrines of sin and of new creation in Christ. This thesis looks towards a fresh engagement of the human body with the human soul or spirit.

In the biblical narratives, the Spirit of God broods over the body of creation. It comes upon and then departs from Israelite kings and prophets. It is embodied in feminine terms in the Israelite wisdom tradition. Through the Spirit of God, the Son of God is embodied in Mary at the annunciation. It descends upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River and remains with him until he hands it over to the Father in his dying

---

3 Ibid., 154-159; 160-162.
on the cross. This is the same Spirit who raises the crucified and dead body of Jesus of Nazareth to new and never before experienced resurrection life. This same Spirit of God—named the Holy Spirit—descends upon the apostles gathered in the Upper Room at Pentecost transforming their lives and energising them and the community of the friends of Jesus for the ongoing mission and ministry of God. To the surprise of Peter and his Jewish companions who understood Gentiles as alienated from the God of Israel and, at best, second class religious citizens, the same Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles gathered in the home of Cornelius in Caesarea enabling them to speak in tongues and extol God. This visible presence of the Holy Spirit is interpreted as an affirmation of God’s approval of these Gentiles that enables their incorporation into the new community of his love—the body of Christ. This Spirit of God engages both the personal and the ecclesial body. In Trinitarian terms, it is the Father’s gift that continuously acts to graft the community of faith into Christ.

The Spirit of the living God brings to life the body of Christ—the Church—through the centuries. The Holy Spirit gave stability and encouragement to some of the early Christians, their bodies washed and graced in baptism at the river, pool or font, to face the traumatic baptism of martyrdom in prison, arena or palace. Yet how the Spirit of the living God is embodied in the human person and or in human persons in the church—the community of faith—is a mystery. That this remains a mystery is a good thing because it prevents us from treating the human body or the ecclesial body as a possession, something that we own and control. From a Christian viewpoint, whether we refer to the human body, to the body of the crucified and raised Jesus Christ, to his

---


5 This “resurrection life” is not resuscitated life; it is not a return to what once was but life that is totally new and from God who is the Creator, Redeemer and Giver of New Life. Yet this resurrection life is linked to the identity and form of the human Jesus who was crucified.


church as his living body, or to the sacramental body of the bread broken and wine
poured out in the Eucharist, this body is graced by and through the presence and power
of the Holy Spirit. It is this graced body with which this thesis is concerned. It is
graced because the body—the human body—is part of the good creation brought into
being by God who acts in love and mercy. It is graced also because this love of God
was embodied (incarnated) in the person of Jesus Christ; God with us. From the
perspective of theological anthropology, whatever definitions of the human being are
used—body and soul, or body, mind and spirit, or heart and body—the Holy Spirit is
involved, actively present but distinct from the human being, engaged in forming and
re-forming human beings into being fully human. Alongside this, Christians recognise
that the Spirit of God is working to shape them corporately into the body of Christ and
personally to be Christ-like.

For Pauline and other New Testament communities, the resurrection
appearances of Christ and the remembered witness of them, focussed the church’s
aspiration upon the eternal life to come rather than the temporary life in the body of
flesh. This hope enabled them to cope with the painful experience of bodily loss
through disease, death and martyrdom. According to the Apostle Paul the human body
could be described as an earthly tent and a burdensome one at that. What was needed
was not a stripping away of this tent but further clothing, so that “what is mortal may be
swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:1–5). The personal and ecclesial experience of the
Holy Spirit was the certainty of this coming fulfilment but the exigencies of bodily
existence—the need to eliminate waste, their sexual urges—reminded them that they
were in exile from their life with Christ.

However, from the earliest period of Christian history the very positive
valuation of the human body inherited from the church’s Hebraic background, and
affirmed in the theology of the incarnation and resurrection, has been challenged by a
dualistic vision of creation. In theology, dualism refers to the dichotomy between the
divine and human, Spirit and matter, soul and body, in which transient, earthly matter is
as nothing compared to the eternal, permanent value of the spiritual or heavenly things.\(^*\)
This dualism had a pervasive influence throughout Hellenistic countries or places
previously influenced by Greek occupation; for example, Egypt and Syria and
Mesopotamia in the first century CE. A further important element in the definition of
this ancient dualistic worldview is the idea that things of the mind and spirit are good
whereas material, earthly things, matter itself, are evil. Hence such dualistic
anthropologies held that the essential character—the true person “in its non-bodily
dimensions”—was located in the soul.\(^*\) In contrast to the Hebraic vision in which the
body united the whole person (flesh, heart and soul) the Platonic vision understood the
physical body as the source of division: “…that which divides one human being from
another rather than relates them to each other”.\(^*\) This tension between unity and
difference has been a major source of conflict in theological anthropology ever since.

Dualism within Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical systems and Greek
culture in general influenced the developing theologies and spirituality of the early
Christian communities. Recent textual and historical research has revealed the richness
and variety of Christian life, spirituality and thought in the cultures of Syria and regions
to the east of Palestine,\(^*\) and the Greek influence had been present in these places too.
These several and distinct influences were especially felt in the emerging Christological,
anthropological and pneumatological definitions and controversies over several
centuries. This was true of the similar but distinct heterodox Gnostic and Manichaean

---

of the influence of dualistic world views on the cultures and religions of the Ancient Near East.

\(^*\) Colin E. Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity—the

\(^*\) Ibid., 48.

\(^*\) Susan A. Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective,” in Theology and
Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr (Oxford, UK/Malden, MA:
Blackwell, 2002).
groups in which the dualism of spirit over matter featured so powerfully and in such complicated ways. As Peter Brown makes clear, what was understood in one part of the Roman Empire was not necessarily understood in a similar way elsewhere within or beyond the fluctuating imperial boundaries.¹²

Patricia Cox Miller nuances our understanding of the working out of Platonic dualism upon the growing Christian ascetic movement’s view of the human person during the 4th century CE.¹³ The problem about the body, she suggests, was that of lack. It was not that the body imprisoned an immortal soul but that it was not fully a body: “it was not a body of plenitude”.¹⁴ It was incomplete; dim in comparison with the dazzling, transformed, eschatological body of the resurrection.¹⁵ Miller carefully surveys the recorded dreams of two Cappadocian theologians, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzus. In these dreams, the dim body of present, fleshly, brutish reality is contrasted with the dazzling, heavenly body that is to come. The problem with the body of flesh was that it “impairs our gaze upon the holy”.¹⁶ For the two Gregorys and others of their era, the body was not easily comprehended as the valued place of integration of the human soul with the divine Spirit. It kept you on the earth rather than assisting you to ascend to heaven. It communicated a sense of incompleteness.

The dualism of antiquity is not the only form of dualism. Of equal theological significance is the dualism of modernity that stems from the writings of René Descartes and his followers in the Enlightenment. In contrast to Plato who had elevated the human soul above the human body in a dichotomy that separated the transient from the

¹⁴ Ibid., 282.
¹⁵ Ibid., 284. Miller quotes Peter Brown’s observation that in the thought of the Cappadocians “Men and women were poised between an original, lost prototype of human nature, created by God in His own image, and revealed to the visible world in the shimmering ‘angelic’ majesty of Adam, and a fullness of humanity that would come about, through the restoration of Adam’s first state, at the Resurrection”. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 293-294.
non-transient, Descartes developed the modern subject-object dualism in which the soul or mind is the reflective, thinking human subject whereas the body with its capacity for sensate perception is an object.\textsuperscript{17} This dichotomy between subject and object in which the body tends to be treated as a thing continues to influence theological anthropology in our present post-modern world.

Dualism is thus a multifaceted phenomenon for Christian theology that values the spiritual above the material. It is one way in which Christian communities cope with their experiences of incompleteness, of exile, of loss and inadequacy in embodied existence; with the sense that the Spirit does not really belong to the physical body.

Responding to the influence of these dualisms, Timothy Gorringe argues:

> What is missed is the role of the body in the economy of God. Human life is, not by accident, or lamentably, life in the body, and love is love in the body, for embodied creatures. Spirit is not apart from this but in and through it, as the hypostatic union and the resurrection make clear. We could not have a more emphatic affirmation of the body than we find in the core Christian story and its theological commentary.\textsuperscript{18}

What Gorringe draws out for us so succinctly is the inextricable relationship between human love and divine love that is incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ through the creative and re-creative action of the Holy Spirit. In and through Christ’s love, the human body and the Christian body are affirmed in their totality. This is now recognised by a growing number of theologians, as will be seen, yet many do not acknowledge that this total view of the human body includes sexuality and loving relationships.

### 1.2 Stating the thesis

I propose that an inclusive theology of sexuality has a solid basis in a theological anthropology that integrates pneumatology and Christology. By inclusive I mean a


\textsuperscript{18} Timothy J. Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-274.
theology that includes as many human beings and their communities as possible. In particular an inclusive theology of sexuality will intentionally include opposite-sex oriented and same-sex oriented persons and their relationships. The human body and human sexuality are properly understood in the light of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all human beings. Where the Holy Spirit is present and active, there grace is embodied. Grace is another term for the free and generous and purposeful love of the triune God directed towards creation and humanity.\(^{19}\)

I use the title “The Graced Body” to emphasise that dualistic thinking and division is not a Christian option. The graced body implies that the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit of Christian faith and experience—is present to us as embodied persons and as embodied ecclesia, the body of Christ. Where the Spirit of God is present in embodied human lives (and all human lives are embodied) the transforming effects of that presence may take the shape of graced lives through which the presence of God can be recognised. The shape and form of grace can be described as embodied holiness.

Persons in these graced relationships should be able to participate fully in the church’s sacramental life because they, through their baptism, are living members of the ecclesia—the body of Christ. It is through the sacrament of baptism that human persons are adopted as sons and daughters of God, incorporated into the body of Christ, receive forgiveness of sins, freedom from death, new life and the Holy Spirit. From a Trinitarian perspective this is the work of the whole Trinity but is ascribed to the Holy

---

Spirit. Personal and ecclesial belonging and relationship in Christ are a gift or grace of the Spirit.

This thesis develops a theme that is often missing from theological anthropology: the place and value of human sexuality. It is my contention that sexual love—whether expressed in monogamous other-sex or same-sex unions—can be an embodiment of grace and therefore can and should be recognised as, and expected to be, an occasion of holiness. Human sexuality and sexual union are included in the love of God, come from the love of God, and are a consequence of the love of God.

Two things follow from this for the church. The first will be working out how such partnerships can receive ecclesial recognition and subsequent blessing. What this liturgical blessing builds upon is recognition by the partners and by their friends, family and neighbours that in this union the Holy Spirit is present. This is known because of the holistic character of the relationship. It is not just about sexual coupling. At best, marital-like unions, whether opposite-sex or same-sex, involve the whole of the partners’ lives and are marked by unconditional mutuality, discovery and engagement. This is one of the contexts in which Christian holiness in all its diversity can be manifested and recognised.

The second will be the determination that such persons, male or female, may be ordained (after appropriate discernment, selection and training) for liturgical presidency, pastoral ministry and prophetic leadership in the church.

Clearly, both these matters are a present point of struggle, confusion and dissension for many of the mainstream church denominations, and have become increasingly so in the past ten years. What marital-like partnerships of practicing lesbian and gay Christians will be called is a current difficulty—a moot point—within the various ecclesial denominations as well as within gay and lesbian Christian

---

communities and the wider secular community. Here I use the term “same-sex unions” to refer to such monogamous, faithful marriage-like relationships while recognising that gay and lesbian Christians and the wider lesbian and gay community sometimes use the euphemistic terms “friendship” or “sexual friendship”.

This thesis examines how theologians in the recent past have contributed to the development of a theological anthropology of the graced body. Such a theological anthropology rests soundly on scriptural, theological and historical scholarship and sets us free to rejoice in the fullness of our physical, material, bodily life through the Spirit whose loving presence rests upon and between us. The thesis also examines how pneumatology—the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—has been applied to the embodied character of human and ecclesial life, including human sexual experience and love.

Two particular questions help to focus this aspect of the thesis:

- If the Holy Spirit indwells and rests upon the human body what are the implications of this reality for human sexuality and sexual relationships?
- How do our human sexuality and sexual relationships impinge upon God, the Trinity of love?

In these matters, the thesis considers the graced body as both personal and ecclesial. Of particular importance will be the examination of the inter-relationship between the Spirit of God and the constitution of human being as soul and body which is explored in the coming chapters.

1.3 Embodiment and grace

From the perspective of Christian theological anthropology, “embodiment” means to personify or represent in human or animal form; to incarnate or give body to a spirit.21 Thus embodiment may refer to the human soul or divine spirit that gives life.

vigour, direction, to the body. It may refer to the body that gives shape and form to the spirit or soul. The concept of embodiment involves the meeting of the life-giving Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, with the totality of the human person, body and soul.

Embodiment is my awareness that my physical body is enlivened by the presence of my soul, my living personal self. In this sense, embodiment is about awareness. My sexuality is part of my being embodied; but it is not the whole of it. Embodiment is also “the medium in which and by which the encounter between human and divine takes place.”

Roger Scruton, writing on Sexual Desire, makes a helpful distinction between the experiences of embodiment and body:

Although I am identical with my body, my experience of embodiment must be sharply distinguished from my experience of the body. In arousal the unity between body and person is immediately experienced, and forms the living focus of an interpersonal response. But the body is not the object of this response. …Arousal reaches through the body to the spirit which animates its every part.

I find Scruton’s terms “arouse” and “animate” helpful for describing the role of the Spirit of God in bringing about “embodiment”.

Along with theologians like Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann, I understand this embodying of body and soul to be the work of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. In this is comprehended not only the body and soul of the believing, baptised, practicing Christian but also the body and soul of every human being. This is one of the universal claims of Christian faith. Embodiment and Spirit belong together. The Spirit indwells or rests upon the body of the human person. The body receives the Spirit and is enlivened by it.

---


Embodiment refers not only to a physical body but also to a social, political or religious group. This places our identity and belonging within a wider context than the narrowly individual. For Christians this means that embodiment happens within the community of faith—the ecclesia—the gathered assembly of the church, the body of Christ. In this regard, theological anthropology has a significant relationship to ecclesiology and pneumatology. Both the personal human body and the ecclesial body are held in being by the Spirit of God in a living partnership and communion—κοινωνία. 26

To refer to the body as graced is to refer to it as touched and transformed by the generous, utterly free gift of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification. Until recently, creation, incarnation and redemption and therefore Christology carried the theological weight in the development of a positive focus on embodiment. However, the past fifty years has seen the retrieval of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of Trinitarian theology as crucial for the life of the Church. Some scholars have indicated that Trinitarian theology will be a creative foundation for the development of an inclusive theology of sexuality. 27

In pointing to the presence of the language of sexuality in the Bible, Rowan Williams reminds us that a continuing task of all Christian communities is the proclamation of the truth that grace is about transformation:

---

Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted. The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ’s body tells us that God desires us, as if we were God, as if we were that unconditional response to God’s giving that God’s self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God.  

This divine desire has consequences for the character of our responsive love to God and to our fellow human beings. According to Williams, the rationale of the Christian community is to assist in “ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy”. He helps us focus some of the issues that arise from sexual desire and our being sexual bodies when he writes:

What is less clear is why the fact of sexual desire, the concrete stories of human sexuality rather than the generalising metaphors it produces, are so grudgingly seen as matters of grace, or only admitted as matters of grace when fenced with conditions. Within the history of the church, Williams’ question can be applied to the hesitant attitude to married life as well as a reluctance to welcome same-sex persons in committed partnerships. It is only since the Reformation in the sixteenth century that marriage has enjoyed a higher status in the life of the church than the institutionalised forms of celibate life: male or female monastic or religious life, or the celibate ordained life of most Roman Catholic and some Anglican clergy. Marriage of clergy and the practice of clerical concubinage in the church of the West were universally forbidden by the First and Second Lateran Councils in 1123 and 1139 CE. The imposition of clerical celibacy in the Western church was in marked contrast to the practice of the church of the East in which clergy were free to choose prior to ordination whether to be married or in monastic community life. L life alone, as a single person, is not permitted

---

29 Ibid., 312.
30 Ibid.
for Eastern Orthodox clergy. This is also true for their bishops who are invariably chosen from monastic communities.

1.4 Theological background: 1940–1990

In this section I survey the work of a number of theologians, biblical scholars and historians from the mid-twentieth century whose published works have helped elucidate the relationship between theological anthropology, pneumatology, the body, sexuality and ecclesiology.

In the second volume of *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation* published in 1948, Karl Barth (1886–1968) laid out his theological understanding of humankind as God’s covenant-partner; established a doctrine of humanity in which Jesus Christ is the image of God, the true human being; and in which human beings are indivisibly united as soul and body. 32 Barth’s particular stance on gender, in which male and female are understood as co-humanity, created in God’s image, was unique and controversial. 33 His central anthropological insight was that the Spirit of God is the basis of the human soul and body, 34 but is not to be confused with the soul. 35 Barth was strongly opposed to any dualistic separation of soul from body. 36 His theology of God and of humanity were characterised by relationality. 37 The magnitude of *Church Dogmatics* and its nuanced depth means that most theologians take their cue from him. Eugene F. Rogers

---

34 Barth, *Church Dogmatics, the Doctrine of Creation*, III/2, 344.
35 Ibid., 373.
36 See his argument through this section § 46 and especially in his discussion on spiritualism and materialism on Ibid., 391-392; here 392.
in the USA and Graham Ward in Manchester, UK, are examples of contemporary theologians writing on sexuality and embodiment who develop their own theology in dialogue with Barth’s work.\textsuperscript{38}

In \textit{Time for Consent} Norman Pittenger, an American Episcopal theologian, argued for a more accepting attitude of the church towards homosexuals, whilst in \textit{Making Sexuality Human} he addressed the wider arena of sexuality, marriage and homosexuality.\textsuperscript{39} The theological basis for his openness to homosexual persons was a God who was incarnate in Christ and who loves and calls others to love in a fully human and embodied way. Pittenger believed that “in human personality the reality of love is the deepest and truest significance of human sexuality.”\textsuperscript{40}

Eight years later James B. Nelson, in \textit{Embodiment: an Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology}, drew upon theological assumptions that “positively affirmed the wholeness of embodied selves, the goodness of sexual pleasure, and the creative significance of sexual self-affirmation in an incarnational theology.”\textsuperscript{41} “Sexuality” meant more than erotic activity. For Nelson, it was an essential element of human experience, and therefore helped to define human persons “as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion—human and divine.”\textsuperscript{42} It was an essential element in our relationship with God.\textsuperscript{43} Nelson critically assessed earlier work, notably that of Helmut Thielicke\textsuperscript{44} and


\textsuperscript{40} Pittenger, \textit{Making Sexuality Human}, 39.


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{44} Helmut Thielicke, \textit{The Ethics of Sex} (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 79-144.
Derrick Sherwin Bailey,\textsuperscript{45} including Karl Barth’s derivation of a theology of marriage from Trinitarian doctrine. However, he believed that Barth over-emphasised the complementarity of male and female in marriage at the expense of single and homosexual persons.\textsuperscript{46} Nelson advocated a re-sexualising of the church’s theology so that a greater affirmation of desire and self-giving love could be affirmed and balanced.\textsuperscript{47} In his opinion, what the church needed was a sexual theology not a theology of sexuality.\textsuperscript{48}

An important source that Nelson used for his theology of embodiment was John A.T. Robinson’s \textit{The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology}.\textsuperscript{49} This short book was both exegetical and theological and remains an important study resource. It offers us two important insights. The first is that Paul uses the one Greek word \textit{σώμα} (\textit{soma}) to link together the several dimensions of his theological concept of the body that pervades the whole of his theology, as Robinson illustrated in the following quotation:

\begin{quote}
It is from the body of sin and death that we are delivered; it is through the body of Christ on the Cross that we are saved; it is into His body the Church that we are incorporated; it is by His body in the Eucharist that this Community is sustained; it is in our body that its new life has to be manifested; it is to a resurrection of this body to the likeness of His glorious body that we are destined.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

The significance of \textit{σώμα} (\textit{soma}) for Robinson is that it refers to the whole human being firmly set “in the solidarity of creation, as made for God.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 135-136. Nelson believed Barth’s interpretation ended up as “sex role stereotypes or on the genitalisation of sexuality” by connecting the alienated aspects of human sexuality with the doctrine of the image of God.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 31. Equally, \textit{σαρξ} (\textit{sarx}) “flesh” refers to the solidarity of humanity as distant and other from God.
Robinson’s second insight concerns the use of metaphor and analogy to describe the relationship between Jesus and the several theological uses of ‘body’ in Paul and the New Testament.

But to say that the Church is the body of Christ is no more of a metaphor than to say that the flesh of the incarnate Jesus or the bread of the Eucharist is the body of Christ. None of them is ‘like’ His body (Paul never says this); each of them is the body of Christ, in that each is the physical complement and extension of the one and the same Person and Life. They are all expressions of a single Christology.\textsuperscript{52}

In denying that metaphor and analogy are intended and focusing instead on the direct meaning, Robinson emphasises the importance of the embodied relationship between the personal, physical body of Jesus and the Eucharistic body, and by implication, the ecclesial body. The liturgical greeting means what it says: “(Presiding priest) We are the body of Christ. (People) His Spirit is with us.”\textsuperscript{53} According to Robinson, it is Paul who is the first of the New Testament writers to make this connection—“this extraordinary leap from the Eucharist to the Ecclesia itself as the extension of Christ’s human personality.”\textsuperscript{54}

In his focus on the body, Robinson does not leave out the Spirit. He makes important links between the Spirit and the resurrection body. The Spirit is the means of the transformation of the old human being into the new humanity of the resurrection—our new creation as a member of the body of Christ which begins in our baptism and leads gradually to our transformation to glory as a σῶμα πνευματικὸν (soma pneumatikon) “a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 44).\textsuperscript{55} Throughout his study, Robinson emphasises the corporate, ecclesial character of Christian personal life. This is an important underlying idea for this thesis on the “The Graced Body”.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{54} Robinson, The Body, 57.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 79-80.
Nelson noted the theological failure to use the doctrine of the goodness of creation stemming from Genesis 1 and the New Testament teaching of the embodiment of God in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth to bring about a positive valuing of the human body throughout much of the then nearly two thousand years of Christian history. He understood the influence of the dualistic separation of body from Spirit as the source of the sexual alienation that he was addressing in the 1970s.56 The human body of flesh has second place to that of the spirit or the soul.57 In this, Nelson recognised the persistent difficulty in Christian theology of connecting sexuality with “the full humanity of the one whom we call Truly Human”.58 His continuing interest in embodiment and human sexuality helped integrate the theme of the body in theological reflection and practical spirituality for two decades.59 To the question, “What, then, is ‘body theology’?” Nelson responds: “It is nothing more, nothing less than our attempts to reflect on body experience as revelatory of God”.60 This was a fresh and useful insight in the development of theological anthropology and the tentative theological explorations into human sexuality because by its linking of the body to the divine the inherited dualistic tradition that had kept the Spirit and the body separated was challenged. However, Nelson does not bring the body and Spirit together in a fresh engagement which would help counter the dualistic influences still present in the church and western culture.

The Australian Anglican patristic theologian, John R. Gaden (1938-1990), recognised the need for the church to engage in body and sexual theology if it was to

57 Ibid., 19-36; here 19.
58 Ibid., 77. Nelson argued: “If we take Jesus with utter seriousness and yet uneasily retreat from thoughts of his sexuality, or even recoil with repugnance, it is also likely that we shall either deny much of our own sexuality or else find considerable difficulty integrating our Christological beliefs into the reality of our lives as body-selves. (See Note 17 where he acknowledges that both Tom F. Driver, 1966, and William E. Phipps, 1975, make a similar point.)
60 Nelson, *Body Theology*, 50.
relate the central doctrines of the faith to the embodied lives of ordinary people at the close of the 1980s. Gaden proposed ten theses on sexuality in which he affirmed “the goodness of all bodies, women’s and men’s”, noted a link between personal, sexual and Christian identity, as well as suggesting that “A theology of sexuality also includes our experience of prayer, worship, Jesus and God.”61 From an Australian perspective, Gaden was a radical, careful and courageous theologian who was not afraid to address controversial topics such as homosexuality.62 Sadly, because of his untimely death, he never had time to explore the relationship between the Spirit and the body in relation to sexuality.

Ten years earlier, John Boswell, a professor of history at Yale University, proposed an explanation of possible causes of the growth in aggressive intolerance toward gay people from the twelfth century onwards in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*.63 This scholarly and controversial study received both praise and criticism. His discussion moved from the first century social mores of Roman society through a critique of the Early Church’s understanding of Scriptural passages and theological traditions referring to homosexual acts. Boswell noted the growth for a short period of a publicly visible gay subculture by the eleventh century. This sub-culture was marked by gay literature and the prominence and influence of respected gay persons at a variety of levels of society in most of Western


62 Gaden, *A Vision of Wholeness*, 228. Thesis Ten reads: “In developing a Christian perspective on homosexuality, the specific biblical material must be carefully set out in context and our more complete knowledge of human sexuality be given sufficient weight.”

Europe. Throughout his study, he tried to account for the reasons for the decline and rise of anti-gay attitudes and legislation within Christian church and culture. He was unable to explain the change of attitude to gay culture to the virulent hostility evidenced in popular culture, legal and theological works towards the end of the twelfth century.

Eight years later Princeton University professor and historian Peter Brown critically evaluated the transformation of Christian attitudes to the human body and society intended in “the practice of permanent sexual renunciation - continence, celibacy, life-long virginity” that appeared as an important option in life choices for Christian men and women from just prior to Saint Paul’s missionary journeys (40s to 50s CE) until just after Saint Augustine of Hippo’s death in 430 CE. In particular, he evidenced the wide diversity of patterns of sexual renunciation and continence in the Eastern and Western churches of the mid-second to late third centuries CE. Some of these patterns focussed on a sexual discipline in married family life, essentially patriarchal in style, in which senior males exercised control over women and young people; other patterns were characterised by sexual renunciation and continence exemplified by wandering prophetic travellers moving from one Christian community to another, as well as those living alone outside the normal life of their village in new patterns of ascetic community, who became known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The Christian “two ways” of life, single or married, was expected to be marked by a disciplined sexual holiness. Brown addressed the various historical, philosophical and religious causes of the body-spirit split that continues to influence Christian belief and practice today. During this period, he noted the rise of social distance between clergy

---

64 Ibid., 333-334.
67 Ibid., see Chapter 7 “Promiscuous Brotherhood and Sisterhood….”, 140-159; especially 144-147.
and laity, men and women, as well as the prominence of women in the churches compared to Judaism.

The works of Robinson, Nelson, Boswell and Brown in illuminating and critiquing the scriptural, theological, and historical foundations of the Christian traditions about the body and sexuality made a significant impact in the world of theological scholarship and in the church. First, these and similar studies stimulated a younger generation of scholars, some of whom were gay and lesbian, to engage in new research and publication and to begin a much more public dialogue in the church, academy and the public arena about homosexuality. Second, the above scholars revealed the complexity of the negative attitude towards the body in the Christian tradition. These were important studies in the late twentieth century against which subsequent writers have had to formulate their own thinking and undertake rigorous work.

The years between 1980 and 1990 saw the publication of Jürgen Moltmann’s studies on the theology of the Trinity and on the theology of creation. Not only does Moltmann pay substantial attention to embodiment as the goal of God’s purpose in creation; he also addresses the place of the Spirit of God in creation and the relationship of the Spirit of God to the indivisible human soul and body. In Chapter 4 we look in greater detail at Moltmann’s theological anthropology and pneumatology. Although he deals well with these topics, he nowhere explores in detail the consequences of his theology for human sexuality.

Rowan Williams’ 1989 address to the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement in London entitled “The Body’s Grace” was a ground-breaking lecture that gave a new, inclusive and holistic dimension to the Christian understanding of God’s intention for

human sexuality. He argued for the prior necessity of possessing a language of grace if any talk of the body being graced was to make sense in human and Christian discourse. This required an existing language of creation and redemption.

To be formed in our humanity by the loving delight of another is an experience whose contours we can identify most clearly and hopefully if we have also learned, or are learning, about being the object of the causeless, loving delight of God, being the object of God’s love for God through incorporation into the community of God’s Spirit and the taking-on of the identity of God’s child.

Laying out an argument in which heterosexuality, the single vocation, celibacy and homosexuality were affirmed as contexts in which the body’s grace could be experienced, Williams remarked on the tendency in contemporary cultures of the West, for everything in relationships or friendship to depend on sex. In the original lecture, he said:

Sex is risky and grace is not discovered by all; and there is something frightening and damaging about the kind of sexual mutuality on which everything comes to depend - that is why it matters to locate sexual union in a context that gives it both time and space, that allows it not to be everything.

His point is well illustrated in the complaint of the gay theological student in Michael Arditti’s novel, The Celibate: “Love: all I ask is a little love. But all that’s on offer is sex.”

For Williams, same-sex loving raises the issue “of non-functional joy—of joy, to put it less starkly, whose material ‘production’ is an embodied person aware of grace.”

He observed that it was odd that “this sense of meaning beyond biological reproduction is the one foremost in the biblical use of sexual metaphors for God’s relation to

---

humanity.”\textsuperscript{75} In this observation he draws our attention to the themes in biblical literature of God as husband to Israel as both land and people, and to Hosea, and thus to God, as jealous lovers who long for the healing and restoration of their nuptial relationship.\textsuperscript{76} In his conclusion, Williams points us forward into the coming theological and sexual studies and debates of the 1990s; not least to the exploration of how the Trinity and human sexuality can be laid alongside each other.

We shall return to Williams’ theology in Chapter 6. It is important to observe that although he makes significant use of the language and theology of grace in his several writings on the body, he seems shy of referring to the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God (except in his 1980 article “Word and Spirit”\textsuperscript{77}) in his discussions about body and sexuality. Likewise we see little use of the term sanctification by Williams. He seems content to subsume it under creation and redemption. My observations are made to draw attention to the ease with which the Spirit is hidden within western theology. I think this is unintentional but all the same it has theological consequences, not least for our attempts to revalue the body and develop an inclusive sexual theology.

In summary of our survey of the years 1940–1990 I think we can acknowledge that substantial revaluing of the body as a theme for theology occurs. There are the beginnings of new theological work on sexuality but what is not achieved is the theological linking of the Spirit with sexuality. There were hints that this should be addressed; Rowan Williams is perhaps the best example.

In the next section, I look at theological research and publication that has occurred in the past twenty years. It has been a most fruitful time and many developments have happened, so much so that it is impossible to deal with them all, within one thesis.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
1.5 Recent theology: 1990–2010

This period is marked by the appearance of many theological publications by feminist and gay theologians on the interrelated themes of sexuality, embodiment, gender studies, and the new fields of queer theory and queer theology. I acknowledge thankfully the important role that Grace Jantzen played in the growth of my own theological awareness through her two articles published in 1990, "A Language of Desire" and "Healing Our Brokenness: The Spirit and Creation".78 Jantzen drew my attention to the relational significance between divine and human love, embodiment, sexuality and the Incarnation in the following statement:

The ingredients of sexuality at its best are also precisely the ingredients of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ are united the particular animal physicality of a Jewish male with the profoundest love of God, in the most troubling encounter the world has ever known. God’s love in Christ is revealed to be not vague and sentimental and generalized, but embodied in a particular time and place, and with passion for the well-being of those Jesus loved which led him to the cross rather than betray his commitment to them.79

Her insight resonated powerfully with me because it made me face the inherited unease with the body and sexuality that is revealed in our hesitancy in writing about the sexuality and gender of Jesus.80 Part of the problem has been a common belief that Jesus Christ was too holy to be engaged by such embodied sexual matters. Tom Driver of Union Seminary, New York wrote on this issue in 1965 and pointed out that Jesus of

Nazareth was a human being who experienced sexual desires, emotions, and feelings.\textsuperscript{81} Theologically what is at stake here concerns the redemption of our whole humanity; including our sexuality—our desires, feelings, relationships, and bodily parts. Irenaeus of Lyons, a second to third century bishop and theologian, wrote that what has not been assumed by Christ has not been redeemed by him.\textsuperscript{82} Nothing is to be left out of redemption. One implication of this is that the Spirit of God desires to be embodied in us—in the whole of our flesh—in a way that corresponds to how this happened in Jesus of Nazareth, and this will not exclude our sexuality.

Gareth Jones and Adrian Thatcher were among English theologians who made challenging, even controversial, attempts at connecting reflection on human sexuality with new writing in Trinitarian theology.\textsuperscript{83} The energy for this development was linked to the church’s efforts to respond positively to the challenge of gays and lesbians visible in church and academia, as well as to the HIV/AIDS crisis, and concerns with heterosexual relationships and marriage. Theology was seen to have a new pastoral responsibility.

Gareth Jones dealt with gender, sexuality and the Trinity.\textsuperscript{84} Proposing that ontological language is lifeless and useless in “building a meaningful bridge between God and humanity,” he argued that language that keeps God and humanity separated can no longer “be tolerated as a model for speaking of God. … for the fundamental


requirement of the model we use to speak of God must be that it brings God into the world.”85 “Being” language needs to be replaced with the language of sexuality.

Sexuality as a model for speaking of the relationships between the Persons of the Trinity, therefore, and subsequently as a model for speaking of human relationships, has a prima facie case for acceptance, because of its very definition as the immediacy of expressive love; for it is precisely that immediacy which ensures the eternal unity of the being three-in-one of the Persons of the Trinity. That is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one eternally in passionate embrace.86

In a similar vein, Adrian Thatcher claimed that embodiment is in dire need of rescue from both anthropological and philosophical dualism and sexist dualism.87

Deploring the rarity of consideration of sexuality alongside Trinitarian doctrine, the American Catholic theologian, Catherine Mowry LaCugna argued: "Sexual practices and customs can be iconic of divine life, true images of the very nature of the triune God."88 She connected the ideas of relationship and persons in her study of the Trinity with the relational aspect of sexuality, noting that the human body itself is not finally the decider of human nature. “Personhood is.”89

Sexuality broadly defined is the capacity for relationship, for ecstasis, and for self-transcendence. Sexuality lies at the heart of all creation and is an icon of who God is, the God in whose image we were created male and female (Gen. 1).90

LaCugna held that sexuality finds expression in positive and negative ways - Godlike and ungodlike! The wrongful use of human sexuality moves towards loneliness, violence, and isolation. It can also express the great sexual disorder of domination. Positively, it is “a vital path to holiness, creativity, fecundity, friendship, inclusiveness, delight and pleasure”.91

---

85 Ibid., 40. Emphasis in original.
86 Ibid., 41.
87 Thatcher, Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology. See p. 31 for his definitions of these phenomena.
88 LaCugna, God for Us., 407.
89 Ibid., 282.
90 Ibid., 407.
91 Ibid., 407.
In *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, David S. Cunningham sets out to transform our “enacting” of Trinitarian theology. He presents his readers with a fresh Trinitarian analogy of “Source, Wellspring, and Living Water” as an alternative for Father, Son and Holy Spirit.\(^{92}\) Two particular matters stand out in his theology as highly relevant to this thesis. One is that he addresses the problem of the oppositional pair “oneness and difference” in Trinitarian theology.\(^{93}\) Secondly, he indicates the importance of our attention to the connection and dependence of a theology of embodiment on Trinitarian theology for the discernment of rules for Christian living.\(^{94}\)

Cunningham does not accept that oneness and difference are necessarily opposites, and this opens the possibility that Trinitarian theology does not need to choose between them. He argues:

…oneness and difference are not mutually exclusive, not even contrastive. Rather, they interpenetrate one another in ways that confound our typical mathematical certainties. …God’s Triunity is not merely a compromise between the one and the many. Rather it grasps both concepts simultaneously and defines them as requiring one another.\(^{95}\)

This simultaneous call to “difference and to oneness” is a liberating insight that helps to break down the dominance of polarised choices in theology. The consequence for Cunningham involves Christians in practices of *pluralizing*.\(^{96}\) For Cunningham pluralizing is not pluralism,\(^{97}\) the notion in western culture that promotes countless options as the greatest good; rather he understands pluralizing to be the embodying in Christian life of both differentiation and convergence, especially in “our practices of worship and family life”.\(^{98}\) This means the taking on of the dynamic relationship that we perhaps dimly comprehend as the internal relationship between the Trinitarian

---

\(^{92}\) Cunningham, *These Three Are One*., vii.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 270-271.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 302.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 270-271.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., Chapter 8, 270-303, here 271.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 271, 303.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 271.
Persons and that is offered to us as gift, as grace. Thus, among many other aspects of Christian life, pluralizing has to do with the practices of the body and of sexuality. It allows us to consider properly the sexual desires and relationships of both opposite-sex and same-sex persons.

Cunningham argues that Trinitarian doctrine says nothing against monogamous same-sex unions. It is possible for gay and lesbian Christians to pursue their sexual desire virtuously within such unions.

In such relationships, mutual participation is clearly possible, just as it is in opposite-sex relationships. The same-sex partner is still an ‘other’, and fully capable of embodying the trinitarian virtue of particularity.99 This argument that a same-sex partner can be a relational other as much as an opposite-sex partner is a telling point against those who argue for male-female complementarity as the necessary sexual configuration in Christian unions.100 These are important insights.

Cunningham also proposes that if we have a theology of embodiment that is properly attentive to its Trinitarian theology then we shall have a useful analytical tool for addressing arguments (whether based on tradition, natural law, or the plain sense of scripture) that are used by “those who seek to specify legitimate and illegitimate bodily relationships without attention to the triune life of God”.101 He is critical of the “Church” and “almost every cultural institution” for failing over many centuries to promote the Trinitarian virtues of “constancy and mutuality” in the relationships of gay and lesbian persons.102 At the same time, he gives no blanket approval to distortions in either same-sex or opposite-sex relationships. The failure of any Christian, or any

99 Ibid., 300.
100 See LaCugna, God for Us, 282, Note 119, 314. LaCugna distinguishes between patriarchal and “true complementarity”
101 Cunningham, These Three Are One, 302.
102 Ibid.
ecclesial body, to embody the Trinitarian virtues, especially those virtues of generosity, mercy and mutual love, in human sexual relationship is a matter for grief. 103

In 1999 an American gay theologian, Eugene F. Rogers Jr., challenged the church with the publication of *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*. 104 By critically engaging with the two “greats” of the Western theological tradition, Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth, Rogers directly addressed issues of concern for gay and lesbian Christians and how they could be welcomed into the *ecclesia*. He recognised that what was missing in past theological debate was a proper understanding and appreciation of the person and role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Trinity and in particular to the concerns of human embodiment, sexual identity and same-sex unions.

By peacefully expounding “How Liberals Hear Conservative Arguments” and “How Conservatives Hear Liberal Arguments”, Rogers leads us through the contemporary culture wars. 105 The beauty and success of his work was acknowledged by some conservative critics who, although not agreeing with his conclusions, were approving of his tone and style. 106 Developing Rowan Williams’ discussion on the body’s grace, Rogers contends:

The grace of the body only makes sense by reference to the grace of God identified in a community that tells certain stories of God’s creation and redemption. Only thus can it emerge that the body is one of God’s ways of catching human beings up into God’s own life, and therefore a possible means, derivative and at second or third hand, of grace. The body’s grace, should it occur, is not a movement of the body up

---

103 Ibid., 303.
106 See particularly reviews by: Peter H. Davids, “Sexuality and the Christian Body (Book Review),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Lynchburg* 43, no. 3 (2000): 561-63. This is a moderately positive review from a conservative position. However, note on page 561, Davids’ critical remark: “Rogers fails to realize that evangelicals will not be able to move beyond such Pauline passages because theology can never explain away exegesis.”; and Stephen R. Holmes, “Sexuality and the Christian Body, Their Way into the Triune God (Book Review),” *Journal of Theological Studies* 52, no. 1 (2001): 495-98.
to God, but a movement of the Spirit down—so that a human body will not be left out of salvation.\textsuperscript{107}

What Rogers explicates so carefully in \textit{Sexuality and the Christian Body}, what he allows us to discover, is that the shape of the body and the shape of the Spirit (which is also the shape of grace) belong together. They are one and the same thing.\textsuperscript{108} He identifies and links clearly the implications of Trinitarian relationships for embodied Christian living.

Human bodies, like human reason, are not left out of the Spirit’s work and love’s communion, but taken up into it on the pattern of the assumption of flesh by the Logos. ...God desires to enter into human bodies and to be desired bodily by them.\textsuperscript{109}

His work directs us to tasks that he has already identified but not exhausted; tasks that require deeper theological reflection, such as the relationship of anthropology and pneumatology (how the Spirit of God is embodied in human beings), the relationship of pneumatology and ecclesiology (how the Holy Spirit is embodied in the church), and the relationship of Trinitarian theology to sanctification (how the Trinity makes holy our sexual loving).

Eugene Rogers is in my view the first theologian to give detailed attention to the Holy Spirit’s place in embodiment and sexuality. This has been a significant achievement as can be recognised by the use made by other theologians of his work.

A fellow gay theologian who draws on Rogers is Mark D. Jordan whose work has appeared during the past fifteen years.\textsuperscript{110} I make use of Jordan’s arguments in Chapter 7 “Holiness and the Graced Body”. Writing at much the same time as Jordan

\textsuperscript{107} Rogers Jr, \textit{Sexuality and the Christian Body}, 240.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., Chapter 11, “The Shape of the Body and the Shape of Grace”, 237-248.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 241.
are Gerard Loughlin and James Alison. All three are Catholic theologians and their insights are referred to at several points.

To draw this survey to a close, I consider the imaginative and wide-ranging contribution of Sarah Coakley, English theologian, philosopher of religion and Anglican priest, to such themes as desire, pleasure, gender studies, spirituality, and the current sex crisis in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.111 Drawing on patristic sources such as Gregory of Nyssa’s “On Virginity”, Coakley encourages the church to reconsider marriage and celibacy alongside each other, as lifestyles of equal value that Christians can freely choose to live. In a similar manner she suggests that heterosexual and homosexual desire should “be examined together and subjected to the same exacting standards of ascetic transformation through discipline and ‘right direction’.”112 Clearly Coakley offers us significant resources for the development of a theology of the graced body and we shall look more closely at these in Chapter 7. Perhaps her most challenging insight is that

…we cannot solve the Anglican crises about "homosexuality" unless we first, all of us, re-imagine theologically the whole project of our human sorting, taming and purifying of desires within the crucible of divine desire. Such is the ascetical long haul set before us, in which faithfulness plays the indispensable role endemic to the demands of the primary love for God.113

In the next section I consider the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and our contemporary concerns with human sexuality. One of these concerns is about how

---


113 Ibid.
we use the Bible in the church; linked to this is the question of the authority of scripture in the making of ecclesial decisions in the present, not least about sexual relationships.

### 1.6 Scripture and sexuality

The Bible is like a body. It is a whole composed of many parts, in the pages of which we find other bodies ... The biblical body is not singular, but many: malleable and multiform.\(^{114}\)

—Gerard Loughlin, “Omphalos”

The metaphor of the Bible as a body emphasises that Holy Scripture does not present one narrow view of the human body and sexuality. The metaphor undermines the notion that there is only one interpretation of any biblical text.\(^{115}\) Thus, the hermeneutical position which informs this thesis is supported by a diversity of scholarship, particularly that of Walter Brueggemann,\(^{116}\) Stephen C. Barton,\(^{117}\) Brendan Byrne,\(^{118}\) Stephen E. Fowl,\(^{119}\) Walter Moberly,\(^{120}\) Luke Timothy Johnson,\(^{121}\) Robert Jewett,\(^{122}\) André LaCocque,\(^{123}\) J. Richard Middleton\(^{124}\) and Dale B. Martin.\(^{125}\)

---


\(^{115}\) An example of this view is expressed in the phrase “the plain meaning of the Bible”


\(^{119}\) Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*.


Johnson sets before us a way of openness that links texts and contemporary experience:

I take it as basic that hermeneutics involves the complex task of negotiating normative texts and continuing human experiences. Within the faith community, this means an openness to ways in which God’s revelation continues in human experience as well as a deep commitment to the conviction that such revelation, while often, at first, perceived as dissonant with the symbols of Scripture, will, by God’s grace directing human fidelity, be seen as consonant with those symbols and God’s own fidelity. Essentially, however, the call of faith is to the living God whose revelation continues, rather than to our previous understanding of the texts.\textsuperscript{126}

According to Johnson this requires an exacting discipline of attention to what the living God may be doing at the present time.\textsuperscript{127} He argues that the Bible does not speak with a single voice but is a collection of texts containing “an irreducible and precious pluralism of ‘voices’ shaped by literary genre, theme, and perspective.”\textsuperscript{128} It is our paying attention to this plurality of scriptural voices that enables us to re-work the interpretation of particular texts and the role they should now play in determining a theology of sexuality that sets out to be inclusive of the whole range of human sexualities rather than exclusive.

In this regard, Stephen Fowl makes a useful point:

…the authority of scripture is not a property of the biblical texts any more than a meaning or an ideology is property of those texts. …Rather, scriptural authority must be spoken of in connection with the ecclesial communities who struggle to interpret scripture and embody their interpretations in the specific contexts in which they find themselves.\textsuperscript{129}

So the interrelationship of context, community and the Spirit with the text is all important in the working out of meaning and its subsequent application.

Having established this approach, we look at some examples of scriptural work on human sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, during the past thirty years. In

\textsuperscript{125} Martin, \textit{Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation}.
\textsuperscript{126} Johnson, “Disputed Questions,” 367-372; here 368.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 369. Johnson writes of “the rigorous asceticism of attentiveness.”
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 368.
\textsuperscript{129} Fowl, \textit{Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation}, 203.
1983, Robin Scroggs’ study, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate*, appeared. Here for the first time in the modern era was a critical yet positive and non-condemnatory scriptural study that worked through both the Old Testament and New Testament texts that were being used by many Christians to condemn both homosexual acts and persons of homosexual orientation. Scroggs concluded:

The New Testament church was not much concerned about homosexuality as a problem, at least to judge from the evidence of the texts. All three instances referring to homosexuality are directly or indirectly from preformed traditions, either Greek or Jewish. No single New Testament author considers the issue important enough to write his own sentence about it.

Scroggs believed the biblical stance on homosexuality was irrelevant and shouldn’t be used to discuss the matter of homosexuality or to prohibit the ordination of gays or lesbians. The point that he makes quite strongly is that this stance is not because the Bible is not authoritative but because it does not address the contemporary situation. Reading Scroggs gave gay and lesbian Christians of the 1980s some hope that the church’s attitude to homosexuality might become more accepting and open to change.

Setting the study of sexual ethics in the wider context of the Jewish ritual and purity laws, William Countryman raised significant questions about how Holy Scripture is to be used in the contemporary church. In *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, he argued that:

... one of the primary contributions which Scripture makes to the work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian community is that it stands outside our present and therefore prevents us from treating our contemporary world as an inevitability. The antiquity of the biblical writings means that they give Christians other models of social life to stand alongside those we know directly. ...The spiritual function of the Bible’s antiquity is rather to relativise the present, to rule out in advance the notion

---

131 Ibid., 121.
132 Ibid., 127; from his Conclusion “Taking a Stand”.

that things can be only as they are. …In sexual matters, as elsewhere, this is the goal of Christian theology.\textsuperscript{133}

Countryman’s examination of New Testament sexual ethics focused more on what is forbidden than what is to be taken up and lived. This is due to the style of the New Testament texts themselves: they are about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Arguing that such texts were not negative about sex and sexuality, and that very few New Testament texts speak theologically or philosophically of sexuality \textit{per se},\textsuperscript{134} he proposed a refocusing of negative boundary lines to allow an alternate, positive perspective:

The New Testament’s positive account of sex is that it is an integral part of the human person, particularly as joining us to one another, and therefore has a right to be included in the spiritual transformation which follows upon our hearing of the gospel.\textsuperscript{135}

In 2004 Countryman suggested the practice of reading and re-reading scripture in the liturgical prayer of the Daily Office as a means of dealing with controversial interpretations of biblical texts.\textsuperscript{136} He suggests further that Jesus’ practice of reading and interpreting scripture must place a “radical uncertainty into our reading of Scripture”.\textsuperscript{137} The result of such reading and re-reading must lead us to face our own refusals to attend to the Spirit’s challenge to transform not only our understanding of scripture but its application. Rather than a legal text or constitution, scripture becomes “a meeting with the grace of God”.\textsuperscript{138} The positive implication I draw from Countryman’s article is that we need to read and re-read scripture not only to hear the graciousness of God towards all human being but also so we can enact that inclusiveness, especially in the conflicted area of same-sex preferring persons.


\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 265.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 265.


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.: 582.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.: 577.
Scroggs and Countryman set the scene for the development of exegetical scholarship that encouraged more inclusive interpretations of the six biblical texts traditionally used to condemn homosexual practices and relationships.\[^{139}\] One English example of this was *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* by the late Michael Vasey. He acutely observed that:

> While social space for gay people in the church remains so heavily contested, the barrenness of much theological reflection on homosexuality within the Christian church is hardly surprising.\[^{140}\]

His observation underlined the hard political and ecclesial facts of life for gays and lesbians who also happened to be Christians.\[^{141}\] We can rejoice that positive theological reflection on homosexuality has blossomed in the intervening fifteen years. However, it is important to note that the ecclesial space for gay and lesbian Christians remains marked by conflict and rejection. This is the situation in many parts of the Anglican Communion as well as in the Roman Catholic Church. But within these two churches there are places of hope and hospitality that stand as beacons of light and proclaim the inclusiveness of the Gospel.\[^{142}\]

Understandably these works provoked conservative ire and important responsive scholarship.\[^{143}\] Many of these responses assumed that the biblical witness against same-sex practice was definitive and unquestionable. However, many conservative scholars engaged in new exegetical and theological commentary to defend their position and


\[^{141}\] Ibid., 8.

\[^{142}\] The Auckland Community Church at St Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland, New Zealand is a positive example of a local Church providing free space and a place of worship for an ecumenical gay and lesbian congregation to form in the early 1980s. The ACC had the encouragement of the diocesan bishop. The diocesan synod knew of its existence and gave some initial financial support in 1983, and in 1985 did not condemn it when some synod members objected to its existence. It continues to the present day.

\[^{143}\] However not all evangelical scholars took a conservative position. For example see Alan D. Verhey, “The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality: An Evangelical Approach to Scripture and Sexual Ethics,” *Interpretation* XLIX, no. 1 (1995): 31–45. This an important article because Verhey takes a different slant than most evangelicals to interpreting the meaning of the scriptures about homosexuality.
resource the conservative wing of the church. For example, John Boswell’s exegesis of Romans 1: 26-27 brought forth a critical response from Richard Hays in 1986.¹⁴⁴ Hays’ continuing work has been irenic, modest and nuanced not least because he had had pastoral relations and friendship with gay Christian students.¹⁴⁵

By contrast there is the massive detail and erudition of Robert Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*.¹⁴⁶ This is an example of a more strident anti-homosexual piece of biblical scholarship. Gagnon’s position becomes clear in the following:

First, there is clear, strong, and credible evidence that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin. Second, there exist no valid hermeneutical arguments, derived from either general principles of biblical interpretation or contemporary scientific knowledge and experience, for overriding the Bible’s authority on this matter. In sum, the Bible presents the anatomical, sexual, and procreative complementarity of male and female as clear convincing proof of God’s will for sexual unions. Even those who do not accept the revelatory authority of Scripture should be able to perceive the divine will through the visible testimony of the structure of creation. Thus same-sex intercourse constitutes an inexcusable rebellion against the intentional design of the created order.¹⁴⁷

Gagnon described the damaging consequences of same-sex intercourse for those who engage in it and for society as a whole:

These consequences include matters of health (catastrophic rates of disease and shortened life expectancy) and morals (unstable and destabilising patterns of sexual behaviour where short-term and non-monogamous relationships constitute the rule rather than the exception).¹⁴⁸

Unfortunately, Gagnon’s arguments have been used uncritically by others who have used his work to support an anti-gay and lesbian reading of scripture in ecclesial

---


¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
documents.\textsuperscript{149} My arguments are different, especially in relation to the use and interpretation of Holy Scripture.

Kevin Giles and Scott Cowdell are Australian Anglican theologians who have contributed significantly to the debate on gender and sexuality and strongly supported the ordination of women.\textsuperscript{150} However, they have taken opposite views on the matter of homosexuality. Giles has argued that subordination of the Son to the Father in the Trinitarian relationship is used by conservative evangelicals to justify the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry. He makes a strong case against this because he believes Trinitarian theology does not subordinate the Son to the Father. However, in an Appendix he argues that his same argument cannot be applied to homosexuality. To do so would allow the acceptance of same-sex unions and their ordination to the sacred ministry. Giles is against this not because there are some few texts opposed to same-sex unions and homosexual behaviour in general but because, in his opinion, “same-sex relations stand in opposition to God’s creational pattern making sex the creative bond between man and woman (Gen 1:27–28)”.\textsuperscript{151}

Cowdell, although no doubt agreeing with Giles’ Trinitarian position about subordination, takes a far more inclusive approach to homosexuality and the possible blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian Christians. His detailed discussion of sexuality can be found in God’s Next Big Thing: Discovering the Future Church. His two shorter pieces on the making of moral decisions and on the use of Holy Scripture are particularly important. Cowdell criticised and reveals the


\textsuperscript{151} Giles, The Trinity & Subordinationism, Appendix C, 269-273.
weaknesses in Archbishop Peter Jensen’s arguments promoting “the clarity of Scripture”, “the authority of the Bible”, the notion of “biblical inerrancy”, and people’s need for “assurance of salvation”. For Cowdell, the weakness lies in the circularity of Jensen’s argument, because “…the clarity of Scripture as a support for the sole authority of the Bible’s plain meaning is not there to be read off, and made the guarantee of Christian faith”. It is something assumed and imported from within a particular ecclesial tradition; in this case a Protestant Evangelical one that, amongst other things, is opposed to homosexual Christians assuming leadership in the church or having their marriage-like unions blessed by the church. Cowdell makes clear that the demand for clarity, assurance and authority speaks rather of fear than faith and says nothing about the reality and experience of the Holy Spirit’s guidance of the church and of Christians. Cowdell suggests it is possible to trust in the Bible without following Dr Jensen’s path. This point leads us to the issue of sexual complementarity.

Compulsory complementarity has been promoted as the logical consequence of a divine creational pattern discerned in Genesis 1 and 2 by Giles, Gagnon and many other conservative scholars, Catholic and Protestant. In my view this is overstatement and careful analysis of what is implied in the use of the term complementarity is required. Gareth Moore, a Roman Catholic Dominican scholar, has provided important clarification about the need for a sexual partner to be an “other”. He notes the frequent ambiguity that occurs “between difference of substance—being somebody else, and difference of quality—that somebody else’s being unlike you”. This is a nicely nuanced point that he makes in support of same-sex unions. In a more recent book Moore argued that it is difficult to use Genesis 1: 26-27 in support of a notion of sexual complementarity.

---

152 Cowdell, “Homosexuality and the Clarity of Scripture,” 122.
153 Ibid., 130.
155 Ibid., 127. See also his more recent book
The text does seem to say that both men and women, male and female, are created in the image of God. But it does not say that their being in the image of God consists of their being sexually differentiated, or that it consists in the sexual complementarity of male and female.\textsuperscript{156}

Biblical and theological scholarship has contributed to the various church denominational reports and resources on humanity,\textsuperscript{157} sexuality\textsuperscript{158} and homosexuality\textsuperscript{159} over the past fifty years. First, scholarship has worked to assist the church to understand better the traditional scriptural texts that have been used to condemn homosexuality in the past. Second, biblical scholars and theologians have sought to frame the discussion within a broader scriptural vision of God’s plan and purpose for humanity in creation than that supported by a narrow reading of the first chapters of Genesis. Third, some theologians and biblical scholars have argued that the Gospels’ witness to Jesus’ practices of inclusion challenges traditional attitudes and practices that continue to be used to condemn and exclude same-sex practicing Christians from the life and ministry of the church.

My proposal is that the church ought not to use the Bible to discriminate against faithful, covenanted same-sex relationships of gay and lesbian Christians even if certain biblical texts have been, or continue to be, interpreted as condemning active homosexuality. In the first place, this means that the the two texts from Leviticus that describe homosexuality as an abomination and proscribe the death penalty for males found indulging in such practice need to be re-interpreted (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13).

Secondly, the taking of a small number of texts from the Old Testament and New

\textsuperscript{156} Gareth Moore OP, A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality (London/New York: Continuum, 2003), 127-128.
\textsuperscript{159} Alan A. Brash, Facing Our Differences: The Churches and Their Gay and Lesbian Members (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995).
Testament as the determining factor in establishing a contemporary hermeneutic about homosexuality is questionable in the light of a more comprehensive hermeneutical practice advocated by the biblical scholars whose work informs this thesis. Finally, the practice of relying on the exegesis of a small number of texts ignores the wider hermeneutical principle of the witness of scripture to a Trinitarian God who is both just and merciful and loves all humanity.

The church has already given up using many of the cultural and ritual regulations that can be found in parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. The underlying problem in the use of texts about homosexuality is that many Christians are not skilled at discerning the sources of their cultural biases against a minority grouping of persons. Thus, they tend to explain their rejection of same-sex orientation, practices and relationships by reference to biblical texts interpreted legalistically, rather than take responsibility for their learned cultural prejudices and social choices.

To accept this view means that we may need to live with the tension between what we understand the biblical text to mean and an ecclesial decision to encourage the blessing of same-sex unions. In the meantime we need to accept that exegesis will continue to happen and may change our understanding of a text and its context. As an example, a recent rereading of Leviticus 18: 22 by Renato Lings, a Danish translator, suggests that this difficult and “opaque” Hebrew text that tradition has interpreted as excluding all male-male erotic enactment, and which some contemporary exeges have limited to anal penetration, may refer to the forbidding of male same-sex incest. Lings concludes that this would better fit the overall context of Leviticus 18 and 20 in which heterosexual incest is banned.\(^{160}\)

Similarly, there have been exegetical and hermeneutical attempts, some very successful, others less so, to broaden the interpretation of Romans 1:26-28 to mean the

forbidding of homosexual practice. John Boswell re-interpreted the translation of two little-used Greek words in Romans 1.¹⁶¹ His argument and evidence has been criticised by some scholars,¹⁶² but defended by others.¹⁶³

Keith Dyer, an Australian biblical scholar, although not supporting Boswell’s exegetical points as such, sets Romans 1 within the total context of Paul’s argument in chapters 1-3.

It is clear, however, that the wider context shows that Paul is not prescribing ethical standards in Romans 1-3 so much as describing what he sees as the fallen condition of humanity (Gentile and Jew, see Romans 3:9). So in Romans 1:26-8 he merely reflects the typical Jewish perceptions of immoral pagan Gentiles before hitting his Jewish colleagues with the truth that they are no better off (Romans 2:17f)—even if they don’t practise ‘homosexuality’, amongst other things. All have fallen short—all are saved by grace—whereupon ethical standards must be worked out anew in the light of grace.¹⁶⁴

Dyer’s argument, in common with other exegetical scholars, sets Paul’s “sting” operation outside of immediate concerns for the condemnation of homosexual persons.¹⁶⁵

James Alison, writing as a Catholic theologian and from a gay perspective, contends: “It is my view that Romans 1 has quite simply nothing to do with what we call homosexuality.”¹⁶⁶ Alison’s lucid biblical and theological work is used in Chapter 6 to help us arrive at an inclusive interpretation of grace.

¹⁶¹ For Boswell’s discussion see Chapter 4 “The Scriptures”, pp.91-117, especially that about the Sodom story, pp. 92-94; and Appendix 1 “Lexicography and Saint Paul”, pp. 335-353, where he argues that the translation of the Greek words ‘μαλακοί’ [malakoi] and ‘αρσενοκοίται’ [arsenokoitai] found in Corinthians 6:9 stand for the active and passive partners “in homosexual intercourse is fanciful and unsubstantiated by lexicographical evidence.” (Here p. 341).
¹⁶² An early example of this criticism is by Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” 184-215.
¹⁶⁵ Byrne SJ, Romans, 64-72; Jewett and Kotansky, Romans: A Commentary.
¹⁶⁶ James Alison, Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), see Chapter 8 “‘but the bible says’? a catholic reading of romans 1”, 123-140; here 139.
Stephen C. Barton emphasises Paul’s affirmative attitude towards the body in his instruction to the Corinthians to “Glorify God in your body”.\textsuperscript{167} Defining sexuality as "the desire for self-transcendence in union with the other which is the natural expression of our embodied humanity",\textsuperscript{168} Barton argues that sexuality is earthed in the divine and is an expression of God’s life in us. He points out Paul’s overall purpose in dealing with sexuality to be the constructive one of building up the health and well being of the early Christian communities for the glory of God. Paul’s aim was always to "create an ordered, holy and life-giving society”.\textsuperscript{169} Spiritual, for Paul, did not imply dis-embodiment. Rather the body mattered supremely as the place in which God’s glory was worked out tangibly and visibly. God’s glory is to be worked out in the body of the individual and in the body of the community - the \textit{ekklesia}. Hence Paul’s concern for the life of Christian households, the places where both bodies were normally present, because it was there that both male and female bodies were present. Thomas Breidenthal emphasises the significance of nearness in the working out of what Jesus’ command to love our neighbour meant for the first Christians and for us now: nearness requires sanctification.\textsuperscript{170} Jesus’ practice of breaking traditional Jewish meal boundaries by eating with all sorts of people and of talking directly to women had set the first Christians free for a new context of nearness at the Eucharist meal and the fellowship that surrounded it. Today, we are attentive to the fact that issues of human proximity and holiness confront us in places of work and recreation not just in the home. Relational boundaries and disciplined practices need to be worked out afresh.\textsuperscript{171}

\begin{itemize}
\item[]\textsuperscript{167} Barton, “‘Glorify God in Your Body’ (1 Corinthians 6.20): Thinking Theologically About Sexuality.”
\item[]\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 373.
\item[]\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 378.
\end{itemize}
I look now at how anthropological studies on bodily and social and sexual boundaries may support this thesis.

1.7 An inclusive interpretation of grace

In drawing on scriptural and other sources to emphasise the inclusive interpretation of grace, I begin with a brief survey of the occurrence of Hebrew and Greek words and usage for grace and mercy. The key words in the Hebrew Scriptures that describe the character and relationship of the God of Israel, Yahweh, towards God’s people, and occasionally towards the whole world of peoples, are hanan and hesed.172

*Hanān* is a verb meaning to be gracious, to show gracious favour. Yahweh acts graciously, mercifully, favourably towards Israel as a whole or to some particular Israelite or Jewish person or community. Forgiveness—letting go and letting off—as an expression of gracious benevolence is also implied in this word.

Zimmerli draws out the possible interpretations of *hesed* as mercy, gracious favour, and grace, and in particular in relationship to Yahweh who shows covenant grace towards Israel, God’s people. Such gracious favour finds liturgical expression in the Psalms; for example in the continuous refrain found in Psalm 136: “for his steadfast love endures forever,” where “steadfast love”—is the translation of *hesed*.173

Later, the Hebrew word *hesed* is translated in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as *eleēin* (mercy) not as *charis* (grace).174 Duffy observes two matters of significance for Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora during the inter-testamental period. First, both grace and mercy have an eschatological reference seen in apocalyptic writings, “*Charis* is a global word for salvation to come”175. Second, there is an observable tension,

---


174 Ibid., 381.

exemplified in Sirach 24:6–8, between Israel’s exclusive possession of Yahweh’s grace and its universal availability.  

Walter Brueggemann argues that Yahweh’s free and passionate partnership with Israel goes beyond Israel’s own conception of the partnership that is embodied in the covenant and in Israel’s relationship to the “land”. He emphasises that Israel’s comprehension of the human person is a relational one not an essentialist one. Although Brueggemann does not spell it out in detail, the ancient Israelite can be understood as embodied in the covenantal relationship with Yahweh, with the whole people of Israel and with the land (and, I think, with the whole of creation).

This is further illustrated by Brueggemann’s insightful interpretation of the three great verbs that enact Yahweh’s relationship—save, rescue, liberate! They are available for Israel first, and then for the other nations (for all human persons), and all creation: Israel has no monopoly on these verbs, but Israel is always loved.

Isaiah 45:22–25 is an example of this concern of God for all humanity beyond the national boundaries of the Hebrew people. “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” This compassionate care and concern of Yahweh for all humanity and the cosmos is reflected in the covenant with God’s people, Israel. Although the covenant is particular and focused on Israel, Isaiah 56:1-8 depicts a future outward-facing aspect of it: God will welcome those traditionally excluded by Israel, the eunuchs, as well as foreigners, aliens, the Gentile nations, on the condition that they enact lives that please God.

---

176 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 451.
179 Ibid., 520; see also 306.
180 Ibid., Chapter 15 The Human Person as Yahweh’s Partner, 450-491, especially 451-454; and Chapter 416 The Nations as Yahweh’s Partner, 492-527; and Chapter 417 Creation as Yahweh’s Partner, 528-551. On Yahweh’s freedom and passion see 410-412.
181 Isaiah 45:22.
These I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.\textsuperscript{182}

This text illustrates how there is always tension in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and Yahweh and the nations. Yahweh’s sovereignty and power can be in tension with Yahweh’s loyalty \textit{hesed} (steadfast love).\textsuperscript{183}

The overarching benevolence of God towards human beings and animate creation is illustrated in God’s challenging dialogue with his reluctant prophet Jonah.

And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?\textsuperscript{184}

On the one hand, there are occasions in the Hebrew Scriptures when Israel is God’s mercy embodied as sign for all the nations. On the other, there are periods in Israel’s history when exclusion rather than embrace is the order of the day. Mercy and love were not given to everyone.\textsuperscript{185}

When we look at the various uses of grace in the New Testament we find that grace is not a concept but a “concrete embodiment” as it was in the Old Testament. This concrete embodiment is located in a particular time, place and event—the death and resurrection of Christ. Brendan Byrne makes this clear in his contrasting the \textit{παπατούμα paratóma} (trespass) of the First Adam with the \textit{χαρίσμα charisma} (gracious


\textsuperscript{183} Brueggemann, \textit{Theology}, see especially 306-307.

\textsuperscript{184} Jonah 4:9–11; here 11.

\textsuperscript{185} cf Ezra 10:1–44; especially v.2 and vv.10–11 and Nehemiah 10:28–31; 13:23–27 which recount the putting away of foreign wives because such foreign wives were identified as a principal source of idolatry; for example, see the comment on King Samuel’s wives and their leading him astray from the “pure” worship of Israel’s God, Yahweh, 1 Kings 11:1-10.
gift) of the Second Adam in Romans 5:15: “The act of Christ is a tangible, historical embodiment of God’s grace”.  

In the Greek Testament, χάρις charis (grace) has a variety of uses with broadly similar meanings. Its essence as a noun is expressed in the English word “favour” or “gift” or “thanks”; as a verb it means “to show favour”, “to bless”, “to pardon or forgive”, “to give thanks”. Ordinary usage and theological usage need to be distinguished. Given its importance in Paul’s Letters and hence in the churches founded or influenced by Paul, its absence from the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, its single use in John’s Gospel and absence from 1 and 3 John is surprising. In Luke it occurs six times and in Acts twelve times.

Paul’s theological understanding of grace refers to the salvation “actualised in the cross of Christ (Gal. 2:21, cf. vv. 15-20) and that is an actual event in proclamation”. More than this, grace is the reality of justification not just its foundation. Salvation is by grace alone. In this sense grace is the wholeness of salvation. Conzelmann states that grace is always a gift; it is never habitual; a person is invited to receive grace. “One can be sure of grace [but] one does not have it for certain. It is possible to fall from grace.” However, grace is “the event of salvation … oriented to the sinner and carries justification with it; hence it is received in faith”.

Observing the lack of precise definition and consistency of usage, Duffy remarks that Paul’s use of grace is a “multifaceted” and “a polyvalent symbol” that
demands an “imaginative sympathy [that will enable the reader to] re-enact an experience rather than analyse a concept”.

“Grace” is the new order ushered in by God’s uncontainable generosity made manifest in the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ. What Paul is proclaiming is the solidarity of humankind in alienation and despair and now in liberation, life, and hope. It is precisely this corporate solidarity that Paul tries to express when he refers to the “body” of redeemed humanity (1 Cor 12:12f.; Rom 12:3f.).

The experience of grace is nothing other than the countless different and diverse instances in which the generosity of God reaches out towards all humanity in a new economy of mercy and love that has been embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In some contrast to Paul’s theological use of grace are his more practical everyday uses of the term. First, it appears as a greeting at the beginning and ending of almost all his Letters. We think here especially of the fullest form of the concluding greetings: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you”. Second, there are references to his own calling to be an apostle, even if the least of the apostles. Third, grace or “gift” is used to describe the financial collection undertaken for the poorer Christians in Jerusalem. A further use of grace is that of “thanks”, as an expression in response to a gift received for which thanksgiving is appropriate.

This survey of the usage of mercy and grace shows a trend towards inclusiveness in their description of God’s relationship with Israel and with all

---

192 Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace, 33.
193 Ibid., 35.
194 Duffy maintains there is no formal theology of grace until Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) and his controversy with Pelagius. Ibid., 31.
195 Ibid.
197 Galatians 1: 15–16, and 1 Corinthians 15:10.
198 1 Corinthians 16:3 and 2 Corinthians 8:1; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9. Duffy notes the parallel that Paul draws between the generosity of the Corinthians and that of Jesus. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace, 32. The verbal form χαριζομαι charizomai always mean “to give”; so Conzelmann, “Χαρις,” 396. However, Conzelmann suggests that it carries the sense of “to pardon” in Colossians 3:13.
199 Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace, 32-33.
humankind and the cosmos. Some of the parables of Jesus explicate this theme: All are called, all are welcome, all may belong within the community of faith. This is seen in particular in the parable in Luke 14:15–24 in which invited guests are too busy to accept their invitations. Their refusal sees the extension of this invitation to all and sundry, the poor not just the rich, the nobodies living in the streets and lanes: “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner”. 200 This inclusive command in Jesus’ parable has a hint of ambiguity to it in that those originally invited are now threatened with exclusion. There seems to be a freedom in grace to exclude oneself.

While Luke 14:15–24 (paralleled in Matthew 22:1–14) and similar passages seem to welcome all people into the reign of God, are there limits to this welcome? John Dominic Crossan helps us explore this issue. 201 Commenting on the egalitarian character of the food-sharing practices of Jesus, noting especially their radical overturning of existing political, religious, social and gender norms, Crossan argues that “The radical lack of social differentiation remained as a permanent challenge to all specifications, interpretations, and actualisations of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus”. 202 In theory at least, this permanent challenge was particularly embodied in Jesus’ own and then his community’s egalitarian practice of open commensality. 203 Robert E. Goss, an American Queer theologian, observes how this would have impinged upon Jewish factional rivalry “with their own politics of holiness and their attempts to construct fences around God’s grace.” 204 He adds: “God’s unconditional grace still remains ‘out of place’ or disruptive for most churches where doctrine,
sanctioned conduct and ‘pure hearts’ (‘no erotic desires’) are necessary for receiving communion’. 205

Such refusal by ecclesial communions and local churches to practice Jesus’ egalitarian welcome and practice of open commensality is a source of tension, division and hurt to gay and lesbian Christians worldwide. It is in fact a failure in love; a refusal to be the graced body of Christ. This means that the full implications of God’s welcoming and transforming grace may be in conflict with the values of the welcoming group. The reason for this is that there has been a failure in attention by the welcoming group to the full impact of the Gospel of God’s grace. God’s grace is not just for those who are like us or acceptable to us. This failure in attention has been the group’s forgetting that they too have to change and respond to the radical grace of Christ’s love; their moral expectations may need to be modified or prioritised differently.

Recently, Richard B. Hays has claimed that:

The sticky questions for New Testament ethics have to do not so much with who is initially welcomed into the community of faith as with the shape of the new life of radical obedience into which all who are welcomed are summoned to participate. 206

As I read Hays, the “radical obedience” that he means may be used to exclude the gay and lesbian Christians who have been welcomed into the church. If this is so, his “radical” obedience is not radical enough, according to the New Testament version of grace. A genuine act of “radical obedience” directs the church towards an understanding of how the Spirit works through a fresh comprehension of egalitarian grace that visibly and actively welcomes the blessing of same-sex partnerships.

In the Acts of the Apostles 10–11, Peter interprets his midday vision at Joppa as divine approval for the early Jewish-Christian community to associate with Gentiles and to eat with them. Peter proclaims to the Gentile “God-fearers” gathered in Cornelius’

205 Ibid.
home in Caesarea an interpretive narrative of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit falls upon these Gentile listeners audibly and visibly. The Spirit embodies the inclusive grace of Jesus Christ toward these God-fearing gentiles. In response, Peter has them baptised and thereby incorporated into the church.\textsuperscript{207}

James Alison makes the point that this first re-telling or preaching of the Jesus story to Gentiles and the falling of the Holy Spirit on them is a massive “cultural earthquake” that has different implications for the two groups gathered in the house.\textsuperscript{208} On the one hand, Peter and his Jewish-Christian companions are seriously surprised that God has acted in a new way. On the other, Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles are suddenly living with the dawning discovery: “God likes the impure people, … God wants them to be on the inside of God’s story just as they are”.\textsuperscript{209} Alison concludes: “The Holy Spirit is creating a new and impossible story in the midst of religious and cultural fixity by enabling both the previously ‘impure’ and previously ‘pure’ to work out a new story together”.\textsuperscript{210} This is grace in action! The Holy Spirit enacts the inclusive love of God in the slow, painful yet joyful creation of a new people of God.

Chapters 10–11 of Acts have been well used as an analogy for welcoming groups and persons previously excluded from the body of Christ, living on its margins, and desirous of being incorporated into the life of the community.\textsuperscript{211} James Alison comments:

When faced with the mounting evidence that in matters gay the teaching of the Church has been based on a taboo, that is, a sacred idol, a series of violent lies which seemed to be holy but were not, I expect Peter at first to hold firm. Then, as it becomes clearer that what seemed to be from God was not from God, and that God is revealing something new and fresh about God’s creation, God’s impartial love for all of creation and how no human is profane or unclean (cf. Acts 10), I expect him

\textsuperscript{208} James Alison, \textit{On Being Liked} (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), viii-xii.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., x.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
gradually to get it, to recognise that what had seemed “outside” has been brought in by a power not his own, for God’s holiness is shown in Creation made fully alive.212

Alison’s insights help us to recognise that God’s impartial love for all humanity and all creation in which nothing is by nature profane is an expression of God’s grace that Christians know in the life of Jesus Christ and experience through the empowering activity of the Holy Spirit. If we accept James Alison’s interpretation of Acts 10–11 then Richard Hay’s “new life of radical obedience”, in which all Christians are called to participate, is already with us and will be embodied in many diverse and different ways depending on how and where the Spirit leads us. All of these ways of radical embodiment will be open to the graced presence and power of Christ and the Spirit.

1.8 Bodily boundaries

Interpersonal and intercommunal conflict and the resulting brokenness need to be resolved in embodied ways, personally, religiously and socially. One response is to erect protective boundaries, sometimes physically but also symbolically, making use of the human body as the symbolic image of human society and even the physical world.

In her 1966 study Purity and Danger, the social anthropologist Mary Douglas described the inextricable relationship that exists between the human body corporate and the individual personal body of the human being:

The body is a model which stands for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relations afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva, and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and the dangers credited to social structure, reproduced in small on the human body.213

The interrelationship of the human body, human sexuality and the human group involve the recognition and consideration of such boundary issues. Douglas encourages us to

pay particular attention to sex and sexuality as boundary issues. Every age has been aware of the presence of evil, sin, disorder and disillusion in human sexual experience and relationships—desire, intimacy and love struggle for appropriate expression in all human lives. Failure and the fear of failure is a common experience in intimate sexual relationships, as well as among those who live in nearness with each other in common households. Violence may result. Proximity and intimacy are not easy to handle.

Thomas Breidenthal argues that nearness requires sanctifying so that careful and respectful boundaries will be honoured in all forms of Christian households. Life together, to use Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s phrase for community life, is never easy. It is hard and therefore requires sanctifying by the Spirit. The discipline of boundaries, especially sexual boundaries, along with other disciplines, needs to be practised.

Violence towards persons engaged in human relationships that are outside the boundaries of what has been considered normal has often been fuelled by spiritual writings and preaching that do not do justice to the central doctrines of the Christian faith about the value and integrity of the human body and soul. Margaret Miles describes the situation:

…in Christianity, an endemic problem exists in the contradiction between a rhetoric of disparagement of the body and theological descriptions of the permanent integrity of body and soul. Contempt for the body is fundamentally inconsistent with the Christian doctrine of creation, the Incarnation of Christ, and the resurrection of the body. Throughout the history of Christianity, the problem of the relative value of the body and soul has been written about a great deal, precisely because it is so difficult to define a rationalisation of productive ascetic practice that does not seem to slight the goodness and integrity of physical existence.

Miles’ insight helps us appreciate that not all Christians, or even Christian theologians, have been able to integrate their spiritual goals with their embodied

---

214 Breidenthal, Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness.
216 Ibid.
existence in the mature way of Gregory Nazianzus. One purpose of this thesis is to encourage the integration of our spiritual desires and our sexual desires. Miles observes: “If we make a clear distinction between body and sexuality, it is not difficult to find in Christian tradition, very positive statements about the goodness and beauty of human bodies.” A further purpose of this thesis is to be able to make positive statements about both body and sexuality, not a negative distinction between them. Much of our past Christian tradition has encouraged us to divorce the spiritual from the bodily, including even the sexual from other elements of bodily life. Miles helps us again when she notes the role of scapegoat that Christians have given to sex in their efforts to construct their Christian identities. In its use as a scapegoat “…sex can serve to represent the ‘world, the flesh and the devil’ because the individual’s desires are socially constructed and conditioned, not ‘natural’ or biological.”

In Hebrew religion the scapegoat symbolically carried the sins of the people and was driven out into the desert on the annual feast of the Atonement. All that was negative in personal and social life was focussed upon it and expelled from the community. Here exemplified is a ritualised dealing with boundary issues: the scapegoat is driven from the arena of human occupation across an imagined boundary into the solitude and aloneness of the dry place occupied by the wild animals representing the shadow side of human life.

Following Douglas and Miles, we can recognise that sex has been used as the scapegoat for larger boundary issues arising from tensions in the corporate social and political body. Women have been so treated. Homosexual persons have been persecuted, exiled and killed as sexual scapegoats throughout the Christian centuries.

---

217 See the epigraph at the start of this Chapter.
218 Miles, Practicing Christianity, 157.
219 Ibid., 157-158.
220 John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago and London: University of
In World War II, homosexuals as well as Jews, gypsies, and the mentally deformed were made scapegoats and disposed of by the National Socialist State in Germany.\textsuperscript{221} Such injustice is perpetrated even in our times in first world and third world nations.

The bodily and relational boundaries that would circumscribe the presence of the Spirit in human sexual activity are not easily discerned. To propose that the Holy Spirit may be present in human sexual loving is not to say that every form of sexual love is appropriate. The church has a long history of discernment about what sexual activities and relationships can be held within a coherent vision of Christian theology and embodied holiness.

Although marriage liturgies seem not to have been an early part of the church’s sacramental practice, it would be hard to argue that the character and quality of Christian married life was not of pastoral or theological concern to church leaders from the earliest times. The very mention of a marriage celebration in the Gospel according to John, in addition to Jesus’ teaching on divorce, as well as Paul’s letters which address the relationships of husbands and wives towards each other, show that the members of the early church were challenged to maintain a high standard in their interpersonal marital relations. However, this must be understood within the context that early Christians expected a high standard of interpersonal and intra-communal relationship of every baptised person. Embodied relations within early Christian communities revealed the saving power of the gospel of Christ to transform and heal what was broken in human life. The inclusive practice of table fellowship introduced by Jesus and continued in the life of the first Christian communities brought about a new form of

\textsuperscript{221} Bent, Martin Sherman’s classic 1979 play about two German homosexuals prior to World War II and then later in a concentration camp, depicts the persecution experienced by the ‘homosexual community’ of this period. See Robin Green, “Sacred Space,” \textit{The Way Supplement} 67 (1990). Many of the ‘homosexuals’ imprisoned in German gaols and concentration camps during Hitler’s regime were not freed at the end of the war but remained in prison for years, precisely because they were regarded as criminals by the Allied Occupying Forces.
nearness in community which seemed to permit a closer mingling of men and women during worship and the extended table-fellowship that followed. The famous aphorism “See how these Christians love one another”, though certainly not addressing intimacies of sexual love, reveals the visible and embodied character of this new life and its new freedom in social and religious relationship. The social and ritual boundary markers had moved.

In his 1989 lecture “The Body’s Grace”, Rowan Williams remarked:

A theology of the body’s grace which can do justice to the experience, the pain and the variety, of concrete sexual discovery is not, I believe, a marginal eccentricity in the doctrinal spectrum. It depends heavily on believing in a certain sort of God the Trinitarian Creator and Saviour of the world and it draws in a great many themes in the Christian understanding of humanity, helping us to a better critical grasp of the nature and the dangers of corporate human living.\(^{222}\)

On the one hand, to articulate such a theology of the graced body is to describe the human body touched and transformed by the generous, utterly free gift of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification. On the other hand, a theology of the graced body has to attend in some compassionate way to the brokenness, the sinfulness, the relational disruptions and destructiveness that occurs in all human community, and which remain untransformed.

From this theological articulation, juxtaposed alongside narratives of the Spirit’s presence in the lives, struggles and loves of same-sex preferring Christians, the church needs to construct an ascesis—a way of contemporary discipleship—that permits and encourages the committed loving relationships of gay and lesbian Christians to be sanctified by the church in the name of God. The present options of Holy Matrimony for a man and a woman, and for all others, other-sex or same-sex preferring, a life of chaste celibacy within religious community life or as single persons, are no longer acceptable. For most persons the first option is a choice; the second option,

---

\(^{222}\) Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 320.
although chosen by some, tends to be imposed without choice as the only alternate lifestyle that is permitted within the body of Christ.

There is a constant temptation for human beings and their human communities to understand and describe the human body in biological and instrumental terms. In other words, it is treated as an object rather than an indivisible part of the human subject. The effect of this is to isolate the body from the whole human person and from immediacy to God. The graced body challenges Christians and the church to step beyond such narrow limitations. The goal is for human bodies in their totality to be comprehended as relational. This is the work of the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit. It is through our bodies that we relate to other bodies. It is through our bodies that we express our love and care of others. It is through our bodies that our desire for intimate sexual relationship and personal communion occurs. It is through and in the wholeness of our embodied life that we come to know the life-giving grace of the Spirit of God.

A fuller understanding of the relationship of the human body and human soul/spirit to the divine Trinity may enable us to move beyond an instrumental and isolating approach to human being and sexuality, to a more holistic comprehension. There are many matters in this field of theological anthropology that need work. I have chosen to do this through the examination of the interrelationship of a number of Christian doctrines, particularly creation, Christology and pneumatology.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine and critique Karl Barth’s doctrines of creation, Christology and pneumatology to support a theology of humanity that is inclusive of all persons (especially same-sex persons) within the life of the church. The reason I start here is because Barth is the first theologian of his era to draw together in a substantial way a doctrine of humanity and an extended consideration of human sexuality within this. Importantly he draws upon Christology and pneumatology for his understanding of the human being as an indivisible unity of soul and body, a unity held in being by the
Spirit of God. At first glance, Barth seems to be dominated by a theology of the Word; however it becomes clear that the Spirit plays an important and interdependent role in his doctrine of humanity.

In Chapter 4, recognising both Jürgen Moltmann’s indebtedness to Barth and the prominence he gives to embodiment I examine how and why he relates the human body and soul to the Spirit of God. Moltmann’s creation theology and pneumatology give us a fresh way forward for a holistic theological anthropology. One reason for this is the embodied character of his eschatological vision. A second is his strong critique of dualism in theological doctrine inherited from the early church and its surrounding cultures, which tended to deny the value of the body and matter, and from the Cartesian subject-object dualism of the Enlightenment era of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 5 sets out to critique Moltmann’s theology of creation, Christology and pneumatology and put forward what is helpful for an inclusive theology of sexuality; one that positively and deliberately includes same-sex Christians. As a theologian of hope, Moltmann offers substantial material for an inclusive and holistic doctrine of humanity and within that for a theology of sexuality. We look especially at how successful he is in holding together in critical appreciation the doctrines of Christology and pneumatology so that pneumatology is no longer the forgotten Third Person of the Trinity.

In Chapter 6 I bring together the Trinitarian theology, pneumatology and Christology sourced from Barth and Moltmann as the basis for discussing the relationship of grace and sexuality. In this I am helped by the writing of Rowan Williams, Grace Jantzen, Graham Ward, Eugene F. Rogers Jr. and James Alison.

Chapter 7 considers the relationship of the graced body to the Christian expectation of holiness, especially in relation to the blessings of same-sex partnership.
and the ordination of same-sex partnered persons to the ministry of liturgical presidency and pastoral care. The writings of Mark D. Jordan, Marilyn McCord Adams, Gerard Loughlin, Sarah Coakley and Ellen Carry provide a rich resource for this task.

This thesis holds that there can be no inclusive and holistic theological anthropology and theology of human sexuality without the bringing together of Spirit and Word so that the human person is understood in a non-dualistic unity as ensouled body and embodied soul.
Chapter 2: Embodying Humanity

The human being whom God has created in God’s image—that is in freedom—is the human being who is taken from the earth. …The “earth is its mother”; it comes out of her womb. …From it human beings have their bodies. The body belongs to a person’s essence. …A human being does not “have” a body or “have” a soul; instead a human being “is” body and soul. The human being in the beginning really is the body, is one—just as Christ is wholly his body and the Church is the body of Christ. People who reject their bodies reject their existence before God the Creator.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall.

This Chapter focuses on theological anthropology and examines how Karl Barth’s working out of his doctrine of creation can support a contemporary Christian anthropology that accounts for all of human experience and human relationships and therefore takes into account the difference and diversity discovered in creation and in humankind. One attribute of this theological anthropology will be that it is inclusive of all people; it will not exclude sexually marginalised persons and their communities.¹

Theological anthropology is only a part of a total theology of creation; embodied humanity issues forth from “mother earth”, “God’s earth” and is closely related to it, never divorced from it.² The Christian faith affirms that the created world and humanity are from God and therefore have purpose and a goal, and in this sense can be termed spiritual. They are fertile with life and future possibility because God has breathed into them the breath of life.³ A consequence of this affirmation that creation is only from God, not from itself, is that every aspect of human existence has value. This includes

¹ Included in this grouping are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. The common acronym is LGBT or in some countries and usages GLBT.
³ Genesis 2:7.
the human body as well as the soul. It is to the constitution of the created human being and its relationships to the Trinity and to other human persons that we now turn.

The theologian who considered the relationship between the Trinity, creation, humanity and sexuality at great depth in the middle years of the twentieth century is Karl Barth. Following his expulsion from his professorship at Bonn in Germany in 1935, Barth, his wife Nellie, and children and his theological secretary, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, settled at Basel in neutral Switzerland. Here he lived, wrote and taught for the remainder of his long life, dying there in 1968. In this context, the extreme adversity of the European trauma surrounding him, he began in 1942 to write *The Doctrine of Creation* in which he proclaimed the covenant-partnership between God and embodied human beings. This partnership was not with some abstract humanity, nor with some nationalistic demi-god. Barth understood the divine-human covenant-partnership as a foreshadowing of a future, hopeful purpose for creation and for humankind. Such theological hopefulness is as crucial today as it was then. This is something that we can appreciate in his mature theological writings even now. With this prospect we shall explore what he offers us for the development of a theology of the graced body.

2.1 Karl Barth’s theological anthropology

The four volumes of *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* were written between 1942–1951. Therefore, it is not surprising that much of Barth’s theological

---


anthropology seems caught in cultural, gender and sexual attitudes of the past, including his then negative opinion of homosexuality.\(^6\) Coupled with this is the fact that his writing is driven by long-standing theological and philosophical issues and conflicts of the Enlightenment and the modern era, as well as by his opposition to the Nazi regime and its ecclesial supporters. At first glance, Barth’s theological attitudes do not offer much encouragement to the contemporary hopes of lesbian and gay Christians for greater participation in the life of the Church. Nevertheless, I believe he has something to offer to the tasks and challenges of theological anthropology in our time.

What I value in The Doctrine of Creation is how Barth uses the theological disciplines of Christology and pneumatology to expound his theological anthropology, particularly his determinations about human relationships and sexuality. The previous volumes of Church Dogmatics are pervaded by his reworking of Trinitarian faith. He understands himself as a theologian of the Trinity. This has not been without its interpretative and dogmatic problems especially in regard to Barth’s preference for the use of the term “modes of being” rather than triune “Persons” to describe the inner Trinitarian relationships.\(^7\) But as the following quotation reveals, his argument is very carefully nuanced: one may not claim that he disregards the Trinitarian Persons:

---

\(^6\) Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4, 165-166. See also Karl Barth, “Freedom for Community,” in Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (Oxford, UK/Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 114-115. I quote the third of three points from a letter drafted for him by his assistant Eberhard Busch on 21 June, 1968 in response to a letter from Rolf Italiaander of 10th June, 1968, that acknowledges that Barth in 1968 might take a different view of homosexuality than he did in Church Dogmatics, III/4:

“(3) Prof. Barth is today not completely satisfied any more with his former, incidental comments and would certainly formulate them today somewhat differently with respect to what has changed or been newly recognised since they were written down. One might also think that, precisely against the background of the context that God’s command also wants to be perceived and followed as ‘freedom in community’, he could, in conversation with doctors and psychologists, come to a new judgement and exposition of the phenomenon.” The German text of the Letter is collected in “Letter to Rolf Italiaander” (June 21, 1968), in Karl Barth, Offene Briefe 1945-1968, ed. Diether Koch, in Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoever, eds., Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe V Briefe, (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984), 542-543.

God is One. That He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that in this Trinity He is the epitome and sum of all riches, does not mean that His being is inwardly divided. The older dogmatics spoke here of the perichoresis of God’s three persons or modes of being. It means by this that He is always the One, not without the Other, but in and through the Other. ...It would not be God the Creator, the Father Almighty, as manifested in His Word and attested in the creed, if we did not immediately and fundamentally recognise in Him the Son and His work, and the Spirit, the Lifegiver.\(^8\)

The significance of the Trinity for Barth can be recognised in his use of the Trinitarian themes of creation, reconciliation, and redemption as the basic structure for the *Church Dogmatics*.\(^9\) Keeping these themes in mind, I look at three components of his doctrine of humanity:

- first, humankind was formed for covenant relationship with the Creator and fellowship with co-humanity;
- second, humankind was created in the image of God; Jesus Christ being the true imago Dei;
- third, humankind was united indivisibly as soul and body and held in life by the Spirit of God.

For convenience I describe these three components as relationship, identity, and unity. They are not discrete entities in Barth’s thought but are interwoven, dancing around each other interdependently. In order to place some limits on the scope of this exploration, my discussion of the three components is sourced from the four part-volumes of *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation*. This will require accepting the complexity and nuances of Barth’s method. John Webster describes this and warns of the danger of relying on a superficial reading:

…as always in Barth, the full force of the argument is not conveyed by any one statement, but by a layered, or perhaps cumulative, effect. Poor readers of Barth extract one layer, make it stand for the whole, and then find it a relatively simple

---


\(^8\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 32-33.

\(^9\) The final volumes on the doctrine of redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit remained unwritten.
matter to annex Barth to another scheme or project. Good readers endure the perplexity for longer, but in the end are afforded a rather more complex (and ultimately satisfying) account of the matter.  

Throughout *The Doctrine of Creation*, Barth uses three strategies to expound his doctrine of humanity. The first is Christological, the second is analogical, the third is pneumatological, but none of these strategies work independently of each other. They interweave with each other. Christology is the substantial foundation of all his anthropology; its critical filter is the humanity of Jesus Christ. For example, in each section of Church Dogmatics III/2, he pays substantial attention to Jesus Christ in his relationship to God and to humanity. The section titles illustrate my point: “Jesus, Man for God”, “Jesus, Man for other Men”, “Jesus, Whole Man”, and “Jesus, Lord of Time”. Jesus Christ is always, at one and the same time, Son of God and Son of Man; his divinity and humanity though distinct are always united; this “is the mystery of Jesus Christ”.

His second strategy is the use of analogy. This is not the traditional analogy of Catholic theology—*analogia entis* (the analogy of being)—which allows the dangerous possibility of the identity of divine and human substance and essence, but rather *analogia relationis*—the analogy of relationship. Barth explains:

God wills and creates man when He wills and creates the being between which and Himself there exists this *tertium comparationis*, this analogy; the analogy of free differentiation and relation. …He wills and creates man as a partner who is capable of entering into covenant-relationship with Himself for all the disparity in and therefore the differentiation between man as a creature and his Creator.

---


11 Ibid., 208. In *Church Dogmatics* III/2, Barth gives a “full-blooded” and vibrant description of the humanity of Jesus. This is remarkable when compared with the dullness of his writing about our “ordinary” humanity in the same volume.


13 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 185.
But he is careful to distinguish between the internal relations within the divine being and external relationship between God and humanity:

This is not a correspondence and similarity of being, an *analogia entis*. The being of God cannot be compared with that of man. ...It is a question of the relationship within the being of God on the one side and between the being of God and that of man on the other. Between these two relationships as such—and it is in this sense that the second is the image of the first—there is correspondence and similarity. There is an *analogia relationis*.  

Barth borrowed this term from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and used it as an interpretative tool to further his enquiry into God’s creation of humanity so that the category difference between God and humankind is maintained yet the relationship acknowledged. This is emphasised in the third volume of his Doctrine of Creation:

All theology is a meditation about God and the creature. But since it meditates and speaks about them they are always in danger of becoming things. The human thinker and speaker is in constant danger of forgetting the inconceivable mystery of their existence and being, their presence and operation, and of imagining that he can think and speak about them directly, as though both they themselves and also their relationship to each other were somehow below him.

To respect the difference of being but allow for similarity and correspondence even in unlikeness in the relationship is Barth’s intent. This is of the utmost significance for him because he is so deeply concerned to prevent any confusion of being between humanity and divinity. Likewise, this is an important issue for the present discussion because we are concerned with discerning the relationship between God and the human body and sexuality. What is at issue is the possibility that divinity and humanity might be confused. More specifically, there might be a confusion of divine love (especially

---

15 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 220.
17 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3, 102.
the intra-divine love of the Trinitarian Persons) with human sexual love. The use of *analogia relationis*—analogy of relation—enables theologians to keep an appropriate distance between the human and the divine while drawing attention to significant (or even insignificant) similarities.

However, Barth’s particular use of the analogy of relation has attracted some criticism. There are fault lines that Barth does not recognise or which he disregards. One such is whether the analogy of relation leads him to a particular relational interpretation of humanity created in the image of God that is not justified exegetically. With these brief comments on his two methodological strategies, I now examine the three components of his doctrine of humanity—relationship, identity, and unity.

The Christian tradition witnesses from the earliest times that human relationship cannot be properly comprehended without reference to the divine-human relationship that Holy Scripture describes in covenantal terms. This divine-human relationship is initiated by God to whom human beings in turn respond. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity proclaims that God is in relationship; the intra-Trinitarian mutual relations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The retrieval of Trinitarian doctrine during the twentieth century has had a profound influence upon Christian theologies of relationship and Barth was a key theologian working in this area.

---

19 Gerard Loughlin, *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* (Malden, MA/Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 148. “Unlike their predecessors, many modern theologians have wanted to draw a sharp distinction between the love that is proper to God and to the Christian imitation of God, and that which enthralls the flesh, which elicits touch, caress and embrace, the stroking of skin and the meeting of lips. For Karl Barth this latter love (eros) is but a rapacious ‘intensification and strengthening of natural self-assertion’. ‘It is hungry, and demands the food. ...both Red Riding Hood and her grandmother’.”


21 Gorringe, *Against Hegemony*, 288, Note 280. Gorringe asks “how satisfactory is Barth’s pressing of the analogy of relations in his anthropology,” and argues that there are places where we need to go beyond Barth’s position.
The doctrine of humanity begins with God, according to Barth, because it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Creator who reaches out to establish a covenant with humanity. This covenant is reciprocally linked with the act of creation so that creation is “the external sign of the covenant and the covenant is the internal sign of the creation”. A further interpretation of the divine act of creation is that God creates humankind in freedom for freedom. To begin with humankind would be from Barth’s perspective to avoid the theological truth that theology and anthropology are determined by God’s revelation not derived from human knowledge or speculation.

This is his all important determination throughout the *Church Dogmatics* and especially so in *The Doctrine of Creation*.

For Barth, the Bible witnesses that all human beings are created to engage in encounter and fellowship with their Creator and with other men and women. His biblical sources are principally Genesis 1–3 and the Song of Songs. In Genesis 1:1–2:4, a liturgical poem celebrating the goodness of God’s creation, commonly referred to as the *P* saga, God forms humankind as the culmination of a purposeful creative activity involving inanimate and animate creatures. This human creature will have responsibility and agency for the care of all creation including the beasts.

The second saga, Genesis 2:5–2:25, the *J* saga, is for Barth the climax of the Creator’s purposeful creative activity: God forms a partner for Godself, *’adam* “humanity”, from the dust of the earth and with the breath of God a living being is

---

22 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, § 41. Creation and Covenant 42, especially 184-187 and 236-238, 244-245.
24 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*,III/2. See his discussion of the anthropological issues in § 43, 19-27; and § 45, 228-229.
26 The initial *P* is used as an abbreviation for this saga because the majority of biblical scholars believe it is sourced from a group of priestly writers, working at a particular period in Israelite history.
27 Barth’s discussion of Genesis 1:1–2:4 is located throughout Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, and especially 181–191 for the creation of humankind on the sixth day of creation.
28 Genesis 1:28.
formed. He describes this saga as the “Old Testament Magna Carta of humanity” because in it God responds to the aloneness of the undifferentiated human creature by creating a partner for the creature. Man and woman are placed by God in the luxurious garden for encounter and exchange. The importance to Barth of the male and female relation is revealed again in his linking Genesis 2–3 with the story of the two lovers and their union in the garden of love in the Song of Songs which he describes as a “second Magna Carta of humanity”.

In the act of creation God reaches out to establish ongoing relationship with creation. This reaching out is God’s free initiative. The focus of this ongoing encounter and desired partnership is ‘adam, the newly formed human creature. Barth draws our attention to Michelangelo’s painting of “The creation of Adam” on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The artist imaginatively captures one dynamic moment of the second Genesis creation saga. Finger tip to finger tip—the Creator and the created—are depicted at the moment of the setting free in freedom for freedom. God lets go in trust, hoping that ‘adam will respond in trust, “summoned because chosen”. The Creator’s gracious act of creation in fact looks hopefully to the future, to the possibility of ongoing encounter. Barth is clear that because God “is not solitary in Himself, and therefore does not will to be so ad extra, it is not good for man to be

---

29 The initial J is used for this second creation saga with its story of the creation of Adam and Eve, and the use of the Yahweh for God. The J comes from the first letter of the old form of God’s name Jehovah. This saga is attributed to the Yahwist writer(s).
31 For an illuminating, critical and beautiful exegesis and theological reflection upon Genesis 2–3, see LaCocque, The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist, see his Conclusion/Inclusion, 267-277, especially 276. LaCocque echoes many of Barth’s themes and concerns; for example: “The human being is a miraculous being. S/he is born from the divine desire to dialogue with a partner. The human, therefore, is a being in relationship, first with God, then with a ‘consubstantial’ counterpart, and eventually with the rest of creation. In this interaction, the contrast similar/dissimilar is crucial. Historically, such relationship at all levels is perturbed, but it remains the ultimate goal in life and is here and now a ‘star of redemption’.”
32 Barth, Church Dogmatics, 293-294, 296-297; here 293.
33 Ibid., 150. See also Barth, Church Dogmatics, 245 and 247.
34 Barth, Church Dogmatics, 150.
alone”. The divine likeness—the *imago Dei*—in humankind is one of relationship not of being. It is this focus on relationship that is ultimately important for Barth in his use of the *imago Dei* to determine what it is to be a human person. As God is in a triune relationship of persons so man and woman created, redeemed and sanctified by this same God are in relationship as fellow humanity.

Following Martin Buber, Barth characterises this human encounter and fellowship as an *I-Thou* relationship as opposed to an *I-it* relation. This *I-Thou* relationship is a covenantal one between God and humanity and between human and human, particularly between man and woman. However, the divine-human encounter is a partnership characterised by depth and mutual intimacy but not equality; a covenant partnership marked by similarity, correspondence and difference.

Barth distinguishes “identity” from “likeness”, “similarity” and “correspondence” in his exposition of the divine human encounter in Jesus Christ and fellow humanity. He then draws a conclusion that leads him from human beings in encounter with God as covenant-partner to humanity created in the image of God. He makes clear that correspondence to, is not relational identity with, the divine. Nor does he confuse solitariness and singleness either in God or humanity. Men and women experience the enduring singularity and duality of co-humans:

> Man is no more solitary than God. But as God is One, and He alone is God, so man as man is one and alone, and two only in the duality of his kind, i.e., in the duality of man and woman.

---

35 Ibid., 324.
36 Martin Buber, (1878-1965). Selinger, *Charlotte Von Kirschbaum*, 132. She quotes Buber’s reflection on Barth’s development of the I-Thou concept: “Barth took over; ‘naturally in the manner of genuine independent thinking, our recognition of the fundamental distinction between It and Thou and of the true being of the I in the meeting’.”
37 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 185.
38 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 323.
39 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 186. Barth develops his discussion and argument on male and female as co-humanity in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 288-289. “There is no being of man above the being of male and female.”
The unity of humankind is always expressed in duality. In this concrete human reality of sexual differentiation and relationship Barth sees reflected the _imago Dei_—the image of God. Through this relationship humanity is “the special creature of God’s special grace”. This is the form in which the grace of God is embodied. Why so? Barth answers that it is “because it has pleased God to make man in this form of life an image and likeness, a witness, of His own form of life”.

Men are simply male and female. …This is the particular dignity ascribed to the sex relationship. [It is] the only real principle of differentiation and relationship, as the original form not only of man’s confrontation of God but also of all intercourse between man and man, it is the true humanum and therefore the true creaturely image of God. Man can and will always be man before God and among his fellows only as he is man in relationship to woman and woman in relationship to man.

Later, in his section on the covenant as the internal basis of creation, he places his discussion of the male and female sexual relationship within the context of the church and of Israel. Thereby, he successfully removes the discussion of the human being as the image of God from what reads so often as an isolated individual sphere into a communal and ecclesial sphere.

When the Old Testament gives dignity to the sexual relationship, it has in view its prototype, the divine likeness of man as male and female which in the plan and election of God is primarily the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church, secondarily the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and only finally although very directly in view of its origin the relationship between the sexes.

In emphasising this relationship between Yahweh and Israel, Barth states that it can and “must be described as an erotic relationship”. This may have seemed a startling observation for a theologian to make in 1948. It illustrates Barth’s belief in the radical character of the divine-human relationship revealed in Holy Scripture.

---

40 Barth, _Church Dogmatics_, 186.
41 Ibid., 187.
42 Ibid., 186.
43 Ibid., 322.
44 Ibid.
In summary we can say of Barth’s understanding of relationship that God creates the human creature for enduring, joyful encounter and relationship with God and with fellow humanity; as God is not singular but in Trinitarian relationship, so all human beings are called to mutual relationship in human community.

Barth pays particular attention to the theology of the *imago Dei*—humanity formed in the image of God. This is where he focuses on the Christian comprehension of human identity. The biblical source for his particular theological interpretation is Genesis 1:26–27. There are two important points to observe about his exegesis of the text. The first concerns the translation. The second is his unique interpretation of it.

First, he translates the Hebrew words צלם *selem* and דמה *damah* (which are usually translated in English as “image”, and “likeness” respectively)\(^47\) to mean “original” or “prototype” and “representation” or “copy”.\(^48\) From this he emphasises that humanity is created by God in correspondence to God’s being. Therefore, according to Barth, two things follow: Jesus Christ becomes the real *imago Dei* and human beings are the image of the image, and, second, being in the image of the *imago Dei* can never be a possession of humankind.\(^49\) The *imago Dei* is always a gracious gift of God.

Second, Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:26–27 (as above) emphasises that humankind created in God’s image is created in the duality of male and female. He places great significance on this gendered determination of co-humanity: this is what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God—to be male or female—nothing

---


\(^48\) The English translators of Barth’s German render verse 1:26 as “Let us make man in our original, according to our prototype.” Barth translates these verses with special attention to both the nouns צלם *selem* (“character of an image, …completed work, …plastic representation, …idols”) and דמה *damah* (“…copy, …duplicate, …imitation”) and their related prepositions. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 197-198.

\(^49\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 219, 223, & 225.
more, nothing less, “all other explanations of the imago Dei suffer from the fact that they do not do justice to this decisive statement”. 50 Man is the counterpart of woman; woman is the counterpart of man. The human being “seeks his true partner in woman and not in man, and woman remains what she is, and therefore a being whose true counterpart cannot be found in woman but only in man”. 51

In the development of his theology of the imago Dei, Barth looks beyond Genesis 1:26–27 52 to the wider context of the human relational activity that occurs in the two beautiful gardens depicted in Genesis 2:4–2:25 and the Song of Songs. 53 In his comparison, he highlights the priority given by the respective writers to the celebration of the male and female mutual covenantal relationship above that of the production of human progeny for the next generation.

The Song of Songs is one long description of rapture, the unquenchable yearning and the restless willingness, with which both partners in this covenant hasten towards an encounter. Gen. 2 is even more radical in its great brevity. It tells us that only male and female together are man. 54

In itself Barth’s distinction reveals the strength of his focus on the male and female relationship. This is the primary intra-human relationship, all others are secondary: parents, siblings, family, neighbours, nation. 55

The point Barth draws from the two creation sagas is that in the act of creation, God the Creator has reached out to form an enduring covenant of grace between Godself and humankind. He understands that a significant reciprocal relationship for

50 Ibid., 323-324. See also Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, the Doctrine of Reconciliation, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. IV/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), III/1, 184-186.
51 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 287.
52 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, 183-187.
53 These verses are the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures which refer directly to humanity being created in the image of God: Genesis 1:27, Genesis 5:1, and Genesis 9:6. However, biblical scholars have recognised that Psalm 8 and the Song of Songs express a similar theological understanding of the Creator, the creation and humankind.
54 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, 313.
55 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4, 241-242. “The word and concept of ‘family’ are deliberatively avoided. The term originally denotes the retinue of servants (famulus) who belong bodily to a lord. …In the more limited sense particularly the idea of family is of no interest at all for Christian theology. …The ramifications of the family which are so important in the modern concept are not emphasised in the Old Testament, and even less so in the New.”
humanity exists between creation and covenant: “the covenant is the internal basis of creation” and “creation is the external basis of the covenant”. The Song of Songs is therefore a profound working out and illustration of this covenant in the biblical tradition precisely because it focuses on the mutuality and intimacy and longing that Barth believes to be the joyful and divine intention of the male and female relationship.

Pro-Barthian scholars, and others, have some problems with his exegesis of Genesis 1:26–27. Richard Middleton argues that Barth’s interpretation, alongside that of many other theologians since then, is reliant on “theological paradigms and agendas” that are outside the actual text being exegeted. In effect, it is argued that Barth’s exegesis gives too much weight to humankind being male and female as the defining characteristic of human nature and human relationship.

Barth’s view has repercussions for human relationships because it tends to promote male and female relations above other normal human relationships. Male and male relationships and female and female relationships are also equally significant in the lives, work, recreation and friendships of human beings and human community. What Barth confuses is the biological duality of male and female gender with the relational vocation of all humanity in which all human beings are counterparts to each other. It is the latter interpretation that is better supported by contemporary exegesis of Genesis 1–2 and by a theology of the imago Dei drawn from it.

56 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, 184-187, 236-238, and 244-245. This is Barth’s fuller discussion of the external and internal aspects of creation and covenant.
Not only does Barth’s interpretation tend to exclude the breadth of all other human relationships, it can also be seen to support notions of compulsory complementarity in which the only valid (approved or permitted) form of human sexual union is that between a man and woman in marriage. His determination that the male and female relationship is the primary characteristic of human identity, although important in its own right, seems to place a question mark against the fullness of the human identity of men or women who happen to be single or called by God into religious community life or whose sexual orientation happens to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Compulsory complementarity effectively excludes lesbians and gays from ecclesial blessing of their same-sex unions. In answer to those who would use the theology of the *imago Dei* to exclude gay and lesbian Christians from church membership and sacramental life, gay theologian, Larry Kent Graham writes:

> To be in the image of God as fully human, therefore, is disclosed as a quality of relationship available to all and not limited to special endowments available only to a selected class of people. The quality of that relationship is love. Love is central to care, to sexuality, to healing, and to disclosing the image of God in human experience.  

The positive gain from Barth’s exegesis is that women were no longer to be viewed as unequal to men—male and female are equally valued in the eyes of the Creator and have always been so. However, as is well known, the actual relationships of men and women were not so easily sorted out for Barth. He could not escape from his theological need to place women in a sequential, subordinate relationship to men,

---


59 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 287; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 168-169. Barth’s discussion in this second reference is quite nuanced almost contradictory at first sight. “Man and woman are fully equal before God … They are also equal in regard to the necessity of their mutual relationship and orientation.”
based on his exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 and 1 Corinthians 11:1–11, while maintaining their equality and the mutuality of their relationship.60

For Barth, this relationship of co-humanity—of humankind as always in relation as male and female—is the outward expression of what it means to be created in the image of God.61

“He created them male and female.” This is the interpretation immediately given to the sentence “God created man.” As in this sense man is the first and only one to be created in genuine confrontation with God and as a genuine counterpart to his fellows, it is he first and alone who is created “in the image” and “after the likeness” of God.62

Barth communicates this relational nature of human beings made in the image of God with the use of these words: encounter, partnership, counterpart, and confrontation. The revelation of God is the source for Barth’s determination that humanity is created in the image of God.63 The source of revelation is the Word of God which Barth defines as threefold: the Word of God preached, the Word of God written, and the Word of God revealed.64 However, he was not a biblical literalist in his interpretation of Holy Scripture and its use in determining the ethical choices of human life.65 The words of scripture witnessed to the Word of God, Jesus Christ:

In revelation our concern is with the coming Jesus Christ and finally, when the time was fulfilled, the Jesus Christ who has come. Literally, and this time really directly, we are thus concerned with God’s own Word spoken by God Himself. What we

60 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 287, and especially 312; Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4, 169. “Order means succession. It means preceding and following. It means super- and sub-ordination.” Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 312. This is an excellent example of how Barth struggles with the issue of equality, mutuality, and sequential order.

61 Laurence Paul Hemming, “‘The Undoing of Sex: The Proper Enjoyment of Divine Command,’ Studies in Christian Ethics 23, no. 1 (2010): 59-72. Hemming criticises those who interpret Genesis 2-3 as “a narrative about the inception of the meaning of sexual difference” rather than the traditional narrative inaugurating God’s redemption of humanity. He interprets the effect of such a move as making “a claim for an absolute, essentialised, status of sexual difference” in human gender identity. The effect is to over emphasise the place of sexual identity over all male and female identity. This seems a reasonable criticism of Barth’s position.

62 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, 184.

63 “Revelation” is perhaps the dominant determining element in the whole of Barth’s theology. For his major sections on “Revelation”, see Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, §§ 295-347; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, the Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. G. W. Bromiley, G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight, vol. I/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), §14, 45-121; §115, 122-202; §117, 280-361.

64 Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, § 4 The Word of God in Its Threefold Form, 88-124.

have in the Bible are in any case human attempts to repeat and reproduce this Word of God in human words and thoughts and in specific human situations.\textsuperscript{66}

To summarise Karl Barth’s position on human identity: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is revealed as the image of God, the prototype of true humanity. Through the grace of God the Creator human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. For Barth, the \textit{imago Dei} is always to be interpreted as the co-humanity of men and women. One difficulty with this interpretation is its authorising of male and female compulsory complementarity.

Alongside the themes of relationship and identity, Barth addresses the unity of the human being. What makes human beings indivisible wholes? Why is the spirit or soul not a separate entity from the body? To answer such questions he engages his third strategy, the pneumatological. He moves from Christology and analogy to pneumatology interweaving them together.

Jesus is the true man in the sense that He is whole man, a meaningfully ordered unity of soul and body. …Guided by the New Testament, we must think of the Holy Spirit, and more especially of the presence and efficacy of the Holy Spirit, if we are to give an account of the special constitution of this man. This immediately reminds us of the supreme particularity that this true man is primarily and at the same time the true God Himself. It is in this way, this higher unity of His existence with that of God Himself, that He is whole man, a meaningfully ordered unity of soul and body.\textsuperscript{67}

This move to pneumatology is perhaps one of his more important contributions to theological anthropology. According to Barth, human beings live because the Spirit of God holds them in life. The Holy Spirit breathes life into the material body and makes it a “living body”—en-spirited!\textsuperscript{68} He describes the human creature as “be-souled body” and “embodied soul”, an indivisible whole.\textsuperscript{69} Here is the real key to his understanding of the theology of humanity: Christology, but not without pneumatology. Christ and the Spirit must rest alongside each other.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{66} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, I/1, 113.\\
\textsuperscript{67} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, III/2, 340-341.\\
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., III/2, 219, 223, & 225.\\
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 327.\
\end{flushleft}
In holding pneumatology and Christology together in theological anthropology, Barth reveals the significance of the Trinitarian pattern of his whole theological engagement in *Church Dogmatics*. Certainly Christology has held the pre-eminent position in his theology to this point. In *Church Dogmatics* III/2, pneumatology now assumes a major position in his theological argument about the constitution of human being. Claiming that Barth’s anthropology focuses more on pneumatology than Christology, Jesuit theologian Philip J. Rosato proposes that “the *Church Dogmatics* (III) contains the most innovative Spirit theology within the Barthian corpus.”

The reason for this is that Barth develops the two themes of *Spiritus Creator* and a Spirit Christology in *The Doctrine of Creation* and this leads him to a true theology of the Father: “…this is so significant since only in the perspective of the first creedal article does Barth actually put Christ and the Spirit on equal ground, as it were.” Rosato criticises Barth for presenting the Spirit’s task in humanity and in Christ in “a rather accidental role”, but he concedes that “…this should not detract from the fact that here the Spirit is at least incorporated into Barth’s theological vision in more than a purely noetic fashion.”

He explains in some detail how the role of the Spirit functions in *The Doctrine of Creation*:

The Spirit also guarantees Jesus’ integral humanity so that the Word of God can dwell uniquely in Him. Though Barth’s pneumatology occupies a pre-eminent position over his anthropology in the *Church Dogmatics* (III), it is refreshingly evident that the Spirit shares great responsibility in this entire area. In the light of creation’s vastness and of the Father’s goodness, the Spirit is for a moment seen to play an indispensable part in the very occurrence of the incarnation and not to be totally subservient to the already accomplished Christ-event.

---


71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 184-185.
Thus, according to Rosato, embodiment and the Spirit are tied together in the
Incarnation of the Word. This emphasises the mutuality and equality of the intra-
Trinitarian relations and asserts that the Spirit is not to be understood as subordinate to
the other Persons.

The Spirit has its own role to play in human relationships and human
community, especially in the ecclesia. This role concerns the practical working out of
love in embodied lives so that people can know that grace is tangible and embodied;
that God is real! In other words, the presence of the Spirit is more than noetic.

However I have doubts that Barth successfully leads us to this position by the time we
arrive at Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation III/4 and his discussion on the
embodied practical aspects of male and female relationships, marriage and more
detailed reflections on human sexuality. It is not that the Spirit is totally absent from his
writing but it seems not to connect in any vibrant or tangible way. We look more
closely at Barth’s working out of his pneumatology later in this chapter and again in
Chapter 3. Here, I consider his working out of the theme of the unity of the human
being as an indivisible body and soul.

The strategy he employs is to look first at the humanity of Jesus Christ and then
at the humanity of other human beings. His reading of the New Testament picture of
the human Jesus is that he is a unity characterised by wholeness. This is his first point.
He refuses to divide the human Christ into parts. He asks: “What is there in Him which
is only inner and not outer, sensuous and not rational?”74 Christ does not exist as the
coming together of two discrete substances; rather,

He is one whole man, embodied soul and besouled body: the one in the other and
never merely beside it; the one never without the other but only with it, and in it
present, active and significant; the one with all its attributes always to be taken as
seriously as the other.75

74 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 327.
75 Ibid. This is one of the few places where Barth’s English translators use the word “embodied”.
For Barth this is the New Testament revelation about the indivisible reality of Jesus’ humanity.\textsuperscript{76} The New Testament writers are not concerned with the details of Jesus’ physical well-being or even his unmarried celibate state but with the overall fact of his “corporeality”, with the actions and works of this one whole human being. He draws his readers’ attention to this to highlight his criticism of eighteenth and nineteenth century theological positions which, in his opinion, excessively spiritualised their portraits of the human Jesus. Noting the paradoxical richness of this poverty of biographical detail about either Jesus’ soul or body, he writes:

The soul is real and important only as His shocked and grieved and angered but also loving and rejoicing soul; the body, on the other hand, is real and important only as His humiliated but also exalted body.\textsuperscript{77}

The wholeness of the humanity of this true human being, Jesus, is further drawn out by Barth’s observing the New Testament connection of the spiritual and the bodily reality in the human constitution. Without the somatic the pneumatic neither has form nor activity: abstracted from the body the soul is no longer soul.\textsuperscript{78}

In his second point, concerning the unity and wholeness of Jesus’ humanity, we can note the sense of order and hierarchy that is a recurring theme in Barth’s theological anthropology. He states:

…the oneness and wholeness of this human life is fashioned, structured and determined from within, and therefore necessary and of lasting significance. The interconnection of the soul and body and the Word and act of Jesus is not a chaos but a cosmos, a formed and ordered totality. There is in it a higher and a lower, a first and a second, a dominating and a dominated. But the man Jesus Himself is both. …His life of soul and body is really His life. He has full authority over it.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 328-331.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 287.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 331-332.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 332.
This sense of cosmos and order, unity and wholeness, in the human constitution of Jesus is profoundly important for Karl Barth.\(^80\) As we shall see later on, his understanding of order is hierarchical. For this he was and continues to be criticised.\(^81\)

The exposition of the definitive relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit illustrates the very positive stances that Barth held about the relationship of soul and body and humankind.\(^82\) Word and Spirit together are the foundation for his argument. Noting first that “the human person of Jesus [is] in an absolutely unique relation with the Holy Spirit,”\(^83\) Barth draws out its deeper meaning:

The relationship of this man [Jesus Christ] to the Holy Spirit is so close and special that He owes no more and no less than his existence itself and as such to the Holy Spirit. But in the Old and New Testaments the Holy Spirit is God Himself in His creative movement to His creation. It is God who breathes specially upon man (Gen. 2:7), thus living for him, allowing him to partake of His own life, and therefore making him on his side a living being. From the standpoint of man, He is thus his possibility of being a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7, ζωον, 1 Cor. 15:45), and as such a body.\(^84\)

He then qualifies what this means; it is because Jesus is both Messiah and Son of God that he is specially related to the Spirit of God, not the reverse.\(^85\) Emphasising that all the biblical passages that refer to the Holy Spirit resting on him, remaining with him, of his being full of the Spirit, “are not anthropological but exclusively Messianic”, Barth highlights the unique human character of Jesus Christ over against humankind in general.\(^86\) In the ensuing section §46 “The Spirit as Basis of Soul and Body”, he argues

---

\(^{80}\) Ibid.

\(^{81}\) Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991), 135-138; here 137. Moltmann stands against Barth’s concept of order with its notions of superiority and hierarchy in discussing creation and humanity, especially as male and female. “I do not understand Barth’s hierarchy of the world, nor do I find any legitimation in Christian theology for the order according to which man corresponds to the soul, heaven and Christ and the woman to the body, earth and the community.”

\(^{82}\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 332-340.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 332.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 333-334.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 333.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 334.
that ordinary humankind does not possess or “have” Spirit in any permanent sense.  

The Spirit can come and go: its presence is described as transitory and partial.  

In contrast, the true, real and whole human being, Jesus Christ, has the Holy Spirit unceasingly and completely.

He is the man to whom the creative movement of God has come primarily, originally and therefore definitively, who derives His existence as soul and body from this movement, and for whom to be the “living soul” of an earthly body and earthly body of a “living soul” is not a mere possibility but a most proper reality. He breathes lastingly and totally in the air of the “life-giving Spirit.” He not only has the Spirit, but primarily and basically He is Spirit as He is soul and body. For this reason and in this way He lives. This is His absolutely unique relationship to the Holy Spirit.

This is a significant contrast that Barth makes between Jesus Christ and humankind. It raises a continuing question about his theological understanding of incarnation and embodiment and the meaning of humanity in Christ and us.

Barth then emphasises that something important happens to the flesh when the logos becomes flesh. He notes that in Holy Scripture “flesh” has a primary and neutral connotation of “human existence” or “humanity” and only secondarily a negative meaning of humankind divorced from God in a relationship marked by disorder and contradiction, of alienation. In his detailed consideration of the anthropological paradox of the relationship of Word and “flesh” in Jesus Christ, he touches on questions central to understanding the place of the graced body in a theology of embodiment.

The flesh, which in itself is disobedient, becomes obedient. … The flesh now becomes the object and subject of saving passion and action. In the flesh the reconciliation of the flesh is completed. This is the triumph of the meaning of the human existence of Jesus.

---

87 Ibid., 344-366. Barth’s argument is highly nuanced in this biblical excursus: “That humankind possesses Spirit is ‘the fundamental determination’ which enables the human being as soul of a particular body”. At one moment he argues that “In so far as they live at all, they live by the Spirit”, that without the Spirit there is only death for humankind, and in the next moment we find Barth emphasising that the Spirit’s presence is of “only transitory and partial benefit to him.” (334).

88 Ibid., 334.

89 Ibid.

90 Barth’s very full excursus on the relationship of “flesh”, “Logos”, and “Spirit” can be found in Ibid., 332-340, and especially 335-338.

91 Ibid., 336.
Our concern will be that of the relation of Spirit to the flesh of Jesus Christ and the relation of the Spirit and flesh in “ordinary” humankind. That Barth notes a difference means we must ask if we actually share the same humanity as Christ.

Barth shows us the danger of starting with a notion of humanity, rather than understanding humanity through what is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is never without the Spirit. In the logos becoming flesh and the Spirit resting on him, Barth comprehends that something new is created in the flesh and humanity of Jesus which affects the totality of Jesus’ very existence. He argues that the Evangelists depict the reality of the resurrection invading the whole life and humanity of Jesus from its very beginning: “…the resurrection adds nothing new”, merely “crowns”, discloses and reveals the original embodiment of the Spirit in the flesh of the humanity of Jesus in the Incarnation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is in the most profound sense sui generis. It is the new, the first and unique action of God’s re-creation of the cosmos. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just another, or even greater, sign and wonder. It is a new form of embodiment in which divinity and humanity meet in a new way that the early church and Evangelists described as resurrection—the new creation.

Barth is careful to show that this ordering of soul before body is not a belittling, subjugation, oppression or negation of Jesus’ body. Soul and body are equal in dignity. There is super- and subordination, but it is an order of peace in which both moments, each in its own place and function, have equal share in the dignity of the whole, which means the dignity of the one man Jesus and therefore in the fullness of the Spirit that rests upon Him and the glory of the Logos incarnate in Him.

92 Ibid., 336-337.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 338.
For Barth there is an “irreversible order” which puts soul before body.\textsuperscript{95} Yet it is certain that the body of Jesus shares fully in the Holy Spirit that rests upon him.\textsuperscript{96} In him there is only wholeness and unity;\textsuperscript{97} there is no dualism.\textsuperscript{98}

Barth likens the relationship of the soul and body in Jesus to the similar way in which Jesus’ being as “Son and Word of God the Creator is related to His creaturely constitution as soul and body”.\textsuperscript{99} This ordering of the divine-human relationship is not marked by mutuality or equality but by an “irreversible” sequential hierarchy: the Giver is always prior to the gift, and the Creator is always prior to the creature.

Although Barth makes mention of more distant analogies, he argues that analogies ought not to be pursued indiscriminately, observing that there is far less disparity in the analogy of relationship between Jesus and his soul and body than between Jesus and his community of faith, often referred to as the body of Christ:

We content ourselves, therefore, with the two really close comparisons which we have unfolded. The soul and body of Jesus are mutually related to one another as are God and man in His person, and Himself and His community.\textsuperscript{100}

For Barth, Christology and anthropology are embodied in Jesus and through the work of the Spirit in the \textit{ecclesia}, the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{101} However, important and different questions remain about the relationship or lack of relationship between the humanity of Christ and the humanity of all other human beings.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 339. “His body is the body of His soul, not \textit{vice versa}.”
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 339-340. Barth holds that oneness and wholeness that constitute the human being of Jesus as soul and body is also revealed in his words and actions. Here too he holds to his sense of “order”, of superiority and inferiority, where “The Word leads; the sign follows”.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 338. “The New Testament contains not the slightest hint of emancipation of the bodily life of Jesus from the soul, nor of an ascetic conflict of the soul of Jesus against the body. The Spirit resting upon Him clearly makes the one impossible and the other superfluous.”
\item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 341. “We can have no more than an analogy. The soul of Jesus is not His divinity, but only comparable with it in its function within His being as man. And His body is not His humanity, but only comparable with it (in His totality of soul and body) within His humanity.”
\item \textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 343-344.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 344. “…for all theological knowledge of man as such we must begin with the picture of this man”.
\end{itemize}
2.2 The Holy Spirit as the life of the human soul and body

Barth gives prominent place in his anthropology to the relationship of the Spirit of God to humankind. By God’s “ever new act of grace” men and women are called into existence: “…man is as he has spirit”.102

That man is spirit could be rightly said only in so far as he is soul and therefore also body in virtue of spirit, a spiritual soul and to that extent also a spiritual body.103

Without this relationship humankind could not and would not exist. He uses four delimitations to explain the relationship. First, the human creature cannot exist without God: “Man is God’s creature”.104 Second, humanity experiences limitations because the human creature is not the Creator. Third, humankind cannot be without God and in fact is created for relationship with God by God, “determined for covenant with God”.105 Finally, he argues that the human being cannot comprehend himself apart from God:

Man as soul and body is in no case so made that he is simply there, as though self-grounded, self-based, self-constituted and self-maintained.106

There is no sense for Barth that humankind is spirit. To believe this would be to misunderstand the biblical witness that “spirit” refers to the being and activity of God directed graciously toward humanity. Humanity is possessed by the Spirit of God and brought to life by this same Spirit. The human being does not possess the spirit by right.107 Barth’s phrase puts the relationship succinctly: “…man is, as the spirit has

102 Ibid., 354.
103 Ibid., 354-355. Barth points out the inherent danger, common in the modern theological circles of his time under the influence of Hegelians, of calling man “spirit” and thus allowing the possibility of identifying humankind with God. He supports the Early Church’s condemnation of those who understood humanity’s constitution as having three elements: “spirit”, “soul” and “body”. However, in this criticism of trichotomism he makes a significant Scriptural clarification about the uses of “spirit” and “soul”. “Scripture never says ‘soul’ where only ‘spirit’ can be meant. But it often says ‘spirit’ where ‘soul’ is meant; and there is reason for this in the fact that the constitution of man as soul and body cannot be fully and exactly described without thinking first and foremost of the spirit as its proper basis.”
104 Ibid., 344.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 345.
107 Ibid., 357-358, and 360-362. In two small print excursus, Barth surveys the use and place of the Spirit in the Old Testament and New Testament. He notes particularly the contrast between the two Testaments in that the Spirit comes upon individuals in the Old Testament and not upon the community.
him”.

It determines and limits human life. Thus it is the Spirit who creates men and
women as embodied souls and besouled bodies, and whose departure in human death
makes them bodiless souls and soulless bodies.

In explaining Spirit, Barth writes:

Spirit is, in the most general sense, the operation of God upon His creation, and
especially the movement of God toward man. Spirit is thus the principle of man’s
relation to God, of man’s fellowship with Him. This relation and fellowship cannot
proceed from man himself, for God is His Creator and He is His creature. He himself
cannot be its principle.

In contrast to the human soul and body, “The spirit is immortal” and may not be
identified as a basic characteristic of the whole or even part of the human being; it is no
third thing in the human constitution. Thus, for humankind having spirit or the Spirit
is always by God’s initiative, action and purpose. The reason is that the Spirit shares
identity with God, and is the basis of relationship, fellowship, covenant, and encounter
between Creator and human creature and human community.

Moreover, the Spirit is the basis of human embodiment in Barth’s mind.

Without the Spirit there can be no living human body. Here are deeply important and
recurring themes in his theological anthropology. They also clarify that Christology is
not the only factor in determining the constitution of human embodiment;
 pneumatology is almost equally so when we observe the significance Barth gives to it in

---

108 Ibid., 354.
109 Ibid., 354-355.
110 Ibid., 356.
111 Ibid., 355.
112 Ibid., 356. “Spirit in His being ab extra is neither a divine nor a created something, but an action and
attitude of the Creator in relation to His creation.” For an overview of Barth’s understanding of the
Holy Spirit see George Hunsinger, “The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy
Spirit,” in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2000), 177-194. Hunsinger notes that importance of the determination of “the unity
and distinction between the saving work of the Spirit and the saving work of Christ” (177) as the
continuing key problem for Barth and for Western theology in general. He notes that Barth’s scheme of
revelation, reconciliation and redemption stood in a “subtle, flexible, and complex” relationship to each
other and that this fact was often forgotten (178). Redemption (the part of Barth’s Church Dogmatics
that remained unwritten) was “his category for the saving work of the Holy Spirit in its own right” (178).
this part of his doctrine of creation. The theology of human embodiment depends upon the creative interplay of both Christology and pneumatology, on Word and Spirit.

So what is the more precise significance of the Spirit for embodied and besouled human beings? Barth begins his answer to this question by stating that the Spirit is the activity of God by and through whom the human creature is called, equipped and enabled as “a partner in the covenant of grace.” The consequence of human being becoming bearers of the Spirit (“charismatics”) is that they become new persons having to be responsible before God in a new way for their attitudes, communications and actions. Further, having become receivers of the Spirit, the human creatures have to deal with being on “new ground”, sometimes experiencing this newness as an “alien element” in life.

Barth proposes four anthropological aspects of the relationship of the Spirit of God to humanity. He makes clear that both the elected “new” humanity of the covenant of grace and natural humanity exist through the gift of God’s Spirit. The new and the natural depend for their life on the same Spirit. The human being constituted as soul and body cannot live without the Spirit. In Barth’s thinking it is the constant giving of the Spirit that enables the embodiment of the human soul and the besouling of the human body. The following passage illustrates his thinking:

As he has the Spirit from God, he lives, he becomes and is soul, his material body becomes and is a physical body, and he is soul of this body. If he did not have the Spirit, he would not be able even to begin to live, he would not be soul, nor would his material body become a physical body. If he ceased to have the Spirit, he would no longer live, his soul would becomes a shadow of itself and his body a purely material body which as such could only dissolve in the world of bodies surrounding it. It is really the Spirit and He alone who quickens man, grounding, constituting and maintaining him as soul of his body.

113 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 357.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., 358-359.
117 Ibid., 359.
In the above four delimitations about the relation of the Spirit to the human soul and body Barth spells out his intricate argument and distinctions.\(^{118}\) We recognise how much his views are affected by his notion of the hierarchical order of the soul over the body.\(^{119}\) In determining the inner structure of the human creature Barth uses three specific subsections to examine the unity, difference, and structural relationship of the human soul and body. He continues to link pneumatology and anthropology in the opening thesis of §46 *Man as Soul and Body*.\(^{120}\) It is “through the Spirit of God” that the human being is “the subject, form and life of a substantial organism, the soul of his body”.\(^{121}\)

He chooses the terms soul and body because they are closest to the language of Scripture and direct readers to the necessary questions to be considered.\(^{122}\) As a step toward proof that the human being is constituted as soul and body, he has already noted the contrast between different conceptions of human being:

In contrast to the Greek conception of man, the creation of man as it is described here does not signify that a divine or God-like being had found a prison in an inadequate physical organism, or a spiritual power a material veil, or a holy internal reality a less holy or unholy external. By the same hand and breath of God man is both earthy and alive, body and soul, visible and invisible, internal and external. If the soul given to man by God’s inbreathing is the life of the body, the body formed by God’s fingers cannot be a disgrace or a prison or a threat to the soul. Man is what he is as this divinely willed and posited totality.\(^{123}\)

In his definition and analysis of soul and body, Barth will have nothing of abstractions: the human creature as soul and body is always attached to the material, spatial, and

---

118 Ibid., 358-359.
119 Jürgen Moltmann reminds us that there are ways of describing “order” in human relations other than hierarchical ones, and that Karl Barth knew this. See his discussion: Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 252-253; Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 136-137.
120 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 325-436.
121 Ibid., 325.
122 Ibid., 326. Other pairs of terms like “Man as spirit and substantial organism”, “rational and sensuous”, “inner and outer”, “invisible and visible”, “inapprehensible and apprehensible”, “intelligible and empirical”, and even as “heavenly and earthly,” can all be contained within the theological discussion of humanity as soul and body.
123 Ibid., 243.
earthly world. The human being is always in time and bound and limited by time; it too, is an enduring element of human embodiment.

### 2.3 Barth’s struggle with pneumatology and anthropology

We have already noted that Barth’s distinction of permanence and impermanence marks the relationship of the Spirit to Jesus Christ and to ordinary humanity. A useful analogy can be drawn between the Spirit coming and going from ordinary humanity and the coming and going that is normal and necessary in ordinary human relationships within a family and between friends. Intimacy and proximity are to be rejoiced in but so is distance. Closeness and nearness need sanctifying according to American Episcopal theologian Tom Breidenthal. Sanctifying is the task of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps our human persons—our souls and bodies—cannot bear the permanent presence of the Spirit. Eugene Rogers makes a similar suggestion in After the Spirit. Such a conclusion seems very strange and at odds with what one has been led to expect in Christian faith and life. Yet, on other occasions Barth is clear that Spirit relates to the body through the soul; there is an hierarchical order of relationship. But of greater significance to him is that in Jesus Christ, the disciples, the Gospel writers and their communities in the Early Church discovered something anthropologically new and unique: the new human being.

That is, they discovered the true nature of man. They discovered the man upon whom the Spirit not only descends intermittently and partially but on whom He rests, who does not merely live from the Spirit but in the Spirit. …In other words, they discovered the man who lives in sovereignty, who has power of Himself to live in likeness to God, from whose life they saw life transmitted to themselves and

---

124 But see Eugene F. Rogers’ critique of Barth on abstraction, especially abstraction from the Spirit, Chapter 7 in Rogers Jr, Sexuality and the Christian Body, 159-179.
125 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, §47, Man in his Time, 437-640, here 437.
126 Ibid., 334.
128 Rogers Jr, Sexuality and the Christian Body.
others—a great limitless world of others—while the source remained quite inexhaustible, for it was the fullness of life which they saw poured out in the middle of the creaturely and human world.\textsuperscript{130}

Barth clearly understands that this is not merely something new anthropologically but is a new pneumatological phenomenon. The Spirit is embodied, rests, on Jesus Christ within the world. In a similar manner to Barth, Eugene Rogers draws out the interrelated theological consequences of the Spirit’s resting on the Son:

The resting that incorporates moves up and down an analogical ladder. It characteristically incorporates others into the resurrection, the womb, the transfiguration, and so on. It even works cosmically to incorporate matter. In resting on the Son the Spirit befriends matter, so that Adam’s scorn of matter for giving his pretension the lie is overcome, reversed, and turned—\textit{felix culpa}—to ironic good. …In separating Spirit from matter, Christians—especially Protestants—have abstracted the Spirit from the bodies in which God gives Godself to be perceived and manifested. Each of the bodies on which the spirit rests depends analogically on the body of Christ: the body of Christ in the church, the body of Christ in the Christian, the body of Christ in the sacramental element.\textsuperscript{131}

It is difficult to know whether Karl Barth was able to comprehend and appreciate in his time what Eugene Rogers is stating about the relationship of bodies and Spirit for us today.

Positively, Barth’s theological anthropology gives us important insights about human relationships, human identity and the unity of the human being. Famous for his Christological focus in his theology of redemption, we can see that pneumatology is as vital a component of his doctrine of humanity as it is a necessary part of his Christology. These significant threads need to be affirmed because they help us in developing a theology of the graced body that includes all human beings, as well as all Christians in the graced body of the church.

\textsuperscript{130} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, III/2, 334-335.
\textsuperscript{131} Rogers Jr, \textit{After the Spirit}, 209-210.
Chapter 3: Appreciation and Retrieval of Karl Barth’s Theological Anthropology

Soul can awake and be only as a soul of a body. It presupposes...a material body which, belonging to the soul, becomes an organic body...Thus in being soul, it is not without body. ...Hence every trivialization of the body...Every denial of the body necessarily implies a denial of the soul. It is in this, when seen from below, that the difference between soul and Spirit consists. The Spirit cannot be said to need a body. It is divine action. It is the free act of grace on the part of the Creator.

—Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation

In this chapter I critically retrieve the work of Barth for help in the formation of an inclusive theology of the graced body. Barth attended to both theoretical and practical issues that he believed to be relevant theologically for the church in his time. I seek both to draw on and assess the value of his theological anthropology for an inclusive and holistic theology of sexuality.

There are at least four difficulties with Barth’s theological anthropology. The first concerns the balance between Christology and pneumatology. Does the Word dominate the Spirit? Put another way, Barth’s doctrine of humanity appears to be influenced more by his commitment to doctrines of revelation and of the sovereignty of God than by his Trinitarian theology. Recent scholars have identified problems and confusions in Barth in this respect.¹ We shall address this difficulty under the heading of Equality and Subordination in Barth’s analogy of relations.

¹ Rosato SJ, The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth, 99-101, & 103. Rosato argues: “If, on the one hand, anthropology is not to dominate pneumatology, and if, on the other, pneumatology is to remain the Christian doctrine which includes a theology of man, Barth has to ensure that the confusion
Second, at the core of Barth’s doctrine of humanity is his unique interpretation of the *imago Dei* (image of God) derived from Genesis 1:26–27. A crucial question is whether his interpretation may be used to exclude some particular human beings from being understood as in the *imago Dei*. Elizabeth Frykberg offers a significant resolution of Barth’s difficulty in holding together divine and human relationships.

Third, Barth distinguishes between the humanity of Jesus Christ and the humanity of ordinary human beings, at the same time maintaining that they share the same human nature. I examine more closely Barth’s understanding of human nature.

Fourth, Barth appears to have difficulty in applying his pneumatology to embodied human lives. In writing on “Special Ethics” in *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation* III/4 §54 “Freedom in Fellowship”, he seems not to connect his determinations about human sexual relationships to the unifying and life-giving role of the Spirit in relation to the human being as body and soul that he described in *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation* III/2 §46 “Man as Soul and Body”. It is as if the Spirit, which has played such a strong role in *Church Dogmatics* §46, is structurally invisible, faceless, forgotten in §54–§55. We shall consider each of these difficulties in greater detail.

---

2 Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London, UK/New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2008). Jones offers a critical study of Barth’s interpretation of the humanity of Christ in *Church Dogmatics* III/2 and directs the reader to the work of Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, (1999). In Chapter 3, “Jesus Christ—Embodiment of Grace” (especially 180–191) Jones discusses Rogers’ critique of Barth on gender and Barth’s use of Buber’s I-Thou analogy. Jones acknowledges that his chapter parallels this section of Eugene F. Rogers’ book. Both authors offer important critiques of Barth’s Christological method, noting the good things, but also noting his failures, particularly those that concern gender issues, and questionable aspects of his biblical exegesis.

3 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4. “Special Ethics” is the term Barth uses for the elucidation of the divine encounter with humankind in the ordinary, everyday affairs of life in the world. He does this under four sections: § 53 Freedom before God, § 54 Freedom in Fellowship, § 55 Freedom for Life, and §56 Freedom in Limitation. His editor notes the correspondence between these four areas and the four perspectives on humanity that Barth develops in Church Dogmatics, III/2 §44–47.
3.1 **Equality and Subordination in Barth’ analogy of relations**

Barth’s doctrine of humanity is determined through his unique exegesis of Genesis 1:26–27. The gracious intention of God is expressed in the creation of humankind in the image of God, as male and female, counterparts of each other. The positive gain from Barth’s interpretation of the *imago Dei* is that it helps challenge all theologies that deny the equality of women and men in the eyes of God. In theory this is good news for women who since Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* can no longer be treated theologically as second-class citizens—on earth or in heaven!

However, this is a very tight and limited determination. It is limited in that it excludes or misses other determinations of what God was about in the creation of humanity. One such alternate determination is that human beings are created by God in an infinite diversity of possibilities. There is not just one way of being human; being in the image of God means that a human being is different from God, not the same as God. Barth was himself absolutely clear about the importance of this categorical distinction between the divine and the human. The interpretation of the *imago Dei* as promoting difference and diversity as the loving purpose of the Creator allows for a doctrine of humanity that is deliberately inclusive of all human identity and relationships. Such a theological determination must be recognised as being good news not only for women, but also for those of different races and ethnic origins, and for same-sex oriented persons, because their human identity is included in the creative purpose of God.

As far as I can tell, Barth never uses the term “male and female complementarity” in *The Doctrine of Creation*. This is a currently favoured term used by some biblical scholars, theologians and churches that emphasises God’s creational plan for human relationship as limited to a man and a woman vowed in the Christian sacrament of matrimony. Whether Barth wished it or not, as a major theological figure
of the twentieth century, his interpretation of the *imago Dei* as co-humanity continues to underpin conservative determinations in favour of compulsory complementarity.⁴

This notion of complementarity is used as a not-so-subtle weapon against gays and lesbians desiring their churches’ approval and liturgical blessing of same-sex unions. Kevin Giles argues that “same-sex relations stand in opposition to God’s creational pattern making sex the creative bond between man and woman (Gen 1:27–28). Men and women are made by God to complement one another”.⁵ A consequence of this view is the refusal of some churches to ordain same-sex oriented persons, whether they openly identify as lesbian or gay or not, because what is described as their essential human relationship is out of “order”. By this the churches mean the order of God’s creational purpose as well as the order of holiness. Following this line of argument, by definition same-sex unions cannot be holy because they do not fit the model of male and female complementarity.

Barth defined co-humanity in terms of order; males are superordinate to females, females are subordinate to males. Given his assertion of the essential equality of man and woman, confusion results because equality and hierarchy are at odds with each other. One reason for his insistence on order and hierarchy in his definition of co-humanity may be seen in his use of the analogy of relation in which he finds a correspondence in their unlikeness between God and humanity and similar correspondence in unlikeness between men and women. Barth admits there is a difficulty and a dilemma to be resolved.⁶

---

⁴ Arguments supporting compulsory gender complementarity can be located in Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*; Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism*.


⁶ For Barth’s interpretation and exposition of human beings as male and female see Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 288-291.; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 324. and especially Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 168-172. where by his own admission he acknowledges the dangers and misunderstandings inherent in his application of order (meaning precedence and succession) to the equality of man and woman. We can also sense his fear of disorder.
3.2 Resolving the Tension of Equality and Subordination

Elizabeth Frykberg offers a fascinating resolution of Barth’s problem of holding in tension equality and subordination in the co-humanity of men and women. Making critical yet creative use of his exegesis of Genesis 1:26–27, and of his correlation of the three levels of the I-Thou relationship in which “Jesus Christ is the master analogue”, she reworks the problem beyond where he leaves it in Church Dogmatics, III/2 and III/4. She draws on two contributions from the social sciences and then applies them to our contemporary problem with Barth’s determination of divine-human and inter-human relations.

Barth believes that the inner Trinitarian relationships are relationships of equality. There is no superordination or subordination in the relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whereas in the relationship between God and humanity there is superordination and subordination. However, while asserting the equality of man and woman in the relationship of co-humanity he feels compelled to assert the subordination of women to men. Frykberg explains that this is related to his determination to maintain at all costs the paramount importance of God’s grace toward humankind and the “unlikeness”, the distinctive difference of divinity and humanity. There is an infinite distance and difference in essence between the Trinity and human beings. Therefore Barth uses the covenant as a means of describing the dependant and unequal relationship of humanity to God, a relational exchange that for all its

---

7 For Karl Barth’s own explication of this tension see Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4, 170-172. See also his original discussion on co-humanity, men and women in encounter as fellow-man, in Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, 184-187, and an example of its fuller development in ; Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 288.


9 Ibid.: 347. For her earlier paper on Barth’s theological anthropology, the image of God, and analogy of relation as a theological methodology, see Frykberg, “Karl Barth’s Theological Anthropology: An Analogical Critique Regarding Gender Relations,” 1-54.

10 Frykberg, “Child as Solution,” 348-349. Frykberg borrows the “differential integrative relationship analogy” developed by James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt and later the arguments of James Youniss and William Damon on child peer interactions in relationships.

11 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 287 & 312.
“dissimilarity” as an *analogia relationis* will be characterised always as an I-thou covenental relationship.

Frykberg argues that the parent-child relationship is also determinative of co-humanity and that the determinations “gender” and “age” can work together as “structural variables”.\(^\text{12}\) Pointing out that Barth discusses the parent-child relation but omits it in his determination of co-humanity,\(^\text{13}\) she explains that there is always an unchangeable and dependent value in the inter-generational parent-child relation that can be expressed in covenental terms. The *analogia relationis* between divinity and humanity and the parent-child relation have both similarity and difference in their essential inequality. “Jesus Christ in his incarnation is related to God the Father as the human child is related to the human parent.”\(^\text{14}\) Augmenting Barth’s exegesis of Genesis 1:26–27 with her own of Genesis 1:28,\(^\text{15}\) she proposes that Jesus Christ as the image of God is the original of this model in relation to God and the human:

Jesus Christ (the son) relates to God (the Father) as the human child relates to the human parent; and its corollary: God the Father relates to God’s children (human beings) as the human parent relates to the human child.\(^\text{16}\) …Thus, children are created in and for covenental relationship with their parents, just as humankind is created in and for covenental relationship with the divine.\(^\text{17}\)

Both these covenental I-Thou relationships are marked by “asymmetrical” mutual self-giving service in which “the Son serves the Father and the Father serves the Son” and in which the parents (mother and father) serve and care for the child.\(^\text{18}\)

Frykberg’s argument develops through contrasting parent-child relations with child-child relations. The latter are noted for their “direct reciprocity” in the working-

\(^{12}\) Frykberg, “Child as Solution,” 346.
\(^{13}\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 240-285.
\(^{14}\) Frykberg, “Child as Solution,” 346.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.: 347. As Genesis 1:26–27 shows humanity created in the image of God to reflect, analogically, the intra-Trinitarian relations, so Genesis 1:28 with its divine command to have and raise children shows the corresponding parent-child relation reflecting “outer-divine relational existence”.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.: 348.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.: 347.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.: 348, 350-351. Note Frykberg’s asymmetrical inference in her reference to Jesus as servant and Lord, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 690. “It is as he serves that he rules.”
out of life problems. At their best, adult peer to peer “within a generation” exchanges follow the same principle as with children and come to express “equality, fairness and mutuality”. This move enables her to link the equality and mutuality of the intra-Trinitarian relations by analogy to the equality and mutuality of intra-generational male and female human relations. She notes the “symmetrical” quality of these two, divine-divine and human-human, relations.\textsuperscript{19}

For as the son is distinct from the Father but still God, the adult male and the adult female are distinct and different, but still equal; because they are of the same generation within the human genus of being.\textsuperscript{20}

It is her recognition of the symmetrical quality in this analogy of relation that enables Frykberg to move beyond Barth’s definition of the male and female relation as equal but always having a distinct order of superordination and subordination in which the female must follow the male. Through her bringing together the \textit{imago Dei} and an exegesis of Philippians 2:5–11, she sets out a new vision and purpose for the gender relations of men and women:\textsuperscript{21}

…human creation in the image of God is creation in and for self-giving relational service, it follows that adult male-female relations are characterised by mutual self-giving service, not by structural non-reciprocal superordinate-subordinate order, as Barth contends.\textsuperscript{22}

Frykberg proposes a nice theological equation in which the analogy of relation between equal and/or unequal divine-human or human-human partnerships is marked out by mutuality, self-giving and service.\textsuperscript{23} This equation enables her to divide and consider separately what Barth struggles to hold together with one analogy of relation. I depict the equation in this way:

\textsuperscript{19} Frykberg, “Child as Solution,” 351.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.: 349.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.: 348.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.: 349.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.: 350-351.
Figure 1  Elizabeth Frykberg’s solution to Karl Barth’s problem with *analogia relationis*

The reason, as Frykberg states in her conclusion, is that “Barth had to maintain the principle of superordinate-subordinate ordering because he was comparing male-female relations to both divine-human covenantal relations and divine-divine perichoretic relations”. 24 This imposed an impossible tension on the male-female relation as an analogy of relation expressive of the divine-human relationship. Many theologians have criticised Barth without really understanding his difficulty.

Behind this was Barth’s desire to hold together, as a kind of theological juggling act, three essential elements: first, the grace of God, second, the “qualitative” difference between divinity and humanity and third, the divine “initiation of covenantal existence in the *analogia relationis*”. 25 Elizabeth Frykberg’s resolution, against his choice of the male-female relation as the only structural variable, is that the parent-child relation is the better structural variable to express the *analogia relationis* between God and humankind. 26 In this critique she holds true to her biblical and Reformed tradition whilst appreciating Barth’s many positive gifts. Timothy Gorringe supports Frykberg’s resolution, observing that “the inner Trinitarian relations are more directly analogous to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of partnership</th>
<th>Type of relationship</th>
<th>Participants in relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Asymmetrical or unequal</em></td>
<td><em>Covenantal relationship and</em></td>
<td><em>God/human relations, parent/child</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>relational partners</em></td>
<td><em>service</em></td>
<td><em>relations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Symmetrical or equal</em></td>
<td><em>Perichoretic relationship</em></td>
<td><em>Intra-Trinitarian relations, male-female relations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>relational partners</em></td>
<td><em>and service</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

24 Ibid.: 352.
25 Ibid.: 353.
26 Ibid.
male–female relations *within a generation* than to parent–child relations”.

As he explains, Barth misses the significance of this age/generation analogy in his determination of the relationship between God and humanity:

Barth was led to the problem of subordination because Christ was the analogue in his understanding of the relation of God to Godself, of humans to each other, and of God to humanity. In understanding the relations of men and women Barth ran the first and the last together. What he should have seen, and what his logic leads him to see, is that it is the first analogy which obtains between men and women: as the Son is distinct from the Father but still God the adult male and female are different and distinct, but still equal.

Frykberg’s resolution permits us to value afresh the positive aspects of Barth’s theology of humanity without accepting the subordination of women to men.

Gorringe has suggested the possibility of applying Frykberg’s argument about peer relations to Barth’s understanding of homosexuality. However, I do not think that Barth’s views are developed enough to do what Gorringe suggests, partly because Barth writes all too briefly in a fine print excursus about homosexuality, not in his main text. His view about homosexuality is illustrated in part by the following two quotations:

These first steps may well be the symptoms of the malady called homosexuality. This is the physical, psychological and social sickness, the phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay, which can emerge when man refuses to admit the validity of the divine command in the sense in which we are now considering it. In Rom. 1 Paul connected it with idolatry, with changing the truth of God into a lie, with the adoration of the creature instead of the Creator (v. 25).

and

…the decisive word of Christian ethics must consist of a warning against entering upon the whole way of life which can only end in the tragedy of concrete homosexuality. We know that in its early stages it may have an appearance of particular beauty and spirituality, and even be redolent of sanctity.

---

27 Gorringe, *Against Hegemony*, 207.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 207, Note 189.
30 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 166.
31 Ibid.
The source for this opinion of Barth’s is not identified. It may be a personal observation or a second-hand piece of knowledge. His key focus is on malady and tragedy. He never mentions the possibility of homosexual persons living in relationship. Rather, his adverse description appears to refer to homosexual men or women living separated existences on their own and deliberately separated from the other sex. This solitary existence was not the experience of all gay and lesbian persons in the Western world in Barth’s day (although it may have been for some) and it is not the experience of all gay and lesbian persons in the present. However it is important to note that the notion of homosexual life being doomed to a tragic end was a widely accepted notion in twentieth century European and American culture and is a mainstay of literary depiction of homosexuality right up to the present. In the light of this, Barth’s attitudes are understandable.\(^3\) He does not condemn but speaks in sorrow and observes that people in the church may be attracted to this life because of its appearance of beauty, sanctity, and spirituality. I have already noted in Chapter 2 that Barth’s view of homosexuality underwent some change.

Colin Gunton offers an alternate view of aspects of Barth’s theological anthropology. He indicates that there are other “indirect” ways to explore the ontological interrelationship of humanity and creation than Barth’s refusal to engage in natural theology through “speculative comparison and contrast”.\(^3\) One such indirect approach comes through the recognition that there is a correspondence between various cosmological and anthropological theories. Our conception of what the world is correlates with our conception of the nature of humanity.\(^3\) We see what we expect to see.

---

\(^3\) I am grateful to my friend Alma Ryrie-Jones for drawing my attention to this cultural and literary point.
\(^3\) Ibid., 107.
In acknowledging the originality of Barth’s interpretation of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26–27 as male and female, Gunton identifies two weaknesses in it. The first is a binitarian tendency. This can be observed in that the dual relation of the Father-Son in the Trinity is applied to the dual male-female relation. The result, for Gunton, is that there is no expression of a theology of communion because (unsaid by Gunton) the binary rules in both relations. In my view, communion implies the presence of three or more persons.

The second weakness is Barth’s taste for anthropocentrism. Gunton suggests the need for the more careful relating of humanity with the rest of animate and inanimate creation. To evidence this criticism, he cites Andrew Linzey’s argument that Barth “underplays the way in which Genesis brings the non-human creation into the covenant.”

Alongside these points, Gunton wants “a broader treatment” of the biblical background of the *imago Dei* because its use in the Bible is sparse; “extended exegesis of Genesis 1:26f.” is insufficient. His call in 1991 for a greater and broader biblical foundation for the *imago Dei* theology has been responded to in recent years by a number of biblical scholars and theologians.

In *The Liberating Image*, published in 2005, Richard Middleton criticises systematic theologians of the twentieth century for their failure to make use of current

---

35 Ibid., 115. Gunton observes the infrequency of use of “humanity as the image of God” in the Bible. The New Testament focuses the doctrine of the image on Christ not on God. Therefore, he holds that if we are to use “the image of God” theologically in relation to humankind then we must “draw upon a wider range of biblical background” than is immediately obvious in the Bible.

36 Ibid., 115-116.

37 Ibid. Gunton qualifies his criticism in the following observation: “That is not to say that there is nothing of anthropology of communion in Barth. The anthropology of mutuality in Church Dogmatics III/2 is immensely illuminating, as are many of the things he says about man-woman relations...”

38 An ecclesial example of this can be found in comparing the communion rubrics for Holy Communion and for the Visitation of the Sick in E. C. S. Gibson, *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI (1549 & 1552)* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1910; reprint, 1957), 230, and 422. with *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662 and 1928. Three or more persons were required to be present to partake of the sacrament together.


41 Ibid.
biblical scholarship for their interpretations of the *imago Dei*. He gives two reasons for this criticism: first, the general omission of “the body” in their discussions. This omission tends to support traditional and contemporary dualistic approaches to humanity, and thereby ends in “an implicit devaluation” of the body; second, the gap between interpretations given over the past century by Old Testament scholars and systematic theologians.

Middleton offers two factors for the “virtual” consensus in the present interpretation of the image of God amongst OT scholars: first, the royal character of the Genesis 1:1–2:4 text, especially Gen 1:26–27 and second, the significance of the Ancient Near East background. This supports an interpretation of humanity as the *imago Dei* in royal terms with responsibility for inanimate and animate creation. There is a sense here of humans having “god-like” status in exercising such rule and responsibility and this challenges us to engage in responsible stewardship toward other human beings and all creation.

He elucidates further:

It is indisputable that the notion of humanity as *imago Dei* in Genesis 1 was articulated in the context of a patriarchal society and uses language taken from typical male social roles. What is disputable, however, is whether the *imago Dei* simply reflects the patriarchy of its social background or actively resists this background in order to present an alternative vision. It is clear, at any rate, that in the history of interpretation Genesis 1 came to be understood by scriptural readers as genuinely universal in intent and thus functioned as a basis of human equality, including equality between the sexes. …Whether attributed to authorial intent or rhetorical effect, then, the use of *imago Dei* language in Genesis 1 (derived from the ancient Near East) functions to delegitimate any intrinsically hierarchical social structure and to affirm the dignity and agency of all humanity.

Middleton argues that both Karl Barth’s determination of the meaning of the image as being male and female in relationship with each other and with God, and also Phyllis Trible’s approach in which the characteristics of both genders equally elucidate

---

43 Middleton’s point about the responsibility of humans for all animate and inanimate creation resonates with Andrew Linzey’s thesis referred to earlier by Gunton.
the divine character, are wrong. Following Robert Alter on Hebrew poetic structure, that the third line of three-line poetic units in Hebrew poetry does not repeat the first two but progresses from them with a further and normally new thought, Middleton concludes that “male and female” probably do not add to the meaning of “image”. His argument is a significant challenge to Barth’s interpretation of the imago Dei in Genesis 1:26–27 and illustrates that the imago Dei is not determined solely by relationship as male and female but includes all humanity and has positive implications for the dignity of all human beings.

Correlative with this mutuality of power and agency is the implicit claim of the imago Dei that all persons have equal access to God simply by being human. …As Walter Breuggemann puts it, “There is one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness!”

Whether Middleton intends it or not, this can be received as good news for persons of same-sex orientation who in the past have been oppressed by a narrow interpretation of the imago Dei used to exclude them from being recognised as properly human and worthy of being treated equally.

3.3 Barth’s Difficulty with Human Nature

A third difficulty concerns the meaning that Barth applies to the term “human nature” in relation to Jesus Christ and to ordinary men and women. For Barth our creation and our redemption have a Christological focus: God is for us. “Our human nature rests upon His grace; on the divine grace addressed to us in His human nature. It is both His and ours, but it is His in a wholly different way from that in which it is

---

46 Ibid., 207.
47 See especially Middleton, The Liberating Image, 230-231 for a discussion of the fundamental questions that exile would have imposed upon Israel. These are good questions for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons—all persons who identify as of same-sex orientation—who are faced also with the challenge of existing in or coming out from exile and oppression. These questions revolve around matters of “acquiescence”, “acceptance”, “affirmation”, “agency”, “identity”, and “imagining a new future”.

110
Here we begin to see that Barth assigns different values to the term “humanity” when applied to Jesus Christ and to ordinary humanity. In a slightly later development of his thought, he writes of human nature:

For if it is true that even in Jesus human nature has specific modes and features in which it is also our humanity, yet even more and primarily we must have regard to the fact that it is His nature—the human nature of the Son of God. He is a human person. He is the human soul of a human body. He is a man among men and in humanity. He has a time; His time. It is not the case, however, that he must partake of humanity. On the contrary, humanity must partake of Him.49

Toward the end of this passage we can recognise that for Barth our humanity is dependent upon our partaking of Christ’s humanity. The reason for this in Barth’s thought is because of Christ’s relation to God: “Human nature in Him is determined by a relation between God and Himself such as never has existed between God and us, and never will exist”50 This is just one example of the frequent distinction that Barth makes between the humanity of Jesus Christ and that of ordinary humanity. At first sight, this stance seems contradictory given his commitment to the Christological teaching that Jesus Christ and ordinary men and women share the same human nature. We are faced with the question: “Does Jesus Christ share the same humanity as us?” This is an important question for theological anthropology. Barth attempts to resolve it.

Arguing that a “simple deduction of anthropology from Christology” is not possible,51 Barth focuses on character rather than nature and distinguishes between the character of the humanity of Jesus Christ and that of ordinary human beings.52 He

---

48 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 50.
49 Ibid., 59.
50 Ibid., 49.
51 Ibid. See also Barth’s discussion of “The Basic Form of Humanity”, Church Dogmatics III/2, 222–228 where he distinguishes between the disparity and unlikeness of Jesus to other human beings and places this alongside the basic form of humanity in which there is likeness and “a common sphere of existence”: (223) This is a preparation for Barth’s discussion of humankind as the “covenant-partner” of God, destined to take on the form of the true humanity revealed in the humanity of Jesus Christ. (224–225)
52 See Ibid. §43:2 Man as an Object of Theological Knowledge.
makes this distinction of character as a means of protecting the difference between ordinary humanity and Jesus’ humanity. As an example:

In Him are the peace and clarity which are not in ourselves. In Him is the human nature created by God without the self-contradiction which afflicts us and without the self-deception by which we seek to escape from this our shame. In Him is human nature without human sin. For as He, the Son of God becomes man, and therefore our nature becomes His, the rent is healed, the impure becomes pure and the enslaved is freed. For although He becomes what we are, He does not do what we do, and so He is not what we are. He is man like ourselves, yet He is not a sinner, but the man who honours His creation and election by God, not breaking but keeping the covenant of grace.

The reason is that Barth wants to protect the theological difference between our sinfulness and the sinlessness of Jesus. Behind this, as Frykberg has shown, lies Barth’s fundamental determination to forestall any confusion of identity between Creator and creature.

In God’s mercy and grace the sinfulness of our human nature is “covered” by Jesus and “rightly removed and destroyed. …there now remains only the pure and free humanity of Jesus as our own humanity”. He locates the true foundation for theological anthropology in the “judicial pardon” achieved by and through Jesus’ death and passion that gives humanity the “courage” and “the way” to reflect on humankind as created by God.

He alone is the Son of Man and the Son of God. Our fellowship with God rests upon the fact that He and He alone is one with God. He Himself is the living God. He alone in His own person is the kingdom of God…He alone gives grace as well as receives it. We can only receive it. …He alone has the Spirit of God directly, as the source of His Holy Spirit. We can have it only from His fullness.

Barth’s claim that human nature is contingent upon the grace of Christ requires careful interpretation or it risks separating the experience of our ordinary human nature in its beauty, vulnerability, and frailty from the human nature of Jesus in its beauty,

---

53 For his developed argument, Ibid., 47-53.
54 Ibid., 250-252.
55 Hebrews 4:15.
56 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2, 48.
57 Ibid., 48-49.
58 Ibid., 49.
vulnerability, and frailty. Christ assumed our humanity in its concrete reality and its messiness not just as an idealised human being. In making his nuanced distinction between Christ’s humanity and the humanity of all other human beings Barth creates a problem for our contemporary understanding of the doctrines of creation and incarnation.

In relation to the doctrine of creation and the scriptural affirmation in Genesis 1:31 that the whole of creation including humankind is seen by God as very good, creation has value in its own right. This is a key foundation for any holistic theology of embodiment. In so clearly distinguishing between the human nature of Jesus Christ and that of ordinary humanity Barth places a question mark against our shared humanity.

Alongside this, we must lay the problem of human sin and the experience of evil and death. These cast a shade over any easy determination of creation and humanity being always good and perfect. Barth, true to his Reformed tradition, emphasises the fallen state of human nature and its sinfulness in comparison with the sinless state of Christ. Theologies of the “Fall” that set out to explain the aetiology of human sin and rebellion against God are not the final word about creation or necessarily the governing element in redemption; but the element of “gone-wrongness” in human nature needs to be recognised and addressed. However, even Barth, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter, states that the imago Dei given to humanity in creation is not lost through sin as some past traditions have claimed.59

Similarly, in relation to the doctrine of the incarnation, Barth’s distinction between our humanity and that of Christ raises doubts about the effectiveness of the incarnation and redemption in achieving human salvation. Was Jesus Christ really a human being? If our humanity and his humanity are different how can it be said that God in Christ fully experienced our human condition and suffered what we suffer? The

59 Ibid., 324.
problem seems to lie in what we mean and what Barth means by difference, likeness and unlikeness.

Graham Ward has worked toward a resolution. In his critical discussion of Barth’s Christology, Ward understands the issue as twofold: first, what is the character of the human relationship between Christ and humanity, and second, how does our redemption actually happen?

The heart of the matter here concerns the human nature of Jesus Christ. For while we can admit that all our conceptions of what it is to be human (and in Church Dogmatics III Barth labours the point that to be human is not to be a solitary individual but to be in relation) find their perfect expression in Christ, nevertheless equivocity cannot dictate two uses of the term human: a use for Christ and a use for other human beings. We may, in the manner of Aquinas, have to admit our ignorance of what it means to be human if Christ is the perfection of that humanity, but without an analogical relation between these two uses of “human” how does the operation of redemption take place?60

This is a useful discernment by Ward. It affirms that Barth’s two uses of “human” need to be challenged; otherwise ordinary humanity is distanced from the love and mercy of God. Ward asks of Barth: if Jesus’ humanity is not really humanity how is redemption embodied in human lives and the human community? He reads Barth as answering: “By faith”. His problem with this is that Barth never explains the details of this process of redemption by faith in Christ:

What is missing from Barth’s account of faith is the experiences and practices in which faith becomes operable and evident: the formation of the one who is being faithful…Faith is a response to that which constitutes a relation with; response and engagement enable participation in an economy that is shared. We can agree with Barth that God is the initiator of this redemption, and we do not wish either to deny the ontological difference between creator and creation or to fall into some Pelagian heresy. But faith, I would argue, is an operation in response to a recognition of love, and what is missing in Barth’s account is the process whereby love is received and responded to.61

61 Ibid., 8. Ward argues for a move away from the dialectical methodologies of modern theology used by Barth and his contemporaries.
3.4 The Difficulty of the Absence of the Spirit from Embodied Practices

Ward’s criticism of the absence in Barth’s Christ-centred anthropology of an account of embodied practices leads us to a fourth difficulty with Barth’s theological anthropology: the absence of his theological attention to the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of Christians. This absence, in my view, is exemplified in *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation*, III/4 “Freedom in Fellowship”, where Barth discusses, in great detail, sexuality, the psycho-sexual elements of male and female relationships, Christian marriage, being parents and neighbours. Absent here too, is the mention in any equivalent detail of the embodied relation of friendship that has played such a significant role in Christian relationships since New Testament times. Barth had described positively in his Ethics’ lectures in Münster and Bonn in 1928 and 1930. He never succeeds in explaining how the Holy Spirit is present or functions within these embodied practices of love, marriage, being neighbours and friends and thus brings about their redemption and sanctification.

Barth writes movingly in this volume about the challenges of the intimate sexual lives of men and women from his Christian and cultural perspective under the title of “God the Creator as Commander”. For example:

God’s sanctifying command aims at and wills man himself. This means, of course, the man who in his totality is man and woman, who is physical in every filament and cell of his body, who even as the spirit-impelled soul of his body is not sexless, nor above sex, nor bi-sexual, but mono-sexual man or woman, and lives in the presence of and in responsibility to God in this total and definite orientation of his being. Yet even so, the command of God is not concerned with his sexual organs and needs as such but only as they exist in the order and sequence of the rest of his being, of the total being which in all its sexual determination has other dimensions and components besides those which are manifest and active in this narrower sphere.

---

63 Karl Barth, *Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 187-188. In *Ethics*, Barth’s notion of friendship is focussed principally on friendship between persons of the same gender. “Except perhaps for one case in a hundred thousand, friendship between members of the opposite sex is certainly friendship, but it is sexual friendship, whether as a game or in all seriousness. …it undoubtedly means playing with fire.”
64 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 132-133.
But, I suggest that there is not going to be much “freedom in fellowship” between man and woman, or between man and man or woman and woman, especially if they are lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons! References to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, are few in *Church Dogmatics* III/4 §54 and §55 in which Barth applies his theology of creation to concrete ethics compared to the breadth and depth with which he links the Spirit to his nuanced discussions of humankind’s soul and body in *Church Dogmatics* III/2, §46. This is a remarkable omission, given Barth’s commitment to Trinitarian theology and the important place the Spirit plays in *Church Dogmatics* III/2, and his ethics is the poorer for it. It may also be an example of the effects on Barth of the general pneumatological impoverishment of Western theology, whether Catholic, Reformed or Protestant. In my view, it hints powerfully at the desire within Western theology to order and control the Christian life rather than be open to the life and experience of the Spirit, the creative and sanctifying Holy Spirit that broods over the body of Christ waiting to impart new life and new joy.

Robert Jenson and Eugene Rogers, as well as other contemporary theologians, are aware of this absence in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Jenson asks pointedly: “You wonder where the Spirit went?” In answering this question, Jenson notes the difficulty that Barth has in specifying the Spirit in its personal and embodied roles. He cites §72 of *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 “The Holy Spirit and the Mission of the Christian Congregation” which Barth writes “entirely without mention of the Spirit—which must

---

be a marvel, given who and what the Spirit is in Scripture.” Later, Jenson points out that Barth struggles to define the theoretical role of the Spirit in relation to the church. “The personal agent of this work turns out at every step of Barth’s argument to be not the Spirit, as advertised, but Christ; the Spirit is denoted invariably by impersonal terms. ‘The Spirit is the power of Jesus Christ’s being’. …the Spirit is what happens when ‘Jesus Christ makes use of his power’.” In his concluding remarks, Jenson returns to his question and observes:

When does the Spirit disappear from Barth’s pages? Whenever he would appear as someone rather than as something. We miss the Spirit at precisely those points where Bible or catechism have taught us to expect him to appear as someone with capacities, rather than as sheer capacity.

In turn, Rogers asks if this tendency in Barth “to announce the Spirit and expound the Son, is the tendency of the Church (almost) always and everywhere?” These are significant questions and observations and direct us forward to the important task of holding both Christology and pneumatology together without absorbing them in each other.

3.5 Toward a fresh engagement with theological anthropology and pneumatology

Something more will be required to add to the positive material that Barth does give us. The “something more” is a theology of embodied humanity that will take us beyond the theology and issues of the 1960s through the 1980s to the present. Such a theology of embodiment is needed to resource a theology of sexuality that addresses the conflicted ecclesial and human situation of these first years of the 21st century. It requires a theological anthropology that is grounded in a Trinitarian theology and a doctrine of creation that is not hierarchical or focused on a set order of how things are,

---

70 Ibid.: 303.
71 Ibid.: 304.
or are believed to be. It will need to move from the individualism of the past into a more communal focus given that a significant aspect of embodiment is the ecclesial community of the body of Christ. It must also allow us to place our theology of human embodiment and sexuality in the context of contemporary concerns with the whole of creation. No longer can the theology of humanity avoid or escape being set within this cosmic reality. But more than anthropology and Christology is required. This thesis argues that we cannot achieve the above goals unless we have a much more developed pneumatology that links to, and transforms, traditional theological anthropology and Christology. The achievement of this will mean that Western theology will have to change and revalue the relationship of the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—within the whole theological enterprise. No longer can the Holy Spirit be understood as a distant ‘Third Person’ of the Trinity.

The theologian who offers a new focus on the Spirit of God and humanity is Jürgen Moltmann. It is Moltmann, who in collaboration with his wife, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell, engages profoundly over a period of nearly thirty years with Trinitarian theology, theological anthropology, Christology and pneumatology. The task in the next chapter is to examine how his contribution serves as a creative and critical resource for our understanding of the graced body.
Chapter 4: Embodying Spirit

“The Holy Spirit” does not supersede the Spirit of creation but transforms it. The Holy Spirit therefore lays hold of the whole human being, embracing his feelings and his body as well as his soul and reason.

—Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation.*

Jürgen Moltmann describes the transforming connection that he believes exists between the Spirit of God in creation and the Holy Spirit that we experience in the life of the Church—the body of Christ—and the resulting embodied and integrative consequences for all human life. He appears to make no distinction between the transforming work of the Holy Spirit for all human beings and for Christians. One of the tasks of this chapter is to distinguish with greater clarity our use of the terms “Spirit of God” and “the Holy Spirit” in general theological anthropology and within the specific Christian doctrines of creation, redemption and sanctification.

In this chapter I continue to address the interrelationship of pneumatology, Christology, theological anthropology and Trinitarian theology. My purpose is to explore in greater detail how the Spirit and the body respond to each other in the human person and the lives of human persons in community, as a basis for a theology of the graced body.

Two questions are of continuing interest. First, how can we describe the relationship of the divine Spirit to human beings? Briefly, the Spirit of God takes the initiative and relates to, gives life to, abides with, rests upon the human person whether
female or male. The Holy Spirit is the source of the indivisible unity of the human person as body and soul. Further, in Eastern Orthodox tradition, as human beings have life from the Holy Spirit so the term “life-giver” is appropriate. Thus, the life-enhancing and relational purpose of the Trinity is expressed in the Spirit’s “abiding in”, “dwelling in” or “resting on” human persons and the church.

The second question is whether Christians are a particular subset of the genus “human being” which the Holy Spirit relates to specifically, whereas “the Spirit of God”, “the Cosmic Spirit” and “the Spirit of Creation” are terms that refer to the whole of humanity. This is a question concerning the universal claims of Christian faith and theology. Moltmann helps us to elucidate and answer both questions. The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God are one and the same: the third person of the Trinity. The universal claim of Christian faith is that our Trinitarian God—the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer—is for everyone and everything.

Applying this universal claim to our interest in embodiment, Moltmann explains some of the consequences of it:

So the Holy Spirit is experienced in the body, for the body is already pervaded by the life-giving powers of the future world. Because Christ came for the sake of the bodily resurrection, and on his day will complete the redemption of the body from the destructive power of death, God is not experienced merely in the soul. Paul stresses that he is experienced in the body too, and is therefore praised in the body.2

These words in the conclusion of his messianic Christology, The Way of Jesus Christ, remind us that embodiment is not an optional extra but the very reality of human and

---


therefore Christian existence. From a Christian perspective, despite the experience of tension and conflict, of bodily weakness and eventual death of the body, our embodied nature is a good gift from God and thus to be used in the joyful praise of God.

Embodiment describes not only our physical human condition but the indivisible unity, identity and relationship of human body and soul and points to the source of this unity, the life-giving Holy Spirit. Here, our continuing question comes to the fore: if the Holy Spirit is embodied in and rests upon the human body what are the implications of this reality for human sexuality and sexual relationships? There is a corollary question: how do our human sexuality and sexual relationships impinge upon God, the Trinity of love?

Moltmann offers us a threefold pattern for reflection upon embodiment and the Spirit: “nature, grace and glory”. This pattern corresponds to his threefold imago theology: imago Dei, imago Christi, and imago Trinitatis. It is Moltmann’s ongoing attention to the linking of embodiment and the Spirit in his theological anthropology, his social Trinitarian theology and his eschatology that gives us significant material for the construction of a theology of the graced body. The messianic and eschatological dimension of his theological interests can be discerned in The Theology of Hope and his early engagement with theological anthropology in Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present. These first books were followed by publications in Christology and ecclesial pneumatology. Then in 1980, the first of six published “contributions to systematic theology”, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, sets forth

---

3 See especially Moltmann, God in Creation, Ch IX, 215-243; Moltmann, Spirit of Life; Moltmann, History and the Triune God.
his development of “social Trinitarianism”. This emphasis continued as his major theological concern for the next twenty years. It is the foundation of his theological anthropology, Christology, pneumatology and eschatology.

Moltmann’s social trinitarianism has attracted much interest but also considerable criticism. Throughout his life, his theological agenda has been to promote liberation, mutuality and inclusion in church and society. We also discover a deepening pneumatological focus in his theology, anthropology and Christology. It is the Spirit of God who acts in the creation of the cosmos and of humanity. It is the Spirit of God who acts in Jesus Christ, in resurrection and, in hindsight, in his incarnation, in his baptism, and in his life and ministry. It is the same Holy Spirit who acts in the life of the Christian person and Christian community to embody hope and love and also directs us toward the joyful feast of the “eternal sabbath” that marks the arrival and consummation of the reign of God. Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who unceasingly confirms the Trinity’s universal affirmation of all life.

---


7 For examples on the positive side see, Ton van Prooijen, Limping but Blessed: Jürgen Moltmann’s Search for a Liberating Anthropology (Amsterdam/New York: Editions Rodopi, 2004); Joy Ann McDougall, Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For an appreciative yet critical assessment of Moltmann’s theology of the social Trinity see David Coffey, Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The criticisms of the Australian Roman Catholic theologian, David Coffey, focus on both Moltmann’s theology and philosophy, especially in relation to his social trinitarianism. He particularly critiques Moltmann (as well as Eberhard Jüngel, Heribert Mühlen and Hans Urs von Balthasar) for their dependence upon a penal substitutionary theory of the atonement that necessarily and adversely affects their theology of the cross and of the Trinity. Does the Father abandon Jesus on the cross as Moltmann claims? Coffey says not so. The problem is that Moltmann conflates Jesus’ “feeling” of abandonment with its “actuality” (112).

8 Moltmann, God in Creation, see especially xii, 9-13, 99-100, 243.

9 Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 73-78.

10 Moltmann, God in Creation, 276-296. See also Moltmann, The Coming of God, 261-267.

11 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, see also; Moltmann, The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life.
Moltmann’s theological anthropology: embodiment

The Platonic desire to liberate the soul from the body, the medieval Aristotelian view that the soul forms the body, and the modern Western philosophy in which the human mind is held to rule over the body do not provide a satisfactory foundation for theological anthropology for Moltmann. He is critical of the ever-present “Platonization of Christianity” that misdirects contemporary spirituality with its tendencies to encourage individualism, inner spirituality and disengagement with the created world and a “kind of hostility to the body”. These concerns illustrate the embodied “earthly” focus of all his theology and especially of his theological anthropology. He helpfully connects Trinitarian theology with embodiment in creation and redemption. We see this in his earlier 1980 work, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God:

In the incarnation of the Son the triune God communicates himself wholly and utterly. In the incarnation of the Son God himself fulfils the promise made to mankind in creation—the promise that man should be “the image of God”. In the incarnation of the Son God humiliates himself, accepting and adopting threatened and perverted human nature in its entirety, making it part of his eternal life. …Through the brotherhood of the Son God’s children enter into the trinitarian relations of the Son, the Father and the Spirit. As people in the world they simultaneously exist “in God” and “God in them”.

In God in Creation in 1985 he develops his argument that human beings image God not merely in their spirituality but in the completeness of their embodied being:

The earth is the object and the scene of the Creator’s fertile and inventive love. It was the bodily, sensuous human beings whom he created to be his image, and his first commandment was “Be fruitful and multiply…” (Gen. 1.28). It is not the spirituality of men and women, and not what distinguishes them from animals, which makes them God’s image on earth. They are his image in their whole and particular bodily existence.

---

12 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 8-10.
13 Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, 121-122. My emphasis.
14 Moltmann, God in Creation, 245.
The key to this, for Moltmann, is that “creation is a Trinitarian process: the Father creates through the Son in the Holy Spirit”.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 9.} Alongside this is the Trinity’s coming among us as a human being in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. It is this gracious action of God’s outreach to broken and wounded humanity that, looking back with hindsight from this side of the resurrection, we term redemption. It is this embodied, redemptive love of God in Christ that sets humanity free from all that threatens and perverts human nature and desires to make it a living part of the Trinity’s eternal life in the kingdom that is to come.

\section*{4.2 Moltmann’s theological anthropology: the “imago Dei”}

As with Barth, Moltmann works out his theology of humanity through the theology of the \textit{imago Dei}—humanity created in the image of God. The foundation for this, and all Moltmann’s theology of creation, is in the Bible. God desires to create God’s image on earth, as the Priestly saga proclaims in Genesis 1: 26–27. By implication, humankind are living beings as are the birds, animals, reptiles and sea-creatures, and in the eyes of God all are good (1:25) but humanity is more than this. The Creator not only wants to see his creation but wants his creation to see the Creator. It becomes a matter of mutual recognition. “The creation of God’s image on earth means that in his work God finds, as it were, the mirror in which he recognises his own countenance—a correspondence which resembles him.”\footnote{Ibid., 77.} Thus, for Moltmann, human beings are the \textit{imago Dei} on earth in a twofold analogy of relation. He distinguishes firstly their being in the image of God through their correspondence “to the relationship of God to themselves and to the whole creation”, and secondly through their correspondence to “the inner relationships of God to himself—to the eternal, inner love...
of God which expresses and manifests itself in creation”. The divine desire to be seen and be recognised is an expression of God’s character of love. “God is love.” God desires to love and to be loved. In this humanity is God’s counterpart on earth. To quote Moltmann again: “The human being is the Other who resembles God (Ps. 8.5”).

Moltmann remarks on the central place given to the *imago Dei* in theological anthropology and the comparatively small amount of Old Testament biblical material justifying this theological focus on humanity’s creation in the image and likeness of God. A consequence of this imbalance has been the interpretative location of the *imago Dei* within a theology of creation rather than within the fuller New Testament witness and context which in Moltmann’s opinion gives a significant “messianic alignment” to a theology of the image of God.

What this means is revealed in the structuring of Moltmann’s detailed exposition of the *imago Dei* in Chapter IX of *God in Creation*. There he analyses and critically exeges the Genesis 1:26–28 material in terms of human beings as *imago Dei* and *imago Christi*. The *imago Christi* gives Christological focus and interpretation to the *imago Dei* deriving from the New Testament passages in which the phrase is found. Moltmann offers two possible hermeneutical choices:

The *imago Christi* is an *imago Dei* mediated through Christ. Christians therefore like to translate the Genesis passage we are considering as “according to his image”. But the christological bearing of the phrase can also be read into the translation “to be his image”, if this is taken to mean that the human being has been created “in the direction of” the image of God which Christ is—that this is the trend of his whole designation—so that the creation of human beings is open for the incarnation. Then the christology is understood as the fulfilment of the anthropology, and the anthropology becomes the preparation for the christology.

---

17 Ibid.
18 1 John 4: 16.
19 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 77-78.
20 Ibid., c.f. 78 and 215.
21 Ibid., 215-243.
22 See Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 11:7; 15:49; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; 3:10.
This second choice is important because, unstated but by implication, the fulfilment and preparation Moltmann mentions must involve the work of the Holy Spirit. It is this functional relationship between anthropology, Christology and pneumatology that is arguably the basis of a more inclusive church.

Moltmann looks toward the Eastern Orthodox concept of *theosis*—of humanity becoming God-like—in his second possibility, when he suggests that humanity is created toward incarnation. In *The Spirit of Life*, he develops this possibility by his integration of the thought of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas: Moltmann argues that “by nature man remains wholly human in soul and body, but by grace he becomes wholly God both in his soul and body” and that “the light that shone on Tabor transfigured Jesus’ body and his clothing as well as his soul, and was a visible anticipation of the ‘transfigured body’ of the risen Christ, to which our bodies are to be conformed (Phil. 3:21)”.

Describing (very briefly) human beings as *imago Trinitatis*, Moltmann highlights the communal rather than individual context of their correspondence to the Trinity. One benefit gained from the interpretation of humanity as *imago Trinitatis* is the overcoming of the individualism in theological anthropology. He believes this individualism is derived from the dominant monotheistic concept of God in Western theology.

To assist in elucidating the meaning of Genesis 1:26–28 for theological anthropology, he sets out four defining points:

- Humankind is the final action of God’s creation.
- Human beings are “to be” God’s image.

---

25 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 216. “Anthropology and theology are always mutually related; so in surmounting Western monotheism in the concept of God, we have also to overcome the individualism that corresponds to it in anthropology. Human beings are *imago Trinitatis* and only correspond to the triune God when they are united with one another.”
• The “likeness” of human beings to God is visible in their sexual difference and communal life.

• Human beings are commissioned to be responsible for and care for the earth and its creatures (Gen 1:28) but this is in addition to being in the image and likeness of God.\textsuperscript{26}

In the same chapter, Moltmann argues that it is not the human soul alone that carries the likeness to God as in the arguments of Augustine of Hippo\textsuperscript{27} and Thomas Aquinas and the early John Calvin. Rather, it is body and soul united together that is the human being created in the image of God. Noting that later in life Calvin learnt to distinguish between the image of God in creation and the image of God in redemption, Moltmann draws out this intentional, prospective element in Calvin that will be so important in his own developing theology of humanity as the \textit{imago Dei}. Through the glorification of the unified body and soul, the human person reaches the goal of God’s purpose in creation, redemption, and sanctification.\textsuperscript{28}

Being in the image comes first, and part of this is affirming the unity and the equality of men and women, the indivisibility of the human person as body and soul, the recognition that humanity flourishes within community, and that human community is not to be divided by classes with the rulers assuming more importance than the ruled; the minders more than the minded!\textsuperscript{29} The goal of Moltmann’s hermeneutical exploration is the recognition of the human being as the glory of God and understanding

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 216-225, especially 224-225. On \textit{imago Dei} theology and its significance for human responsibility for the earth see Middleton, \textit{The Liberating Image}.

\textsuperscript{27} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 136. “Augustine reduces the \textit{imago Dei} to the human soul: God’s image is engraved in the soul as if it were a seal.” Against this, Heather Thomson notes that Augustine includes the body in the \textit{imago Dei}. Heather Thomson, “Signifying Nothing? A Reconstruction of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei” (PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, NSW, 2000).

\textsuperscript{28} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 240.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 224-225.
that fulfilment of humanity as the image of God will be their glorification in the coming kingdom of God.\(^{30}\)

In *God in Creation* Moltmann moves through a consideration of humanity as the image of God in nature, through grace and toward glory and arrives at the determination that embodiment will be his guiding anthropological principle.

If “embodiment” is the end of all God’s works, then the human body cannot be viewed as a lower form of life, or as a means to an end—and certainly not as something that has to be overcome. For if embodiment is the end of God’s works, it must correspondingly be the supreme goal of the human being too, and the end of all *his* works.\(^{31}\)

His source for his focus on embodiment is the theology of the eighteenth century Lutheran theologian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782) who proposed that embodiment is both the process and the goal of all God’s works.\(^{32}\) “Embodiment is his goal. All the paths of his spirit and all the paths of his speech end in the lived form and configuration of his body.”\(^{33}\) Moltmann links embodiment to the three biblical traditions of creation, reconciliation, and redemption.\(^{34}\) Embodiment becomes a frequent term of description and reference in his theological writing and teaching.

A further question for clarification in this chapter concerns the relationship of the Spirit of God to embodiment. Moltmann suggests that it is the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—that enables the human being to become the embodied image of God on earth.

In the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” the whole person, body, soul and spirit, becomes the clear image of God on earth. Human beings are drawn physically into the redeeming and transfiguring fellowship of God. They praise and glorify God in their bodies. There can no longer be any question of a degradation and subjection of the mortal body by an immortal soul among those who await the “resurrection of the

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 216. Moltmann’s detailed exposition of the *imago Dei* is in Chapter IX of *God in Creation* where he analyses and critically exegetes the Genesis 1:26-28 material in terms of human beings as *imago Dei* and *imago Christi*.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 245.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 244-247.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 245.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 245-246.
body” and “the new earth” in the future world. Here already body and soul form a communion under the guidance of the life-giving Spirit.\(^3^5\)

This very positive view of embodiment is not just something for the present earthly life. There is an eschatological future for embodiment. The consummation of his imago Dei theology in the imago Trinitatis is an embodied one. We see this being worked out in The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology in which Moltmann considers the resurrection of the body and the future goal of humanity.\(^3^6\)

Some years after his initial discussion of imago Dei theology in God in Creation we discover a further focusing of it in History and the Triune God where he brings together embodiment and sexual gender role differentiation:

But if human beings are the image of God on earth in their corporeality, then they are also the image of God in the sexual differentiation of masculinity and femininity. If according to the account of creation in the Priestly Writing God created his image on earth “male and female”, then this original difference and community of man and woman is already to be understood in terms of the image of God. It is not the sexless soul or the solitary individual which is thought worthy to correspond to God and participate in God’s eternal being but the human fellowship of persons. Here we necessarily turn to the idea of the social image of God which is found in the Greek church fathers.\(^3^7\)

We can note here some similarities with Barth’s linking of the imago Dei and male and female gender relations, but Moltmann focuses upon the human community of persons rather than the more individual relation of one man and one woman that we find in Barth’s writing.

If we understand the whole person, husband, wife and child, as the image of God, then we understand the whole human community as the image of the triune God not just as the image of his rule but also as the image of his inner being. In the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit”, human fellowship corresponds to the unique, incomparable fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.\(^3^8\)

In this he links human fellowship with his social image of the Trinity.

---

\(^3^5\) Moltmann. History and the Triune God, 62.
\(^3^6\) Moltmann. The Coming of God.
\(^3^7\) Moltmann. History and the Triune God, 62.
\(^3^8\) Ibid., 63.
The relationship between embodiment, the incarnation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ and in other human beings is approached differently by Moltmann. For Barth, as we have seen, Jesus Christ is the first and pre-eminent human person and all other human beings derive their humanity from his humanity. For Moltmann, ordinary humanity is not a secondary, derived humanity to that of the humanity of Jesus Christ.\footnote{39} As he argues,

In this context a different aspect should be stressed today: if the Son of God became wholly and entirely human, and if he assumed full humanity, then this does not merely take in human personhood; it includes human nature as well. It does not embrace adult humanity alone; it comprehends humanity diachronically, in all its phases of development—that is it includes the being of the child, the being of the foetus and the embryo. The whole of humanity in all its natural forms is assumed by God in order that it may be healed. So it is “human” and “holy” in all its natural forms, and it is prenatally by no means merely “human material”, or just the preliminary stage to humanity. That is why theologically the true and real birth of Christ has to be stressed.\footnote{40}

The doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God, of Jesus Christ born in the flesh to the Virgin Mary, in theory at least, is the basis for giving value to the human body, viewing it as “graced”. This was Barth’s view; it is also Moltmann’s who argues that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the birth of Christ. The focus needs to be on the Spirit not just on Mary as Virgin and mother. This is the biblical witness as he makes clear in his careful discussion of the two different historical traditions concerning the origin of Jesus of Nazareth as Son of God.\footnote{41} In the first tradition, which emphasises the Fatherhood of God not that of Joseph, “the Holy Spirit is the male seed.”\footnote{42} The second tradition picks up the notion of “the motherhood of the Holy Spirit”\footnote{43} both in Mary and in all Christian believers. His point is that this is not the normal process of human

\footnote{39} My emphasis. 
\footnote{40} Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 85. 
\footnote{41} Ibid., 82-87. 
\footnote{42} Ibid., 83. 
\footnote{43} Ibid.
conception but the experience of the Holy Spirit who adopts men and women as children of God.\(^{44}\) Referring to the birth of Christ, Moltmann writes:

The history of his primal and original birth from the Spirit of God merely brings out the difference that he is from the beginning and by nature that which believers become in his fellowship, through Word and Spirit: the messianic child of God.\(^{45}\)

Our adoption as children of God, a gift received in baptism, is another way of claiming that the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—indwells or rests upon us, personally and ecclesially. In this sense our physical bodies become the very place where the Spirit rests and dwells.\(^{46}\) It is this resting or dwelling of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, on the human body that supports the idea of the graced body. In this context, we can claim that the human being as the *imago Dei* is also the body graced by the presence of the Spirit. In case there is some confusion in our definition and usage of the terms “the Spirit of God” and “the Holy Spirit”, I follow Moltmann’s own usage. For him, the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit are one and the same Spirit; one of the perichoretic Persons of the Trinity, sometimes referred to as the “Third Person” of the Trinity.

Reflecting on the above, we can see that Moltmann leads us beyond Karl Barth’s three-point determination of the *imago Dei*.\(^{47}\) He successfully broadens the discussion to take us to an understanding of the *Imago* that is essentially eschatological and points us to what the human being is to become through the Holy Spirit, rather than to a notion focused on the restoration of the *imago* to how it originally existed at the beginning of creation. This future prospective he names the *imago Trinitatis*.


\(^{45}\) Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ,* 83.

\(^{46}\) Rogers Jr, *After the Spirit.* Rogers develops this theme of the resting of the Spirit.

\(^{47}\) First, a primary focus on male and female gender distinction; second, Jesus Christ as the image of God and human beings as the image of that image; third, divine-human/human-divine covenantal relationship and fellowship. See my discussion in the previous chapter.
Moltmann’s broader comprehension of the image of God as *imago Christi* and *imago Trinitatis* looks toward the human and divine future as the goal of embodiment.\(^{48}\) Although he says nothing specific about the physical aspects of sex and sexuality they seem certainly to be included in both his present and eschatological vision for humanity. Nowhere does he state that they are excluded. An age-old question arises as to what exactly will be the character of human relationships when the Kingdom of God’s glory is consummated. Will they be embodied or not? Will our sexual identity be of concern? Paul the Apostle describes the future in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 in terms of mystery.

\[
\text{Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.}^{49}\]

We take up these concerns later in this chapter when we examine and reflect upon Moltmann’s discussion of eschatology as the consummation of glory.

The human person is whole and indivisible. Though there are some similarities of terminology, Moltmann decisively moves beyond Barth’s hierarchical ordering of the soul and body toward an inclusive “perichoretic pattern of body and soul” which is modelled on “the perichoretic fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.\(^{50}\) With this Trinitarian model before us, we now examine his doctrine of the social Trinity.

### 4.3 Moltmann’s Social Trinity

Moltmann first argued his theology of *perichoresis* in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* which he drew from John Damascene’s teaching on “the circulatory...”

---

\(^{48}\) Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 218.
\(^{49}\) 1 Corinthians 15:51–52.
\(^{50}\) Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 258-259.
character of the eternal divine life” of the Trinity.\(^{51}\) *Perichoresis* is a Greek word that means to dance or move around in a circle-like movement. In *The Spirit of Life*, he describes it as a “self-circling and self-reposing movement”.\(^{52}\) The ceaseless, eternal exchange of love and energy of the Trinitarian Persons is expressed in the circular dance-like motion of *perichoresis*. He applies this relational description to the intra-Trinitarian Persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then by analogy to inter-human relationships.\(^{53}\) In *God in Creation* he writes:

> Finally, we have understood human likeness to God in the same context of the divine perichoresis; that is to say, as a relationship of fellowship, of need and mutual interpenetration. The true human community is designed to be the *imago Trinitatis*.

The analogical significance for Moltmann is that human beings do not exist in solitude, because God exists not alone but within the communion of the intra-divine Trinitarian relations. Thus, human autonomous identity is always set within the context of human community in which there is always the fresh possibility of mutual encounter, exchange, and enduring relationships. Such encounter and exchange, (modelled on the assumed and speculative perichoretic character of intra-Trinitarian relations), is not therefore, in Moltmann’s view, individualistic. It has social and political ramifications, as well as personal.\(^{55}\)

---

\(^{51}\) Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 174-176. Moltmann uses perichoresis to describe intra-Trinitarian relations as well as inter-human relations in many places in his theological writings. However, as I noted in Chapter 2, Barth also made reference to perichoretic Trinitarian relations in his discussion of how God acts as One, especially in divine human ethical relations in which God commands and humankind responds in act. Barth’s particular reference to perichoretic relations in the Trinity highlights his desire to emphasise that God is One and that even while being three Persons or three modes of being, the triune Persons do not act separately as distinct subjects in creation, reconciliation or redemption. Moltmann’s concerns in the working out of his Trinitarian theology are different to those of Barth. These concerns focus more on equality in relationships than on sovereignty, status and power. Thus, Moltmann uses the mutuality entailed in perichoresis to transform and expand our vision of divine-human relationships.

\(^{52}\) Ibid. See his fuller discussion on perichoresis in Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, 321-323.

\(^{53}\) Ibid. See his fuller discussion on perichoresis in Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, 321-323.

\(^{54}\) Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 258-259.

\(^{55}\) Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* October (2000): 432-445. Kilby, in her article, is critical of those theologians (such as Jürgen Moltmann, Cornelius Platinga, Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Colin Gunton) who have advocated a social doctrine of the Trinity and not been aware of the problem of the projection of their own social
Moltmann disagrees with Augustine of Hippo’s rejection of the Greek fathers’ social analogy for the Trinity and his development of a psychological doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that Augustine ends up with a Trinitarian theology that emphasises the monarchical sovereignty of God. The fruit of this view is an anthropology that depends on domination and hierarchical rule. Augustine gets to this point from his particular interpretation of Genesis 1:26–27; according to Moltmann, he “understands the divine plural at this point as a singular, to which only a singular can correspond among human beings”. The consequence is that the imago Dei for Augustine is located only in the human soul and not in the total human person in which body and soul is indivisibly united. This leads to the idea that the soul controls and dominates the body in much the same fashion as heaven dominates earth.

This notion of sovereignty reigns supreme in Augustine’s Trinitarian theology and anthropology as it does in Barth’s. Explicating Augustine, Moltmann writes: “God himself is spirit. So only the invisible soul—which is the reasonable spirit—can be the image of God”. Thus, according to Augustine, humanity is created after the image and likeness of:

‘…the one true God. For the Trinity is itself the one true God’. The human being corresponds to the single Being of the triune God, not to the threefold nature of God’s inner essence.

and political theories on to God. She writes: “Projection, then, is particularly problematic in at least some social theories of the Trinity because what is projected onto God is immediately reflected back onto the world, and this reverse projection is said to be what is in fact important about the doctrine”(§3).

56 Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, 142-144. Moltmann argues that Augustine of Hippo’s psychological model of the Trinity describes the Holy Spirit as the vinculum amoris—the common bond of love linking the Father with the Son. This is the Spirit as an energy of unity not as a Person, “a relationship but not a subject”. Barth takes on Augustine’s psychological model and this leads to pneumatological problems because the emphasis is on the relationship of the Father and the Son and the Spirit is left out in the cold!

57 Moltmann, God in Creation, 235.
58 Ibid., 235-236.
59 Ibid., 236.
60 Ibid., 235. In footnote 35, Moltmann quotes from Augustine of Hippo, De Trinitate, XII, ch. 6
61 Ibid.
Thus, “according to Augustine, human beings are the image of ‘the whole Trinity’, since in the unity of the Tri-unity the Trinity itself is ‘whole’”, but Moltmann contends, against Augustine, that:

…human beings are in fact fashioned according to a single Person of the Trinity: the Person of the Son. Only the Son becomes human, and embodies the image for which human beings are created. Christ is the only-begotten Son and, as the image of God the Father, is at the same time the first-born among many brothers and sisters. So as the *imago Christi* human beings are gathered into his relationship of sonship, and in the brotherhood of Christ the Father of Jesus Christ becomes their Father also.

He concludes his argument:

As God’s image, human beings are the image of the whole Trinity in that they are “conformed” to the image of the Son: the Father creates, redeems and perfects human beings through the Spirit in the image of the Son.

It is Moltmann’s view that Holy Spirit takes this very active role in fashioning the human being into the form of Christ.

Moltmann’s particular concern arising from this influence is that if the fundamental relationship within the Trinity is understood as that of monarchy, with its distinct possibility of domination, then the result is a theological anthropology in which the soul has primacy over the body, heaven over earth, and man over woman, as noted in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. In Moltmann’s view theological anthropologies that allow the domination of the body by the soul do so because they fail to take account of the mutuality and equality of intra-relationship of the three Persons within the Trinity which he understands to be the key analogy between the divine and the human.

---

62 Ibid., 242.
63 Ibid., 242-243.
64 Ibid., 243.
65 Ibid., 238-239. Moltmann holds that both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas understand the human soul as the image of God; whereas the human body and its network of relationships carry only a trace of the image, a *vestigia Dei*. The reason for this is Augustine’s belief that human intellect and reason and spirit are of greater importance than the mortal, physical body. Further, it is the soul as the real subject of the human being that corresponds to the “one Person of the divine Trinity” who both Augustine and Thomas, according to Moltmann, interpret monarchically as God the Father. “This means that as the image of God the human being corresponds to God the Father.” Moltmann asks what happens then to the dignity of the body and of the woman. See also my discussion of Barth’s preference for this Augustinian approach in Chapter 2, above.
Biblical theology does not advance such a monarchical system and such divisions within humanity; on the contrary, biblical theology looks to the unity of the whole human being—the human person—within a relational community of persons. Moltmann follows the lead of the theologians of the Greek Church of fourth and fifth centuries, notably Gregory Nazianzus who develops a social doctrine of the Trinity in which the relational analogy of Adam, Eve and Seth—the primary biblical family—are a figure for the Trinity. Thus the human community, not the human individual, is the key for both Trinitarian theology and theological anthropology according to Moltmann. From this particular Trinitarian foundation Moltmann is able to hold Christology and pneumatology in balance and with equal value: the Son is not prior to Spirit or Spirit prior to the Son. Word and Spirit act in mutual support of each other. The human community is also the context in which we come to construct a theology of the graced body: the embodied person existing and relating within both the Church and world of today. The graced body does not refer to an individual, but to an individual-within-society, the social reality of a flesh and blood community of fellow human beings all of whose bodies partake in receiving the Holy Spirit.

Many contemporary theologians, including Jürgen Moltmann, critique Trinitarian theologies that adhere to the *filioque* clause because they can lead to a Christomonism in which all relations of God with humanity are achieved through the initiative of Christ the Word, the second person of the Trinity. A consequence of this is the loss or absence of purpose for the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian economy. Against such a view, the biblical witness shows that the Holy Spirit takes initiative in relation to humanity, including the particular history of Jesus Christ in the totality of his

---

66 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 199; Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 60. His source is Gregory Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, V, 11. Moltmann writes in *History and the Triune God*: “If we understand the whole person, husband, wife and child, as the image of God, then we understand the whole human community as the image of the triune God not just as the image of his rule but also as the image of his inner being. In the ‘fellowship of the Holy Spirit’, human fellowship corresponds to the unique, incomparable fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (63).

incarnation; for example, at his annunciation and baptism and in the life and worship of the Church the Word becomes flesh.

By analogy, the body and soul of the human being can be understood to be equally held in balance, mutually valued and indivisibly united through the work of the Holy Spirit. Body and Spirit will unite but not be absorbed; one lost in a greater other. Rather, the distinctness, difference and otherness of humanity from God will be preserved yet the divine desire for, and initiative in, relationship celebrated. It is the reality of the experience of this divine-human relationship joined with the knowledge of our otherness from God, and of God as Other, that is such a mystery for us; a mystery of grace. According to Paul, human beings, in their totality, are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in human persons. In Romans 8, Paul sets out the characteristics, relationships and hope that come from life in the Spirit. The resultant challenge from Paul to the Corinthian Christians, who are faced with the difficulty of integrating their life in the Spirit with their embodied human life, is “Glorify God in your body”.

Moltmann understands Jesus Christ to be the imago Dei but he is not as concerned to maintain the absolute distinction between humanity and divinity as Barth had been. This sets him free to develop a Trinitarian theology and theological anthropology that he believes resonates with the theological concerns of our contemporary world; one of these concerns is that of relationship, another is

---

68 1 Corinthians 6:19. [The Greek “you” is plural here].
69 Romans 5:5  [The Greek “our” is plural here].
70 1 Corinthians 6:20. For a useful discussion of this text and theme see Barton, “‘Glorify God in Your Body’ (1 Corinthians 6.20): Thinking Theologically About Sexuality,” 367-379. In emphasising Paul’s affirmative attitude and instruction ‘Glorify God in your body’ (1 Cor. 6:20), Barton points out Paul’s overall purpose in dealing with sexuality to be the constructive one of building up those early communities for the health and well being of people and for the glory of God. His aim was always to “create an ordered, holy and life-giving society”. “Spiritual” for Paul was not disembodiment. Rather the body mattered supremely as the place in which God’s glory was worked out tangibly and visibly. God’s glory is to be worked out in the body of the individual and in the body of the community—the ekklēsia. Hence his concern for the life of Christian households: the place where both bodies were normally present (378).
pneumatology. For Moltmann, relationship’s significant attribute is mutuality and this is itself an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{71}

Before we explore his pneumatology more fully, his critiques of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian theologies are reviewed, because these may help us to understand how some past Trinitarian theologies negatively influence theological anthropology: how Christians understand God influences our understanding of humanity; and, thus how we relate to other human beings personally and corporately. In a proper doctrine of the Trinity lies a proper doctrine and praxis of humanity.\textsuperscript{72}

Moltmann indicates a similar agreement here:

In their various communities, human beings are to be understood, not merely as the image of God’s rule over creation, but also as the image of his inward nature. The inner fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is represented in the fundamental human communities, and is manifested in them through creation and redemption. The so-called “sovereignty” of the triune God then proves to be his sustaining fellowship with his creation and his people. This becomes evident in the messianic fellowship of human beings with Jesus, the Son: “That they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us”, runs Jesus’ high priestly prayer (John 17:21). Here the social analogy applies to the divine fellowship which is formed through the mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father through the Spirit. Here ...it means the community within the Trinity.\textsuperscript{73}

He argues that humanity’s correspondence to the Trinity, as \textit{imago Dei} and as \textit{imago Trinitatis} is established by similarity of relationship to, not of identity of substance with, the intra-Trinitarian Persons.

Just as the three persons of the Trinity are “one” in a wholly unique way, so, \textit{similarly}, human beings are \textit{imago Trinitatis} in their personal fellowship with one another. It is not that one person is supposed to represent the Father, and another the Son, and a third the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} We notice Moltmann’s progress toward this goal between 1980 and 1991 when his major work on pneumatology, \textit{The Spirit of Life}, is published. In this he develops the theme of “open friendship” as a particular example of human and Christian fellowship.

\textsuperscript{72} I owe this understanding to my theological formation by the Revd Dr Maxwell McKnee Thomas (later Bishop Max Thomas of Wangaratta, a founding member of the Anglican-Orthodox International Doctrine Commission) at Trinity College, Melbourne, 1970–1972.

\textsuperscript{73} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 241-242.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
This deepening reflection on the theme of embodiment in creation is linked to his radical criticism of Barth and Rahner’s Trinitarian theologies.\textsuperscript{75} Identifying modalistic and binitarian elements in Barth’s Trinitarian theology, Moltmann believes these can be sourced to the influences from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries European theological culture.\textsuperscript{76} The first influence was that of philosophical Idealism; the second was the notion of the “absolute subject”. He lays out the connecting paths that lead Barth, because of his preference for “the reflection structure of absolute subjectivity”, to focus first on the sovereignty and revelation of God rather than the Trinity itself.\textsuperscript{77}

By “reflection structure”, Moltmann understands that two processes are at work in Barth’s description and understanding of God as “absolute subject”. They are those of “self-distinction and self-recollection”.\textsuperscript{78} The problem with this, for Moltmann, is that Barth uses this reflection logic and structure “to secure God’s subjectivity, sovereignty, selfhood and personality” at the expense of a proper valuing of the Persons of the Trinity which Moltmann believes to be imperative for Trinitarian theology.\textsuperscript{79}

Several consequences follow for Barth from this choice which ground his doctrine of the Trinity in his prior doctrine of God as self-revealer.\textsuperscript{80} First, Moltmann believes that Barth does this at the expense of “the biblical testimony to the history of God”, eventually recognising the problem, and sets out to ground his Church Dogmatics in the “concrete and specific revelation, the Son, the Godhead Jesus Christ”.\textsuperscript{81} However, according to Moltmann, this move by Barth remains dependent upon “the reflection structure of absolute subjectivity”.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{75} First set forth in Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity and the Kingdom of God}. Then developed later in Moltmann, \textit{History and the Triune God}.  \\
\textsuperscript{76} Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity and the Kingdom of God}, 141-142. Moltmann refers to Barth’s description of the Persons of the Trinity as “modes of being” rather than as distinct Persons who have their own unique subjectivity and activity. See \textit{Church Dogmatics}, I/1, 359.  \\
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 142.  \\
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 140.  \\
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 140-144, here 142.  \\
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 142.
\end{flushright}
Second, Moltmann believes that Barth’s grounding of his Trinitarian theology in the prior sovereignty of God causes him considerable pneumatological problems. Moltmann’s concern is located in Barth’s over-emphasis on the inter-relationships between the Father and the Son at the expense of the Holy Spirit. Barth is not the only theologian in the Western Church to have had difficulties in this area either in the past or the present, as Moltmann is aware. The problem goes back at least to Augustine of Hippo followed centuries later by the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, who begin their discussion of God from the one divine essence and the one divine nature respectively rather than starting with the “Three” of the Trinity. As Moltmann points out, it was easy for both Augustine and then Aquinas to start from first things, with what they conceived of as prior: “the One God”. Part of the problem lies in their preference for a definition of unity as “oneness” rather than as “a uniting of things distinct” which in their coming together retain their distinctness. A focus on “oneness” seems to lessen the possibility of mutual relationship which Moltmann’s definition, “a uniting of things distinct”, seems to imply. This latter definition allows for a much more robust presentation of the Holy Spirit in the intra-Trinitarian relations, a presentation that brings the Spirit into larger view out of its traditional obscurity in Western theology.

With a similar purpose in mind, Moltmann critiques the Trinitarian theology of the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. The point of contention is Rahner’s interpretation of the Trinity as “a single divine subject in ‘three distinct modes of subsistence’”. He chose “mode” rather than “person” because in our culture it is so easy to emphasise the solitary aspects of person. According to Moltmann, Rahner’s concern about confusions in the meaning of this word “person” in reference to the

---

83 Ibid., 142-144.
84 Ibid., 16-19. Moltmann sets out the salient points at issue in the development of the Western doctrine of God from the time of Tertullian with its focus on the one divine substance at the expense of the fullness of the doctrine of the Trinity which focuses on the three Persons as centres of activity and relationship.
85 Ibid., 148-150; here 150. Moltmann argues for the latter definition of unity.
86 Ibid., 144-148, here 144.
doctrine of the Trinity and with what he calls its ordinary secular meaning in reference to human beings leads him toward such an individualistic interpretation. \(^{87}\) Moltmann argues that Rahner is mistaken about “the extreme individualism” of “person” as “a self-possessing, self-disposing centre of action” \(^{88}\) and confuses it with “person” as expounded by several modern philosophical personalists. He names Höderlin, Feubach, Buber, Ebner, Rosenstock\(^{89}\) whose purpose was to oppose such individualism by emphasising that a person is always in relation to another person; what Buber referred to as the “I-Thou” relationship. Moltmann affirms that “without social relation there can be no personality”. \(^{90}\)

Moltmann himself argues for considerable care in the use of the word “Person” in relation to Trinitarian theology, especially when using the word in reference to each distinct Trinitarian person. Summarising his critique of both Barth and Rahner, he urges that:

…the concept of God’s unity cannot in a Trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, or into the identity of the absolute subject either; and least of all into one of the three Persons of the Trinity. It must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons. \(^{91}\)

Trinitarian teaching is located in and “proceeds from the concrete and particular history of the Father, Son and Spirit attested in the Bible and leads to the universal revelation of its unity and Godhead” rather than from some form of speculative or deductive theology in which the unity of the Trinitarian persons is presupposed. \(^{92}\) This biblically based “salvation-historical” narrative begins with the “divine history of creation” and works toward the goal of divine glory symbolised by the biblical phrase “the kingdom of God”

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 144-148.  
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 145-146, here 145.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 145.  
\(^{90}\) Ibid.  
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 150.  
\(^{92}\) Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 82.
in which all humanity and the whole cosmos will be brought by Christ and the Holy Spirit into the presence of the Father.\textsuperscript{93}

From his critical exposition of the Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, Moltmann goes on to offer us a liberating theological anthropology of the \textit{imago Dei} and of Trinitarian theology that has implications for this thesis on the graced body. These liberating implications are developed in and through his pneumatology. He explicates his understanding of the context of this coming-together of human body and divine Spirit, as follows:

The bodily form which Christ takes and the bodily indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not “the work” of the reason and will of the human subject. They are “experienced” in the surrender of the whole person to God. They are also perceived more readily by other people than by the person involved, because it is not this person himself who “testifies”; it is God who makes him a witness for others.\textsuperscript{94}

In contrast to Barth, who understands the human body as the “serving” body of the “ruling” soul, Moltmann rejects this sequential hierarchy and develops a theological anthropology in which the soul and body are mutually related and engaged in a ceaseless interchange that he describes as a “perichoretic fellowship”.\textsuperscript{95} This refers to that dynamic, mutual, interchange of love that characterises the inner relations of the three persons of the Trinity, which provides an analogy of relation for the constitution of the human being.

According to the basic notion of the perichoretic doctrine of the Trinity, the true image of God lies in the mutual fellowship of man and woman. Only the mutuality of both of them, not the superiority of the man, leads the human life of men and women to full fruition in the powers of the shared spirit of God, which opens up community and brings both to life in mutual love and friendship. It is not super- and sub-ordination, but a shared common life in fellowship that corresponds to the triune God and is the incarnate promise of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{96}

There is a unity of love within the Trinity, a unity of love and fellowship that no longer requires an hierarchical ordering in our understanding of creation, of interrelationships.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 82-84.
\textsuperscript{94} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 264.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 258.
\textsuperscript{96} Moltmann, \textit{History and the Triune God}, 137-138.
between God and the creation, and therefore in relationships between God and humanity.

Moltmann argues that Barth’s view of the unity of God that is dependent on the notions of command, obedience and rule, is not essential, merely one possibility amongst other alternatives. Rather than being marked by “a one-sided relationship of domination,” Moltmann interprets God’s relation to creation by the relational terms of reciprocity and fellowship:

In the creative and life-giving powers of the Spirit, God pervades his creation. In his sabbath rest he allows his creatures to exert an influence on him. From the aspect of the Spirit in creation, the relationship of God and the world must also be viewed as a perichoretic relationship.

What follows from this argument for Moltmann is that the context for humanity’s likeness to the divine—the imago Dei—is the perichoretic relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This intra-Trinitarian relationship is characterised by mutual need, fellowship, and interpenetration. There is fluidity and motion and rest in this self-circling and self-reposing divine life. The implication is that the relationship of the human soul and body does not need to be one of domination, of higher and lower, of ruling and service, but rather of mutuality, of coming and going. Moltmann says it simply: “The true human community is designed to be the imago Trinitatis”. Therefore, there needs to be no primacy of soul over body or of body over soul.

Moltmann believes that his “social doctrine of the Trinity” has led to “far-reaching consequences” in theology and in hermeneutics especially in relation to “the

---

97 See Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, the Doctrine of Reconciliation, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 201. Barth states: “His divine unity consists in the fact that in Himself He is both One who is obeyed and Another who obeys.”

98 Moltmann, God in Creation, 258.

99 Ibid. In his Note 39 (at the end of this quotation), Moltmann refers the reader back to Chapter 4 §5 “The Cosmic Spirit”, where he concludes: “This is the benefit of the Trinitarian doctrine of creation in the Spirit and of the Creator Spirit who indwells creation. …If the cosmic Spirit is the Spirit of God, the universe cannot be viewed as a closed system. It has to be understood as a system that is open—open for God and for his future.”

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 258-259.

102 Ibid., 257.
doctrine of the image of God in human beings and the conception of creation which corresponds to God”. He suggests that “communion” and “fellowship” better describe the goal of the Trinity in relation to the creation and to humanity. These terms are somewhat better in his opinion than previous words used to describe the character and intent of God; words deriving from monarchy, hierarchy and patriarchy all of which describe vertical relationships of power, of someone over or under someone else. Moltmann’s preferred words “communion” and “fellowship” tend to describe more equal and mutual relations; what we may better refer to as lateral relationships. However, it is important to note that the mere definition of relationships as “vertical” does not exclude such relationships from the divine or human experiences of communion and fellowship.

The source of this theological transformation in Moltmann’s thinking comes from his discernment that the Trinity is “a single communion or fellowship which is formed by the three divine persons themselves”. His sense of the Trinity as a dynamic, relational divine community has important implications for the human community and for the ecclesial community—the Church as the body of Christ. If the Trinitarian Persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other in loving relationships marked by mutuality, equality and communion then by the analogy of relation human beings are called to embody these same characteristics of loving relationship in and through their communion and fellowship lived out in their various communities.

The fellowship of the triune God is so open and inviting that it is depicted in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit which human beings experience with one another—“as

---

103 Moltmann, History and the Triune God, xii.
104 Ibid. The Greek Orthodox theologian and bishop, John Zizioulas provides a significant discussion of communion, fellowship, and otherness in relation to the Trinity and humanity; in John D. Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2006).
105 Moltmann, History and the Triune God, xii.
106 Ibid.
you, Father, are in me and I in you‖—and takes this true human fellowship into itself and gives it a share in itself: “that they may be in us”.107

He concludes, “True human fellowship is to correspond to the triune God and be his image on earth. True human fellowship will participate in the inner life of the triune God.”108

Moltmann understands the Trinity as a dynamic and living divine community of love that reaches out to human beings through the Holy Spirit to engage in the creation of human communities of love. This is far more than a sentimental notion of love; it has important practical and embodied consequences whose context is not just small, local human community but also human society as a whole and the whole created cosmos:

A human society is becoming visible in which personality, sociality and nature are brought into equilibrium and people are becoming capable of surviving with one another and with nature.109

This is a positive result from Moltmann’s viewpoint of the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the Spirit being always in mutual relationship, in a reciprocal giving and taking.110 The negative effect of a Christological pneumatology is, in Moltmann’s view, a loss of such mutual reciprocity in the inner relations of the triune God that has consequences for the working out of the triune relationships in salvation history, in the daily affairs of human beings.111 Not the least of these is what he terms the “depersonalisation” of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, a mistrusting of the Spirit’s

---

107 Ibid., 60. John 17:21. “That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be one in us.” [quoting from Moltmann’s transcription of the text].
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., xiii.
110 Moltmann, Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology, 316-320; and 321-323. Here is the clearest setting forth of Moltmann’s understanding of perichoresis and its implications for Trinitarian theology as well as for human life and ecclesial life.
111 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 217-221, here 218. Moltmann develops his ideas of mutuality and reciprocity as gifts and attributes of the Holy Spirit in his discussion on fellowship as more than a mere gift of the Spirit but as the actual nature of the Holy Spirit. “It follows from this that ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ has to be understood in Trinitarian terms as a community of persons, and not in a Unitarian sense as a community of essence.” (219, Moltmann’s emphases).
“inspirations, feelings, visions and dreams”\textsuperscript{112} in the daily experiences of human beings, and a placing of the church before the Spirit that leads to authoritarian structures, attitudes and practices.\textsuperscript{113} Such outcomes can lead to the justification of relationships of domination between human beings and within ecclesial, social and political communities.

Moltmann’s theological agenda is to do away with such relationships of domination in the church and in society and focus instead on equality and mutuality, on fellowship, friendship, and communion that stem from his perichoretic vision of the intra-Trinitarian relations. Thus, fellowship and communion are the “matrix and the sphere of life” of the divine-human relationship.\textsuperscript{114} The analogy is that human relationships, especially ecclesial ones, are to resemble this divine mutual fellowship and communion in a constant “giving and taking” that respects the diversity and equality of others. They are not to resemble monarchical domination. As he clarifies:

According to John 17:21f., the character of the primal image in the Trinity does not lie either in the paternal monarchy or the matriarchy of the Spirit, nor in any way does it lie in individual persons, but in the relationships of fellowship between the persons. The level of relations in the Trinity at which the eternal perichoresis can be recognized is the element in God from which analogies are to be formed.\textsuperscript{115}

\section*{4.4 The Holy Spirit and embodiment}

According to Moltmann, the Holy Spirit’s activity in the human being is not first in the mind and only in the body when necessary but in the whole embodied person, in the emotions and in the unconscious.

Human embodiment is embodiment that is pervaded, quickened and formed by the creative Spirit: the human being is a \textit{spirit-body}. The human being’s soul—his feelings, ideas, intentions, and so forth—is a soul that is pervaded, quickened and formed by the creative Spirit: the human being is \textit{spirit-soul}.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112} Moltmann, \textit{History and the Triune God}, 58.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 58-59.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., xv-xvi.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., xvi. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{116} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 263.
This integration of body and soul by implication includes sexuality—gender, orientation, bodily sexual activity and energies.\(^{117}\) He uses the German term *Gestalt*, meaning “the configuration or total pattern”, to refer to the fully engaged life of the total human creature as an alternative model to the traditional separation of soul from body.\(^{118}\) Linking the creative Spirit and the cosmic Spirit with the biblical Holy Spirit, Moltmann observes that the Holy Spirit engages in the work of transformation—the work of redemption and sanctification—that forms the new human being “in believers and in the fellowship of love”.\(^{119}\) This clarification takes seriously the relationship of the Trinity to human embodiment, especially in his presentation of the role and the relationship of the Holy Spirit. For him, embodied physicality and the life and grace of the Holy Spirit are not polarised opposites. There is always an intimate relation and communion. As early as his 1980 work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, he affirms that human experience of the Holy Spirit is “always a physical experience”.\(^{120}\)

These determinations that link Trinitarian relationships through the action of the Holy Spirit with physical embodiment help Moltmann to re-think the Council of Chalcedon’s “two nature” Christology agreed in 451 CE.\(^{121}\)

Against this Moltmann argues strongly for a theology of the suffering God, who in the history of the Son’s human experiences, comes to know within the Trinitarian relationship loss, pain and abandonment: “It is one divine passion which leads to the

---

117 Ibid., 264.
118 Ibid., 259; and his discussion on “Spirit and Gestalt”, 262-264. See also his further use of “gestalt” in relation to the wholeness of human being in Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 75-76.
119 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 263.
120 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 125.
121 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 46-55; especially, 50. “The christology of Christ’s single person in two natures is the condition which makes it possible to substantiate theologically the redemption of humanity through him.” Moltmann provides here a clear and extensive discussion of the meanings and problems associated with Christ having a divine and a human nature.
pain of the Father, the death of the Son and the sighing of the Spirit: the passion of love for lost creatures”.\textsuperscript{122}

In the replacing of this old theology of the impassibility of God with a Trinitarian theology in which the Father comes to awareness of the pain of separation from the Son in the crucifixion, Moltmann recognises the role of the Spirit: God suffers the “sighing of the Spirit” in the “one divine passion”.\textsuperscript{123} Theologically, what is needed is the recognition of the Spirit’s complementary role with the Son in the process of redemption and sanctification. How this recognition will be achieved will vary considerably depending upon social and cultural context and personal factors. It will be recognised through the telling of personal and communal stories about the shape and form of the grace of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in people’s lives. Hopefully, these will include certain stories from the lives and communities of gay and lesbian Christians.\textsuperscript{124}

4.5 \textit{Nature, grace and glory}

Moltmann maintains that there is considerable danger in a non-integrated doctrine of creation. He means a doctrine of creation that is concerned only with the original act of God in creation, when time and life began, and that believes all that the biblical witness has to say about creation has been said in Genesis 1–3 and its P and J sagas. Against this he proposes that creation is better comprehended with a “differentiated cosmic Christology” in which three ways are used to describe Christ’s presence to creation: first as the ground or foundation of the whole; second, as the

\textsuperscript{122} Moltmann, \textit{History and the Triune God}, xvi. Cf Moltmann, \textit{The Crucified God}, 274-278; here 277.
\textsuperscript{123} Moltmann, \textit{Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology}, 304.
motive energy in evolution; and third, as the liberator and renewer of the cosmos.¹²⁵
Such a differentiated cosmic Christology means that there is a threefold Christological
progression: “Christ rules in the kingdom of nature (regnum naturae), in the kingdom of
grace (regnum gratiae) and in the kingdom of glory (regnum gloriae)”¹²⁶ Expressing it
another way, we could say that Christ is the source, the present, and the future of all
creation. In his History and the Triune God Moltmann develops his ideas further and
argues that the older binary theological divisions of nature and grace or creation and
covenant that satisfied a previous generation of theologians are inadequate. The
eschatological dimension needs to be included too, “a further movement to the new
creation of all things in glory”.¹²⁷ Therefore, he writes:

…it makes sense to assume a movement from the initial creation through historical
reconciliation to eschatological consummation. Past—present—future are then not
three ongoing unfoldings of an eternity beyond time, but are directed toward a future
in which this time is consummated and ended. The kingdom of nature, the kingdom
of grace and the kingdom of glory are not three aspects of the one kingdom of God,
but three stages on the way to its consummation.¹²⁸

These three stages of nature, grace and glory are not static attributes but movements that
leads us forward to future embodied fulfilment of human life and therefore of Christian
life.¹²⁹ As Moltmann makes clear there is a progression and movement from nature
through grace to glory.

In his 1971 work, Moltmann asked how to interpret the meaning of Genesis
1:27; that humankind is created in the image of God. Linking together humanity and all
creatures in fellowship, he explains that we inhabit the world in common solidarity. “In
between God and nothing man exists together with all other beings, as the creation of

¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁷ Moltmann, History and the Triune God, xviii.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁹ Moltmann’s source is the twelfth century Cistercian abbot Joachim de Fiore who himself was
dependent upon the fourth century CE Cappadocian theologians. See his full explanation in Moltmann,
The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, 203-209.
the divine good pleasure.” Together human beings and other animate creatures share a common origin and destiny that Moltmann describes as: “out of nothingness into endless existence.” Human nature and animal nature share similarities. They live in a mutual relationship in the cosmos, beautifully expressed in Saint Francis of Assisi’s “The Canticle of the Creatures”—a hymn of praise celebrating the relationship of all living things: brother sun, sister moon, mother earth and even sister death. But it is humankind alone who bears the “image and likeness” and whom God determines should correspond to Godself in partnership; not just a particular human person but all humanity is created to be and become the image of God and share in mutual responsibility for the whole earth.

In his understanding, human freedom and human responsibility belong together for the prospective task of embodying the image of God into the future. We have already noted that his imago Dei anthropology expands to that of imago Christi and thence to imago Trinitatis. Moltmann focuses on whom human beings are to become, not on a return to some “pure state” that existed once at the origin of creation. This becoming begins now. “True life means here love and there glory. The resurrection hope is not a speculation about some far off, posthumous condition.” Moltmann argues that unless nature is brought under the healing and saving power of Christ then humanity cannot be healed and saved because every human being is a created being and therefore is part of nature.

131 Ibid., 108.
134 Moltmann, The Coming of God, 66.
Under the theme of “The Cosmic Christ” he moves his Christological discussion beyond the confining limits of “modern Western European theology” that uncritically accepted “the modern paradigm ‘history’” and reduced salvation to the two areas of “the soul” and “authentic human existence”. The omission of nature from modern theological debate, according to Moltmann, has assisted the exploitation and destruction of world ecology. Although history has been of great significance in his theology, he recognises the need for contemporary theology to move beyond its limits, taking what is valuable and authentic in this modern view of history into a fresh development of a Christology of nature. One source for this will be “the wisdom of ancient cosmic Christology and its physical doctrine of redemption”. Here again we find him emphasising the significance of the embodied, physical character of salvation. The human body and the earth body are joint recipients of redemption; neither need be marginalised in favour of the other. Moltmann clarifies that Christianity is neither anthropocentric (“man” centred) nor ecclesiocentric (“church centred”), rather it is Christ and God centred: Christocentric and theocentric. He is critical of the continuing existence of various forms of exclusive understandings of Christ that manifest themselves in “personally-centred and church-centred Christianity”, out of touch with the presence of Christ in the cosmos and the whole of nature. Instead, he proposes that the Christian doctrine of redemption requires “the wider sphere of a doctrine of creation”.

Moltmann draws much of his thinking about cosmic Christology from Joseph Sittler’s contribution (1961) to the World Council of Churches General Assembly in

---

136 See Moltmann’s early reflections on time in the history of God with the world, Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 118-139. He notes the division of both nature and history from each other during the Modern period, noting especially that “In the great modern conceptions of world history, nature plays at most a marginal role”. (137). See also his section on “Theology of History” in Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, 28-42.
138 Ibid., 275-276.
139 Ibid., 276-277.
New Delhi, who had argued that “Nature is ‘the scene of grace and the sphere of redemption’ just as much as history.” Like Sittler then, Moltmann locates the long-time contempt for nature in Western churches in the pervasive division between nature and grace and its source in the divisive dualism of Augustine of Hippo. Sittler hoped for the uniting of nature and grace as in Orthodox theology, being influenced by Irenaeus of Lyons and his theology of the recapitulation of all things in Christ. He drew also on the cosmic Christology of the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. This nature-grace dualism has strongly influenced the Western church in its Roman Catholic and Protestant manifestations and the cultures derived from it.

Adamant that a proper understanding of the theology of grace depends upon theologians and the Church agreeing on the parallel relationship of pneumatology and Christology, Moltmann argues that “The Spirit is inconceivable without the Son, and the Son is inconceivable without the Spirit.” In the Christian tradition the Holy Spirit is termed the “life-giver”. Giver and gift are intimately related. The Greek χάρις, from which we derive the English word “grace”, can refer to an attractive quality inviting a favourable response; a favourable disposition toward another; a practical sign of goodwill; special attributes produced by generosity; and responsive gratitude. In the New Testament, God the Father is the source of grace. The good news of salvation is the message of Christ’s gracious action and love directed toward humankind. This grace is life-saving for humanity.

Grace involves the Spirit of the Risen Christ. Hence, Moltmann’s description of grace is in terms of the Holy Spirit and pneumatology not just a narrow Christology that...

---

140 Ibid., 276-278; here 276.
141 Ibid., 277.
142 Ibid., 276.
143 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 72, 81-82.
144 Ibid., 72.
deals with reconciliation and redemption as achieved by Christ on the cross without reference to the resurrection. The grace of Jesus Christ is the gift of the Holy Spirit working itself out in reconciliation, redemption and transformation in embodied human lives. The threefold Pauline blessing in Second Corinthians 13:13 concludes with the phrase “the communion of the Holy Spirit”. This communion, κοινωνία koinonia (meaning also “partnership” or “fellowship”) is a gift of the Spirit, a grace of Christ to be received from the love of God the Father. This grace is the gift of life that leads us to fellowship and friendship with God and with each other.

As Joy Ann McDougall argues, Moltmann constantly maintains that human correspondence to the intra-Trinitarian life is never our “innate capacity” or possession. Our human actions of grace are always in response to God’s first initiative in self-giving, of gracious reaching out to us in love and compassion. God “initiates” and “preserves” relationship with humanity and with individual human beings through the “indwelling fellowship of the Spirit”. Human life and human community are always a gift of the grace-giving Trinity that draws forth Eucharistic responses from Christians.

The divine-human analogy of relations that is the foundation of Moltmann’s imago Dei anthropology is always an act of God’s gracious initiative, a gift of grace. It has a twofold aspect: “the individual person’s correspondence to God’s loving relationship to creation, and a corporate correspondence to God’s inner Trinitarian relations”. But as Moltmann argues, within the intra-Trinitarian relationship the Spirit has “relational independence”—“the eternal Spirit is the divine wellspring of life”. It is not just an attribute of the Father or the Son but a Person in its own right.

---

146 McDougall, Pilgrimage of Love, 160-161.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 115.
149 Ibid., 160.
150 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 82.
So there is “one single gift of the Holy Spirit” directed to the salvation of all humanity and the whole cosmos.\textsuperscript{151}

Through Moltmann’s eyes the \textit{imago Dei}, \textit{imago Christi} and \textit{imago Trinitatis} are always gifts of the Trinity, to be received and enjoyed gracefully. The imparters of this gift are the Holy Spirit and Christ the Word.\textsuperscript{152} According to McDougall, Moltmann believes that men and women will only fulfil the messianic goal of their being formed into the \textit{imago Trinitatis} through the parallel action of the Word and the Spirit. Our conformation as \textit{imago Christi} is the necessary precondition for the achievement of human friendship and fellowship in God’s world. As she puts it, “it is only through the Holy Spirit’s gift of fellowship that human beings are adopted into the Son’s exclusive fellowship with the Father and, in turn, are graced with the possibility of becoming visible images of fellowship with one another”.\textsuperscript{153}

McDougall observes that Moltmann shows the Christian’s experience of grace (our “rebirth in the Spirit”) to be “full of messianic tension”.\textsuperscript{154} On the one hand, there are the human experiences of life-affirming joy and happiness. On the other hand, countering this positive experience and its integrating wholeness and shalom, there are the many negative experiences in daily life that assail human beings.\textsuperscript{155} Christians undergo these life destroying experiences too. Christian faith does not exempt us from them; rather in the midst of overwhelming suffering all cry out into the unknown. Later, they may recognise that the Spirit was journeying with them, alongside them, through the agony of despair and grief, loss and pain.\textsuperscript{156} Moltmann, according to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{152} McDougall, \textit{Pilgrimage of Love}, 161.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 135.
\item \textsuperscript{155} See Moltmann, \textit{Spirit of Life}, 154.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s memorable poem “Christians and Pagans” captures the essence of my thought here: “Men go to God when they are sore bestead,/ Pray to him for succour, for his peace, for bread,/ For mercy for them sick, sinning, or dead;/ All men do so, Christian and unbelieving. …God goes to every man when sore bestead,/ Feeds body and spirit with his bread;/ For Christians, pagans alike he hangs dead,/ And both alike forgiving.” See Eberhard Bethge, ed., \textit{Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Letters and
McDougall, understands that “the Spirit of life empowers active resistance against all life-denying forces”. 157

The coming glory of God, or the kingdom of God, refers to the eschatological fulfilment of all things, both human and cosmic. By eschatological we mean the bringing to completion of God’s total beneficent purpose in calling creation out of nothing and working toward the new creation in glory as a free expression of divine love. Thus for Moltmann: “Creation is the material promise of glory, being full of the ciphers and signs of the beauty to come”. 158 “Glory” and “glorification” are consistently used by him to express the divine goal for human life. “Just as creation is creation for the sabbath, so human beings are created as the image of God for the divine glory,” likewise, “the coming glory of God lights up the face of the raised Messiah, so believers, filled with the Spirit, even here, and even now, also reflect the glory of God ‘with unveiled face’”. 159

The God revealed in the Bible ever seeks to create afresh and to lead humanity to the future glory of life in the Kingdom. Moltmann describes the goal of the human being as imago Dei, imago Christi and the imago Trinitatis in embodied language:

The human being in his embodiment is not created to end in death; he is made for transformation through and beyond death. Hope for the resurrection of the body and a life everlasting in redemption corresponds to the bodily creation of the human being by God, and perfects that. The hope of resurrection is belief in creation that gazes forward to what is ahead. 160

---

157 McDougall, *Pilgrimage of Love*, 135. cf. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 76. Drawing on Paul to the Romans, 8:26, he writes: “When in our torment we ourselves fall dumb, the Spirit is there too, interceding for us ‘with sighs too deep for words’. …We can even say that the cry for the advocacy of the Spirit is itself the Spirit’s own cry.”

158 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 212.

159 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 228-229.

160 Ibid., 275.
4.6 The Eschatological Body—raised and transfigured

Moltmann’s later work, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* develops the same themes of embodiment in relation to the eschatological working out of human history and the coming Kingdom of glory. There is no necessity for the soul to remove itself from the body.

On the contrary, it will be embodied and become flesh. It doesn’t have to deny the emotions. It will make them living in love. Hope for “the resurrection of the body” permits no disdain and debasement of bodily life and sensory experiences; it affirms them profoundly, and gives greatest honour to “the flesh”, which people have made something to be despised.\(^{161}\)

Disembodiment is not demanded. The resurrection hope encourages the human person to engage in life here and now completely; nothing is to be avoided, nothing is to be gained by putting life off for some future, better time. Rather, according to Moltmann, human beings are to give themselves in “self-emptying into what is other and alien”, into the opportunities and risks of “non-identity” that face them in the present.\(^{162}\)

Resurrection hope enables a “love of life” that is a unique and particular embodiment of love. We can identify this in the pattern of the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There his total commitment and God’s total commitment to such a way of embodied loving for the people and in the world of his time is revealed. Moltmann concludes: “I shall live wholly here, and die wholly, and rise wholly there”.\(^{163}\)

Discussion the link between this understanding of resurrection hope and the belief in the coming judgment of God in which the departed will accept responsibility for their good and bad past actions, Moltmann acknowledges that these ideas parallel each other in Israelite scriptural tradition, especially Ezekiel 37:12, 14, and Isaiah 24–26, and apocalyptic sources such as Daniel 12:2. But he also asks whether, in the face of the theme of universal divine judgment and being held to account for one’s actions,\(^{164}\)


\(^{162}\) Ibid.

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 67.
resurrection is desirable. Whichever view of resurrection is held, the physical
disintegration of the human soul and body in death is implied.\textsuperscript{164}

The determining factors shaping Christian resurrection faith are “the dying and
the death of Christ” and the appearances of the risen Christ still identifiable as the
Crucified One.\textsuperscript{165} The resurrection of Christ is “an eschatological happening” rather
than an historical event according to Moltmann.\textsuperscript{166} However, he does not clarify what
he means by this statement about resurrection not being an historical event except to
state that resurrection is not resuscitation. It is not a return to the human life that Jesus
of Nazareth lived prior to his crucifixion and death; neither will our resurrection be
resuscitation to the mortal life that we once lived.

So what will resurrection be? In some yet to be known way, the resurrection of
the dead for human beings will be “expected as a physical happening touching the
whole person, namely as ‘giving life to mortal bodies’ (Rom. 8.11)”.\textsuperscript{167} In this sense we
can say that it is described in an embodied manner.

Moltmann distinguishes two aspects to resurrection achieved by the power of
God’s “life-giving” Holy Spirit. The first is the personal event and the second is the
cosmic event. Personal bodies will inhabit the new heavens and the new earth in which
all flesh—not just human bodies—but all creatures that have ever been vibrant with life
will “obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”.\textsuperscript{168} This inclusive vision
of the eschatological and messianic reign of God is one of Moltmann’s significant
contributions to contemporary theology because, in contradiction to earlier theologies,
whether they are Patristic, post-Reformation Protestant, or post-Tridentine Catholic, the

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 68. Karl Barth has a similar understanding: the death of the body implies the death of the soul.
For him it is the Spirit who creates men and women embodied souls and besouled bodies, and whose
departure in human death makes them bodiless souls and soulless bodies. Barth, Church Dogmatics,
III/2, 354-355.
\textsuperscript{165} Moltmann, The Coming of God, 69.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Romans 8:21.
human body does not lose its contextual “belonging” in some sort of spiritualised—
imortalised—personal heaven. He reacts quite strongly against notions of the
immortalising of our already-lived human lives, especially to the possibility that life’s
negative, traumatic experiences and genetic or accidental impairments would be
continued into the future reign of God. Rather, “immortality” must mean something
more than this. For Moltmann, the raising of the human being to new life implies the
possibilities—the hope—of “healing, reconciliation and completion” within the context
of a new earth and a new heaven, of a cosmos coming to fulfilment, not restoration to
some past perfection at the beginning of creation. 169

This looking to the future of what we shall become gives hope to all humankind
given our “caughtness” in the fears, frailties, and failures of personal, social and
international life. 170 Thus, for Moltmann, forgiveness, reconciliation and new life are
possible.

Men and women will find again with God not only the final moment, but their whole
history – but as reconciled, the rectified and healed and completed history of their
whole lives. What is experienced in this life as grace will be consummated in
glory. 171

However, Moltmann emphasises the social and loving dimension of the resurrection
from the dead and eternal life and makes the link between our experiences of grace in
this life and the glory to come; grace is the foretaste of glory.

Because here we lead social lives, there is no “individual” resurrection, but always
only a social resurrection into a new community. Otherwise “eternal life” could not
be love. Eternal life is the final healing of this life into the completed wholeness for
which it is destined. 172

What is revealed and argued by Moltmann in *The Coming of God* is the contrast
between the Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead and ideas of the immortality

169 Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 70. Here, Rom. 8 and 1 Cor. 15 provide the New Testament
foundation for Moltmann’s strong prospective focus for resurrection to eternal life.

170 This is my term, not Moltmann’s.

171 Ibid., 71.

172 Ibid.
of the soul derived from Plato and his dualistic understanding of life (meaning that the body has been separated from the soul in physical death and decay). From the Christian viewpoint, it is the activity of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, to give new life in baptism, to transform our daily lives here and now and to raise the dead to life, life in all its fullness. As Moltmann argues it is the Spirit of God who brings God close to our embodied lives:

The Spirit brings God into relationship to the whole person, body and soul, past and future, and at the meeting point of that person’s social and natural relationships. The Spirit brings the whole person into relationship with God, in the entire fabric of that person’s life. In the Spirit we live “before God”, just as “the light of God’s countenance” is turned toward us in the presence of his Spirit. In us, the Spirit of life shapes the mutual interdependence of body and soul, past and future, and the social relationships in the history of our lives. If “our Spirit” means the total configuration of our lives and our biographies, it also means our lives as a whole, which are qualitatively more than the sum of our members.

Moltmann’s emphasis on “the entire fabric of that person’s life” as the venue for the Spirit’s relational activity implies that our sexuality also is drawn into a positive relationship with God. My interpretation of Moltmann here is that not just our sexuality in theory but our actual sexual histories in all their particular instances of beauty and wonder, brokenness, loss and despair are included. His setting of the totality of our “lived” lives within the context of “embodied existence” in an embodied resurrection community gives substance to the Christian hope for the present and the future. This is the bringing in of God’s reign of justice and love that he speaks of as “glorification”: the eschatological glorification of human beings to the glory of God. This is an inclusive vision that Moltmann’s doctrines of humanity, redemption and pneumatology offer to all human beings regardless of their sexuality.

The resurrection hope makes people ready to live their lives in love wholly, and to say a full and entire Yes to a life that leads to death. It does not withdraw the human soul from bodily, sensory life; it ensouls this life with unending joy.

173 Many Christians in the past have believed in the immortality of the soul as an expression of the creedal belief in the “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting”.
174 Ibid., 75. My emphasis.
175 Ibid., 66.
Chapter 5 draws on Moltmann’s conclusions to frame an inclusive theology of sexuality— one that positively and deliberately includes same-sex Christians.
Chapter 5: Critical Retrieval and Appreciation of Moltmann’s Theology

To find experiences of God in the experiences of love does not mean divinizing the experience of love, and elevating love into a cult. …To perceive the one in the other means being able to connect and to distinguish. Two spheres intersect, and two experiences deepen and shelter one another mutually. …Like the Greek Fathers, we are using a single expression for the one, single love: the word *eros*, and we shall avoid designations for a higher love, separate from this, such as *agape* and *caritas*.

—Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*.

Both Judaism and Christianity have placed the twin commandment of love at the centre of their lives.¹ Moltmann strongly criticises the various historic traditions that have separated and continue to separate divine love from human love. He takes issue with the medieval distinction of *amor* and *caritas* as well as the more recent twentieth century endeavour by Anders Nygren to distinguish the New Testament use of *agape* as Christian love from the wider Greek use of *eros* as desiring or sexual love.² Stating that these two commandments are one love whether of God or of humanity, Moltmann argues that the experiences they describe do not require different words because “it is a single love which embraces God and our neighbour, just as according to the First Epistle of John it is a single love which is experienced by God and our neighbour”.³ All that is needed “to perceive the one in the other” is the ability to make connections and

---

differentiate. This is a helpful observation because it encourages us to make a positive integration of all human forms of love. Importantly, this means making connections between our internalised (spiritual) experiences of love and our physical (bodily) experiences.

In this chapter I bring together Moltmann’s insights on pneumatology and eschatology for a theological anthropology of sexuality. One of his gifts is the theological focus he has consistently given over the years to the connection between embodiment and divinity. The embodiment of grace and love in the life of Christians and the church is the work of the Holy Spirit and Moltmann understands this in terms of mutuality and inclusiveness—the open welcome of Christ and the Spirit—in fact the whole Trinity to all humanity.

In Moltmann’s writings, there are a few places where he specifically mentions physical sensory experience and experiences of human love; for example, in his discussion of “the Body Language of Social experience of God”.5 The physical expressions of love take in all the senses: sight and hearing, smell and taste, and especially the sense of touch, which according to the medieval view is the fundamental human sense.6

If God, the quickening Spirit, is love, then human experiences of love belong within the open space of this experience of God; and the experiences of God will intensify the experience of human love.7 He also notes the role of the Holy Spirit in the physical expression of mutual love in the liturgy:

…the most intimate sign of the bond of mutual love was “the holy kiss”. …What is meant is the warm kiss exchanged during the embrace. …the “holy kiss of the communion of saints has its origin in the Holy Spirit” as the real communication and

---

4 Ibid., 260-261.
5 Ibid., 263.
6 Ibid., 264.
7 Ibid., 267.
practical exchange of the love which, as the operation of the Spirit, is alive in believers.  

In contrast to Karl Barth, Moltmann does not often use the word “sexuality” in his discussion of gender distinctions or gender relationships. In his contributions to systematic theology, there are very few places where he directly addresses the biblical or theological issues of same-sex relationships, or mentions, other than briefly, the ecclesial situation of Christians of same-sex orientation. However, his theological writings incorporate understandings of human relationship that could support an embodied theology that addresses these issues for the churches today.

One of these relationships to which Moltmann gives significant attention is the human relationship that he calls “open friendship”. “Open friendship turns the world into a home. That is why we are on the search for the traces of a friendlier world wherever we feel exiled and estranged.” Friendship with others is marked by respect and affection, by stability and faithfulness over time; by its origin through freedom it endures by the practice of mutual freedom. He directs our attention to God’s friendship for humanity. In Holy Scripture, both Abraham and Moses are referred to as “the friend of God”. “The triune God reveals himself as love in fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. His freedom therefore lies in the friendship which he offers men and women, and through which he makes them his friends.” At an ecclesial and communal level, Moltmann suggests that Christians can act as a “society of friends” whose ultimate purpose is not the moral improvement of the world but rather:

…the festal joy over the kingdom of God which, with the name of Jesus and in his Spirit, has thrown itself wide open for “the others”. In every true friendship we can

---

8 Ibid., 265.
9 Ibid., 243-245.
10 Ibid., 255-259.
11 Ibid., 255.
12 Ibid., 255-256.
13 Of Abraham, 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23; of Moses, Exodus 33:11.
experience God. It is the presence of his friendly Spirit which makes those who are friends so alive and their friendship so inexhaustible. …There is a divine and a cosmic friendship which precedes personal friendship and invites us to personal friendship. …In a community of creation experienced as friendly, we form open friendships. In open friendships we do not surrender our identity. We expand the relationships in which this identity can be experienced.  

In the New Testament, Jesus calls his disciples friends not servants. Gregory Nazianzus once wrote that the goal of the Christian was “To be, rather than seem to be, a friend of God.” Moltmann sees great significance in the experience of both divine and human friendship. “It is the experience of God’s affection and respect in the friendship of Jesus which shapes the Christian concept of open friendship.” Friendship is a grace of the Spirit, a form of embodied love. In thus connecting open friendship as a grace from the Holy Spirit, he leads us beyond Barth’s dealing with the interrelationship of men and women as freedom in fellowship. Friendship seems to imply so much more than fellowship. For Moltmann the Holy Spirit of God is responsible for the working out of this open, expansive relation of friendship towards “others” that enables the unlike to welcome each other after the pattern of Jesus’ friendship. We shall return to friendship later as it provides an inclusive pattern for the graced body.

5.1 Humanity, sexuality and eschatology

The open question that one struggles with at this point is how Moltmann incorporates (“embodies”) human sexual identity into his theology, including the three stages of nature, grace and glory. This is the case because he writes so very little on

---

15 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 259.
17 Aelred Squire, Asking the Fathers (London: SPCK, 1973). In his epigraph to Asking the Fathers he sources this quotation to the Carmen de Vita Sua of Gregory Nazianzus, 324, sqq., MPG Vol 37, column 1148ff.
18 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 258.
19 Barth, Church Dogmatics, 40 and 576. As I commented earlier, Barth scarcely mentions friendship between human beings in CD III/4, but he does mention the Christian vocation “to be the friend of God” and of God being a friend to humanity. See my discussion of this in Chapter 2 Embodying Humanity.
20 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 259. My emphasis.
sexuality. He refers to gender relations and very positively affirms the mutual and equal relationship and roles of women and men. However, he does not mention the issue of sexual identity, especially in terms of our contemporary discussions about other-sex or same-sex orientation. He does not seem to address such issues directly in his contributions to systematic theology.

Importantly, however, he does seek to include the whole of embodied, physical human experience in his theological anthropology. He sets this in the context of his eschatological vision of God’s good purpose for humanity and the cosmos. This eschatological vision includes all that is human and good, including sexuality and gender. Nature, grace and glory belong together in the coming reign of God and somehow our sexuality and gender identity shall be incorporated in this future, even if, at present, how God shall accomplish this is hidden from us. Moltmann’s powerful focus on human loving relationship has eschatological consequences that imply that our identity, our unity, our relationships will not be lost or destroyed when we die but will be transformed in resurrection life. He makes an important claim for life in the coming reign of God as “embodied” but transfigured, in *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. Both humanity and the cosmos will be redeemed in the eternity of God.

If it is not just the soul that is created in the image of God but the body too, then salvation lies in the “transfiguration” of the body, as Orthodox theology finds if disclosed in the light that shone on Tabor—the light that flooded Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration…(Matt. 17:2).

Elizabeth Stuart offers a somewhat different view to Moltmann; a view from the standpoint of queer theology. As noted earlier in Chapter 1, she takes a constructionist rather than essentialist position on gender and sexual identity. Her argument is that at death our hope lies in our baptism not in our sexual identity or gender, or any identity as

---

21 Moltmann, *The Coming of God*.
22 Ibid., 272-275, here 273.
such. Our faith must be in God not sexuality.\textsuperscript{23} What comes through strongly in Stuart’s writing is the enduring value of relationship, friendship and community, as well as embodiment. These are values that Moltmann embraces.

So we might ask: is it possible for us to determine if sexuality and gender have eschatological significance? And will it matter if we have bodies or not in the coming kingdom of glory? Although we cannot know what awaits us, there are significant theological and pastoral realities that encourage us to answer yes to these questions. On the one hand, both sexuality and gender are foundational elements of our lived human experience and without them we cannot conceive of ourselves as being who we are.\textsuperscript{24} There needs to be an abiding sense of our continuing to be a self who is “other” to others if we are truly to engage in communion with God or our friends and neighbours. This remains true for any conception of our being part of “the communion of saints” now and in the coming reign of God. John Zizioulas argues very powerfully for the essential relationship between “otherness” and “communion”.\textsuperscript{25}

It is because the body is ontologically constitutive for the human being and so essential for its identity and particularity that the conflict between hypostasis and nature is observable above all in the body. For the human being, the key to the resolution of the conflict cannot be found outside the body itself: there is no escape from the body, for example by recourse to the immortality of the soul, for such an escape would amount to the loss of the human being itself. The body is constituted by the Creator in such a way as to be the locus both of the conflict and its resolution. For the body is paradoxically the vehicle of otherness and communion at the same time. With the body we affirm and realise our particularity, and with the body we establish communion with other particular beings.\textsuperscript{26}

This may be where Moltmann stands too, as he has made clear in his argument for embodiment.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Paul’s excursus here, 1 Cor 15:35–49.
\textsuperscript{25} Zizioulas, \textit{Communion and Otherness}, See Chapter 1 “On Being Other”, 13-98.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{27} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, cf. Chapter 10, 244-275.
On the other hand, Stuart’s position is equally important because it emphasises that what awaits us in the eschatological realm is total gift, totally grace, and is not dependent on how we have been embodied in this created world or on our present intra-human relationships. This may be how she understands Jesus’ saying that there will be no marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:30). But Stuart does not appear to imply that we shall be unidentifiable when transformed and transfigured. Relationship is clearly important to her, especially the notion of relating to other persons.

A better theology will seek to emphasise that transfiguration and transformation will leave us in some way as identifiable as baptised persons. In this sense Moltmann’s use of “embodied” may be appropriate in this context. The danger lies in a conceiving of our “coming existence”—our life in the eternity of God as transformed and newly created images of God—as absorption into a “oneness” in which we have lost all sense of our being an “other” able to be in communion with other “others”. This view of identification values the utter diversity and inclusiveness of God’s creation, reconciliation and redemption. In some way our graced bodies will always be part of this hopeful vision and this implies a bodily correspondence between now and then.28

5.2 Moltmann on sexuality

The area of sexuality that Moltmann does address is that of those persons who experience exclusion from their churches for being homosexual or because of suffering from HIV/AIDS. He includes them amongst other marginalised social groups like the bereaved, the terminally ill and the single, as groups who are excluded by society and church and often form “Self-Help groups”.29 He notes the proximity and remoteness of such groups from the local Christian community partly due to the development of a

28 Ibid., 275.
29 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 243-244.
“leper syndrome”.\textsuperscript{30} He states that self-help groups are not just for the HIV-afflicted but also for friends and relatives who are in need of support and assistance to move out from being caught in “prejudice syndromes, fear, disgust and the urge to escape” that he describes as destructive “pathogenic psychological symptoms which in their effects are no less destructive of life than HIV infection itself”.\textsuperscript{31} Moltmann argues that the character of the church as Christian is made visible and is experienced in two particular actions toward self-help groups. First, the provision of “free spaces for the self-help groups on both sides”, for those living with HIV and those who are very near to them, their family members and friends, and second, the bringing together of church groups and self-help groups for mutual discussion “so that people learn to live together with ‘the others’”.\textsuperscript{32} These are noted as ways of embodying love and promoting life in practical relationships.

Moltmann locates the inspiration for self-help groups to be near to the church in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ meetings and eating with, healing of, and inclusion of the socially and ritually marginalised in the society of his day.\textsuperscript{33} Likewise, Francis of Assisi embodied and continued this gospel practice—as Mother Theresa of Calcutta has also in our own time along with countless other unnamed Christian and non-Christian persons and groups.\textsuperscript{34} But he also points out the inherent difficulty that the Church and particular localised Christian communities always encounter in coming near to self-help groups. “The remoteness of self-help groups from the Christian congregations is caused

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 241-245, here 243. In a way similar to “action groups” concerned with Kingdom of God issues and who also experience proximity and remoteness from the life of the local church, often at the same time.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 244-245.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 245.


\textsuperscript{34} William J. Short OFM, \textit{Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition}, ed. Philip Sheldrake, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1999), 72-80; here 75. Bill Short argues that Francis of Assisi did more than do good to the lepers; rather he and his friars went and lived amongst them in the early years of the Order’s existence and allowed the lepers to come close to them in mutual relationship and care.
by the moral notions of the church tradition, with which society’s religion has always operated.”\(^{35}\) This is particularly the case with self-help groups whose membership consists of those who need some form of healing because of acute or chronic illness or because of victim status or of close relationship to those persons in such situations.\(^{36}\)

While Moltmann refers to both “moral prejudices” and “moral notions”\(^{37}\) he does not clarify the content of “moral” in either case. However, he does refer earlier to the exclusion of homosexuals;\(^{38}\) so one must ask whether he understands “moral” to include a pejorative sexual connotation in the sense that any sexual expression outside the accepted norms of heterosexual practice is to be feared and excluded? Although he does not mention it in this particular discussion, sexual purity has a long history as a goal of personal and communal holiness in Christian traditions of the Eastern and Western Churches. There is also the continuation into our own times from biblical times of the connection between sickness and sinfulness. An example of this was the responses of many conservative Christian groups and churches in the early 1980s to the deaths of homosexual men from what came to be known as AIDS.\(^{39}\) To be infected with HIV and then to die of AIDS was seen by some as a direct punishment from God and thus a link between immoral sexual behaviour and illness leading to death.\(^{40}\)

What of those same-sex oriented or practicing persons who do not gather into self-help groups but seek to exist within the mainstream of ecclesial life in parishes, congregations and dioceses? The point being emphasised here is that exclusion from “overarching” communities, such as the church or society as a whole, is a significant issue for same-sex oriented or practicing persons, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals

\(^{35}\) Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 243-245; here 245.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 244. Note particularly Moltmann’s comments about “victim mentality” as distinct from my term “victim status”.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 244 and 245.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 244. “the homosexuals and the people who want to ostracize them,”

\(^{39}\) Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome.

and transgendered persons and their unique communities of sexual identity. Not all such people see themselves as sick, in need or as victims.

By implication Moltmann holds that “moral notions” work to create and maintain distance between same-sex oriented or practicing persons and their local Christian community. Pejorative moral notions can function to increase the exclusion of those persons and groups perceived as ‘other’ to the dominant group.41 He believes that where a particular Christian community is attentive to and embodies “the Spirit of Jesus” then the negative power of “the moral notions dominating the religion of the society in which it lives” will be lessened; empathetic welcome and hospitality will be practiced rather than moral exclusion.42

Based on the totality of Moltmann’s theology, the direction for the Christian community is the movement from exclusion through engagement to embrace. Moltmann understands Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25: 31-46 as the biblical narrative authenticating this movement as the nature and fellowship of the Church. He makes the theological point that the presence of Christ means also the presence of the Holy Spirit as life-giver; Word and Spirit function together.43 The consequent experience will be tangible fellowship, and not merely a good idea which is not realized in practice. His critique of “moral exclusion” and his advocating of inclusive fellowship and embrace can be seen to support my argument that same-sex oriented or practicing persons belong within the fold of the church—that their bodies are graced. Furthermore, Moltmann’s integration of embodiment and pneumatology

41 Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996). This is a significant contextual discussion of the practice of exclusion during the Balkans conflict in the 1990s. With care, Volf’s arguments advocating the move from exclusion to embrace could be applied to situations where same-sex oriented and practicing persons experience exclusion rather than embrace. Miroslav Volf was one of Jürgen Moltmann’s students both for his Doctorate and his Habilitation Doctorate.

42 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 245.

43 Ibid.
assists us now in looking more closely at the situation of persons and Christians of same-sex orientation and practice.

5.3 Implications for persons of same-sex orientation

Moltmann’s central theological purpose is to set forth God’s liberation of all humanity, so his theological anthropology, his Christology and his pneumatology, are deeply committed to this ongoing process of human liberation. As a theologian of hope in the twentieth and early twenty-first Century Moltmann offers a theology that is capable of breaking down the inherited dualisms forming a basic foundation of the theologies that are being used to exclude Christians of same-sex orientation and practice from ecclesial communion and the ministry of liturgical and pastoral leadership in the churches. By implication at least, his theological corpus supports the proposition that same-sex practicing Christians are sanctified by the Spirit of God even though this proposition is one that divides the churches at this moment in history.

This is the case in his writings on Christology and pneumatology i.e., between 1990 and 2000. There is a recognition and deliberate choice on his part that a more developed pneumatology is required to express embodiment. In deciding to add a further volume, The Spirit of Life to his series of contributions to systematic theology he has responded to his own experience and to the experience of the churches with the growth of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements during the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, in The Spirit of Life, Moltmann proposes a “Trinitarian pneumatology” that is derived from “the experience and theology of the Holy Spirit”.44 This proposal arises from his criticism of the perceived weaknesses in twentieth century work on theologies of the Holy Spirit, particularly those of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Hendrik Berkhof and Heribert Mühlen and others.45 For Moltmann these theologies all fail because they are

44 Ibid., 14.
determined by the Western Church’s doctrine of the Trinity, which does less than justice to both the Person of the Spirit and the human experience of the Spirit.  

Moltmann remarks:

> The theology of revelation is church theology, a theology for pastors and priests. The theology of experience is pre-eminently lay theology. …By experience of the Spirit I mean awareness of God in, with and beneath the experience of life, which gives us assurance of God’s fellowship, friendship and love.  

His remedy for this ecclesial division is to bring Christian’s reflection on their human experience of the Spirit into a more positive relationship with the theology of the Spirit. He attempts this through two strategies. First, he critiques the influence of the filioque clause (“who proceeds from the Father and the Son”) in the Nicene Creed that is used in the Western church because he believes this clause leads to the subordination of the Spirit to the Son. In other words, the Holy Spirit is treated as the forgotten third person at a party; mutuality and reciprocity are absent. It is forgotten that “the Spirit accompanies the begetting of the Son, and the Son accompanies the procession of the Spirit”. Moltmann believes that the use of this clause in the Creed has caused the loss of attention by the church and Christians to the Spirit as active in the cosmos and the natural world, everything has been focused on the Spirit of redemption, the Spirit of the Father as the Spirit of creation has also been forgotten He argues that the Holy Spirit of Christian faith is also one and the same with the creating Spirit of God sustaining and ever-creating the world and bringing into being the new creation. The discovery—or rediscovery—of this fuller comprehension of the “cosmic breadth of God’s Spirit” will

---

46 Ibid., 7-8, 12-14. Moltmann argues that Western theology/pneumatology has a tendency to subordinate the Person of the Holy Spirit because of the influence of the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed. He believes that the filioque clause forestalls any reciprocity of relationship of the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation. See The Spirit of Life, 8-14, and Chapter XII, “The Personhood of the Spirit”, 268-309, especially 307.
47 Ibid., 17.
48 Ibid., 307.
49 Ibid., 8.
lead to new “respect for the dignity of all created things, in which God is present through his Spirit”.  

Second, he critiques the dominant influence of human reason and consciousness as determinative of human experience of life and of the human experience of God. For a start, these are about control and the exercise of power, mostly male power. Rather all experience is arrived at from our five senses and we receive these at both conscious and unconscious levels in our bodies physically and emotionally. Nor do we merely use our minds to give expression to our received experiences but our whole embodied being is involved either spontaneously or intentionally. Sensory perceptions lead to experience but the transition between perception and experience is not hard and fast. Moltmann notes this especially in the experience of what he terms “limit situations” such as death and love in which the totality of our human being is involved and outside our control. Here, it may be “truer to speak of empowerment and disempowerment in these central human experiences” rather than the absence of will or an incapacity to act. He does not specifically mention sexual experiences as an example of this but in his references to experiences of love, including his affirmation of both passion and the sensual in human experience, it is certainly implied. For him, experiences of love “penetrate the depths of soul and body, so that the awareness and the activities of the reason discover this overflowing happiness when they open themselves to it, and relate themselves to it”. Such experiences happen within the context of whole human lives lived within the loving relationships of specific human communities graced by the presence of the Spirit of God. One implication of his argument is that embodiment, experience and the Holy Spirit need to be linked in a more positive

50 Ibid., 10.
52 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 19-20.
53 I am grateful to Dr Barry Rogers for this observation.
54 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 21.
balance in the lives of Christians and the church. This means bringing reflection about human and divine experience and pneumatology into a more positive balance and relationship. The effect of the above theological insights has practical implications: Christians are set free—liberated—to be more inclusive of those who are different to themselves or their group. They are liberated to care for all “graced bodies”—to act responsibly for the ecological well-being of the “graced body” of all creation. More particularly, Moltmann’s Christology and pneumatology and anthropology provide lesbian and gay Christians with a theological basis for recognising that they are not excluded from God’s love by their state of being or their choice of identity or lifestyle. He also contributes to an understanding that their bodies are also graced bodies. However, it is another matter entirely to allow that those who publicly identify as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons are sanctified and made holy by the death and resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on them only by their changing their sexual orientation, preferences and practices! Yet a cogent case can be made for the liberating possibility that the Holy Spirit of God graces the bodily communion of human beings whether they be same-sex or other-sex preferring persons, and where Moltmann’s theology of relationships and the graced body supports this claim.

Moltmann’s great strengths are his attention to the historical and eschatological, not just to revelation. In doing theology the “remembered past and expected future” is to be held in creative tension. “The experience of the Spirit is never without the

55 Stuart, Gay and Lesbian Theologies, 81 and 89. Stuart provides a wide ranging discussion on the matter of gay and lesbian identity, especially on the matter of essentialist versus constructivist arguments in the determination of lesbian and gay identity. Acknowledging the influence of Michel Foucault, Stuart observes that “Foucault realised that a gay/lesbian identity was not given, it was made, and that, therefore, it was possible to imagine and work towards new ways of relating, new forms of language and truth, new forms of love and pleasure”.(81) Stuart believes that sexual identity is socially constructed. “For Foucault to be gay was not to have a sexual identity characterised by certain psychological traits and ways of behaving, to be gay was to seek to develop a different type of life and way of relating to that demanded by the dominant discourses. In his project Foucault felt a strong affinity with early Christians, particularly the monastic fathers.”(89)
remembrance of Christ, and never without the expectation of his future.” Thus pneumatology, Christology and eschatology are intertwined. In effect this is a new and fuller valuing of the relationship between God and humanity. What has been experienced as graced in this life will be consummated in glory. His understanding of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and the resurrection from the dead offers same-sex oriented persons who experience rejection and oppression by Church and society during their human lives a welcome and open place in the coming reign of God.

Although not formulating or answering any specific questions regarding the Christian hope of eternal life for same-sex persons, his interpretation of resurrection in the New Testament looks to “transformation” and “transfiguration” in an embodied future rather than recovery of “what might have been” from an unresolved past or what some Christians may describe as “what should have been”. In this latter phrase, humanity created in the image of God is interpreted to mean that all people should be heterosexual in orientation and engage in relationships that conform to compulsory gender complementarity. Whereas Moltmann seems not to address the above negative example in detail, his eschatological theology does add positive dimensions to the inclusive theology of humanity developed in *God in Creation* and *The Spirit of Life*. This is partly because of his strong emphasis on our “becoming” the *imago Dei*, the *imago Christi*, and the *imago Trinitatis*, providing a powerful three-dimensional perspective to his theology overall. Alongside this, we can appreciate Moltmann’s view that the eschatological faith of Christians and its very embodied character and foundation is what destroys the influence of the ancient Gnostic dualism of spirit versus body. In the raising of Christ and the promise of the resurrection of our human bodies (our human flesh, as Moltmann takes the trouble to highlight) the integration or

---

58 Ibid., 70.
59 I have not been able to discover any support in Moltmann’s six volumes of contribution to systematic theology for such an interpretation of the *imago Dei*.
embodiment of matter and spirit by Spirit is affirmed. 60 “The raised body of Christ acts as an embodied promise for the whole creation.” 61

The implications of this “fleshly” eschatological vision for embodied human loving are explained in that, on the one hand, he criticises those theologians who promote hope for the soul in eternity at the expense of the fleshly body (which has no such hope in the thought of such people). From this, a death wish can arise towards oneself and one’s own life, the lives of other persons, and the natural environment.

The passion for life (libido) is pushed away into particular organs and localised there. The total eroticism of the lived life turns into desire for the satisfaction of objectified, purely sexual needs. 62

On the other hand, Moltmann argues, if the body is fully present in eternal life, then significant consequences for the body follow here and now. The body no longer needs to be repressed by the soul and in fact the body can become all-soul. He uses the term “ensouled” drawn from R.W. Emerson’s essay on “Love”: “The soul is wholly embodied and the body is wholly ensouled.” 63

Moltmann also asks if sexuality will be abolished at the eschaton.

When the sinfulness and mortality are overcome, will other characteristics of the bodily existence in which men and women are created be set aside too? Will human sexuality be abolished as well, so that there will be no longer “male and female” (Gal. 3:28), but all human beings will be “like the angels” (Luke 20: 35)? 64

In asking about the practicalities of eschatological “embodied” identity for human beings, he brings to the fore the related and significant question of personal identity. I think this is an equally relevant question for men and women of all sexual orientations. We wonder how it will be for us at the eschaton—whether we too will be like the

61 Ibid., 258. Throughout this section Moltmann emphasises that the whole creation is involved in the embodied promise of resurrection to new life.
62 Ibid., 260.
63 Ibid., 373. See Note 60a where Moltmann quotes Emerson. Barth’s phrase “embodied soul and besouled body” is similar but lacks a little of the sense of “totality” that I read in Emerson and Moltmann. He uses the phrase frequently in *Church Dogmatics III/2 §46* referred to in Chapter Two above.
64 Ibid., 262.
angels, having no passions, parts or paraphernalia—or shall our graced bodies have place in God’s future.

5.4 An Embodied Human Future

As noted earlier, throughout his theological writings, and especially in The Spirit of Life, Moltmann works to promote “the social experience of the self and the personal experience of sociality” against the isolating individualism that thrives on the separation of soul and body and tends to divorce people from communities. Contrary to many theologians and spiritual writers in the Christian mystical tradition, he locates the mystical knowledge of God within the inclusive, embodied, intergenerational human community, not within the personal inner-self, since

There is no mysticism of the soul without the mysticism of sociality. It is only the spirituality of the body and the spirituality of sociality or fellowship which realise, or “embody”, what the Fathers of the church again and again tried to assert, with all possible emphasis, in opposition to the Platonism of the cultured, and the Gnosticism of the common people: the expectation of “the resurrection of the body”.

Moltmann’s argument is that the Holy Spirit’s purpose is an embodied spirituality that is both personal and communal. It is “earthed” in the here and now not just in the future. A consequence of this linking of the Spirit of God, the transfiguration of the body and the vitality of the new creation will be “the liberation of the body from the repressions imposed by the soul, and the suppressions of morality, and the humiliations caused by self-hate.” This liberating conclusion by Moltmann has particular value for all those men and women who have experienced social rejection, whether they define themselves openly as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, Queer, or not.

---

65 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 94.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid. For his development of the significance of “the resurrection of the body” see especially Moltmann, The Coming of God, passim; here 66. “Hope for ‘the resurrection of the body’ permits no disdain and debasement of bodily life and sensory experiences; it affirms them profoundly, and gives greatest honour to ‘the flesh’, which people have made something to be despised.” (Moltmann compares Paul in 1 Cor 15:42-44 and his image of the wheat seed).
68 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 95.
69 Ibid.
The purpose of this chapter has been to argue the theological position that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, can and does “rest” upon and abide within human beings personally and on humanity corporately and not just upon baptised or faith-affirming Christians. More importantly, it has argued that the human person cannot be described or discussed without reference to the human body as well as to the human soul/spirit. The human body and soul are indivisible and of mutual and equal value in God’s creative, reconciling and redeeming purpose. The human experience of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, can only be discerned through embodied, sensory experience. It is the whole embodied human being who is redeemed and graced in Jesus Christ, whom the life-giving Spirit of God indwells, activates and guides.

One outcome of this integrated understanding of Christian theological anthropology and pneumatology is that sexuality in all its many varied dimensions is properly considered as a positive not a negative component of this anthropology because it has a part and purpose in creation, redemption and sanctification. Such purpose is not limited merely to that of the reproduction of the next human generation however valuable that may be in itself. Human love and sexuality is not contained and confined by the biological dualism of male and female gender divisions. The diversity in human creation argues against this. The Holy Spirit, the life-enhancing Spirit of God, may choose to be present in a variety of ways in human sexual love and experience and this is equally true for opposite-sex and same-sex preferring persons. In the depths of sexual communion between two human beings the divine presence may be experienced. By listening to stories of same-sex intimacy and embodied communion we may discern the gracious presence of the Spirit of God. Similarly, through observing the wholeness and joy of couples who are committed to each other we can sense the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit that makes us want to call these graced bodies “holy”.
None of the above may be used to support the idea that all human sexual activity is divine and therefore automatically good. Contemporary social and ecclesial history reveals clearly and painfully that this is not true. Sex has the capacity of being the occasion of evil in any human relationship. Sexual activity can be a weapon and means of abuse especially against women and children and young people. Such misuses of human sexual desire are, from a Christian point of view, wrong and unloving and therefore sinful. The human body is not graced in such situations. In fact, the inclusive, loving work of the Holy Spirit has been disregarded, forgotten, denied and “dis-graced”.

In the next chapter I follow through the theme of the graced body in the work of a number of contemporary theologians whose work may help the church to accept a more inclusive and embodied theology of humanity and sexuality.
Chapter 6: Divine Embodiment—
Toward an Inclusive and Embodied Theology

The erotic is excessive to the sexual, bearing as it does upon that caritas which is the mode of God’s own activity. It is not that our longing to understand Jesus Christ, to embrace and be embraced by that body which is given so completely for us, negates the sexual. The sexual is the very mark of embodiment itself; a mode of relation in which the body experiences itself as such. But desire reorders the sexual as a deeper mystery of embodiment unfolds. Divine embodiment moves us to affirm our own embodiment in a new way—as a temple of the Spirit, to use the Pauline term, as holy, as graced, as transcending our understanding.

—Graham Ward, Christ and Culture.

I have argued for a theological anthropology that is inclusive of the whole of humanity. Such a theological anthropology would take positive account of the unity of the human being as one indivisible body and soul. A consequence of this view is that the physical body and physical sexual love is not excluded from a Christian theology of humanity; rather they are embraced as valued parts of the indivisible whole that I have called the “graced body”. A further corollary is that the graced body is not merely concerned with integration and well being of the personal body but is equally concerned for the integration of the human person within the social and ecclesial and human community. This is another aspect of the graced body. These matters will now be taken up and considered in the light of arguments drawn from theologians of the contemporary church who directly consider sexual orientation as part of their theological anthropology, in particular Rowan Williams, Grace Jantzen, Graham Ward, Eugene F. Rogers Jr. and Gerard Loughlin, all of whom provide helpful and challenging
resources for the thesis being argued. The goal here is the setting forth of an inclusive theology of grace that includes the human body and human sexuality.

We have recognised that the human body has a long history of being denigrated and devalued in Christian theology and spirituality as a direct result of dualistic theologies and anthropologies. Barth and Moltmann criticised continuing dualistic influences in theological anthropology that support such devaluation and worked to counter them, emphasising that the body is of value as well as the soul.

In the previous two chapters, I proposed an important connection between the life-giving Spirit of God, human embodiment and loving sexual relationships drawing on Jürgen Moltmann’s liberating theological vision set forth in his systematic contributions to theology. Particularly helpful were his social Trinitarian theology; his argument that the whole purpose of God is embodiment; and, his setting forth of the role of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of life—in bringing to birth in open friendship a new relationship between the Trinity and humanity. In contrast to Barth, co-humanity for Moltmann is not principally about the relation of man and woman (in terms of the duality of their gender and sex) but with all human beings—women and other women, men and other men, as well as women with men—personally and communally. His focus of interest is on the depth and capacity of human relationships through the Spirit expressed as koinonia. His expression of the imago Dei in his anthropology and pneumatology looks to the embodiment of human and divine love as the means of healing the earth and human beings. As Moltmann explains: “Human life comes from love, comes alive through love, and through love is able to make other life living. If this experience of love disappears from a human life, that life becomes petrified and dies even while the body lives”.  

---

However, as already noted Moltmann has not spelled out many of the concrete details of his vision in the particularities of embodiment in the lives of individuals and local communities. This absence raises the question of how sexuality and the human body stand in relation to each other. Past tradition has often assigned blame to the body for the expression of sexual urges/desires. The body has been the scapegoat for human beings’ unease with sexual desire and experience. In reality, the sexual desires and experiences of the body are as much to do with the mind and emotions and the soul/spirit as with the physical body.\(^2\) This is especially so when love is involved because love not only integrates all parts of a person and unites that person to a fully integrated other; love also enables human persons to love in the midst of their brokenness and to love the broken in the other.

### 6.1 Bodily Wholeness

Rowan Williams in his address “The Body’s Grace” draws our attention to the sense of bodily wholeness that can be known through sexual experience. It is this sense of wholeness that he describes as grace.\(^3\) But Williams does more than draw our attention to the possibility of the body’s awareness of being graced. He challenges us to recognise that wholeness can be experienced even when love is absent or at the least casual and minimal. The wholeness to which he refers flows from the surprising experience of a woman coming to sexual fulfilment outside of marriage. He draws his illustration from one of Paul Scott’s Raj Quartet novels, *The Day of the Scorpion*,\(^4\) retelling the story of the seduction of the powerless, generous, truthful and unmarried Sarah Layton.

Williams describes it thus:


Sarah is absent from the life of the family she desperately tries to prop up, absent from the life of European society in India, and present fully to no one and nothing. Her innate truthfulness and lack of egotistical self-defence mean that she is able to recognise this once the remark is made: there is no joy for her, because she is not able to be anywhere. When the manipulative and cynical but sharp-eyed Clark at last coaxes her into bed, as they “enact” a tenderness that is not really that of lovers (p 452), Sarah comes to herself: hours later, on the train journey back to her family, she looks in the mirror and sees that “she had entered her body’s grace” (p 454).\(^5\)

He asks what this phrase “entered her body’s grace” can mean, noting that there has been no lasting experience of joy for Sarah, observing that:

…it is still grace, a filling of the void, an entry into some different kind of identity. There may be little love, even little generosity, in Clark’s bedding of Sarah, but Sarah has discovered that her body can be the cause of happiness to her and to another. It is this discovery which most clearly shows why we might want to talk about grace here. Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted.\(^6\)

The theological interpretation of this material in his now famous lecture “The Body’s Grace” was a courageous move on Williams’ part because such open discussion of coming to sexual awareness and fulfilment is a matter that has not been encouraged in the church. We delve further into the relationship he sees between the body and grace later in this chapter.

For the moment, we recognise that there is more to be discerned and argued about the relationship of sexuality to our humanity. Barth and Moltmann have prepared us for this further move but not taken us there. In Barth’s fourth volume of *The Doctrine of Creation* we noticed the absence of the Holy Spirit in his account of how men and women live together as members of the body of Christ. There seemed to be little of the gracious freedom of the Spirit and much of a stern God acting as “commander”. Years later, Moltmann struggled with a similar problem: the difficulty of describing embodied Christian living in which the Holy Spirit was seen to be graciously acting in human relationships. In both theologians there seemed to be a

hesitancy to specify the presence and work of the Spirit in specific examples. While not an easy task, the description of the Holy Spirit’s acting in human lives and communities is still worth the attempt. It may best be done through the telling and listening to stories that illustrate the diversity of situations in which the Holy Spirit rests on people and to whose presence they respond freely with vigour and hope.

6.2 Valuing difference

A number of contemporary theologians have offered constructive theologies of the body that are non-dualistic and emphasise the acceptance of difference as a key element in their understanding of all relationships—divine or human. They each deal with difference in relation to one of the key themes of this thesis: embodiment. These include Grace Jantzen (1948–2006), Graham Ward, and Gerard Loughlin. They each discuss difference in connection to creation, embodiment and sexuality.

Jantzen identifies the essential theological split as that between God and the material universe and goes on to name various dualisms, especially those mind-body dualisms, which end in devaluing the material elements of creation, the human body and human sexuality. Ward critiques and develops Barth’s theological work on sexual difference in great detail over a number of years. Loughlin is also interested in sexual difference, particularly in the issues of difference, desire and communion in human relationships. In a variety of ways the work of the theologians considered in this chapter leads us forward from the theological anthropology, Christology and pneumatology of Barth and Moltmann to the very different circumstances that the church and society finds itself in today; however, the challenge of the inclusion of difference within the membership and life of the church remains.

As a way of countering the pervasive influence of these dualisms, Jantzen proposes an understanding of the world, the created cosmos as God’s body—of God as embodied. This was not an entirely new thought. At least one of the theologians of the Patristic period had thought of God as having a body but this did not necessarily imply that the created cosmos was viewed as that body. The effect of her project is to breakdown the polarisation of Creator and creation that the contemporary church has inherited from the past; particularly from various dualistic philosophies that separate spirit (the things pertaining to God) from matter (the things pertaining to earth). Jantzen criticises the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo (creation out of nothing) that was so important to Karl Barth and continues to be for many other theologians, including Rowan Williams. She asserts that this doctrine is not in the Bible, is derived from Greek philosophy, and leads to a doctrine of God as totally separated from creation. In the place of creatio ex nihilo, she proposes a relational model that connects God and the cosmos. What her model of the world as God’s body achieves is an understanding of creation and humanity—the whole cosmos—coming forth from God “through loving self-limitation”.

9 Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body, see Chapter 3, 21-35 where she discusses divine incorporeality.
10 Jantzen notes Origen’s belief that the Bible does not state that God is without a body [incorporeal]. In the next paragraph she affirms that the Bible acknowledges that God is Spirit (pneuma) but notes that the Greek pneuma of the time did not necessarily imply disembodiment. Her examples are from Stoic sources. Patristic theologians eventually rejected the idea of God having a body. Ibid., 21-22.
12 Ibid., 133.
13 Jantzen, “Healing Our Brokenness: The Spirit and Creation,” 137. Against Jantzen’s argument compare that of Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, Chapter 7 “Created” and “Uncreated”, 250-285, especially 253-256. Arguing from a created-uncreated dialectic, Zizioulas links creation out of nothing with freedom and hence with grace; thus human response to this is to be that of thanksgiving.
14 My emphasis.
15 Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body, 158. cf. Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 13-98 passim. Zizioulas claims that that “otherness”—whether divine or human—is the necessary attribute of “personhood”, and is, therefore, an essential attribute of loving relationships.
16 Ibid., 144.
In putting forward her model she is quite clear that the Creator and creation are not of the same substance. Thus she avoids one of the more obvious criticisms of her own model that it might be seen to lead to a possible pantheism in which God and creation became merged as one, monistically, and in which a proper otherness and difference, and thus the freedom to love, do not exist.\(^{17}\) Jantzen’s point of view encourages us to modify the claim of Barth and other theologians that the absolute separateness of Creator from creation is the only possible biblical and Christian vision of God and the world. Her view is well supported by the writer of the Letter to the Colossians who beautifully proclaims God’s action in Christ, in sustaining and upholding creation—“all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1: 16b-17).

So how does she reconcile God and embodiment—what we might term the spiritual and the material—and in so doing unmake dualistic patterns of thought? Jantzen achieves this by making an analogy between God and human beings. In this model the relationship between God and the created world is said “to be analogous to the relationship between the human soul and the human body.”\(^{18}\) The relationship is one of wholeness because her anthropology is holistic: the human being is an indivisible psychosomatic unity.\(^{19}\) I think this is one of the important meanings of embodiment as a concept in theological anthropology. Without there being such a positive concept of embodiment there is little hope of overcoming the influence of negative dualisms.

Furthermore, Jantzen is clear that careful qualification of the application of the analogy is required because “the analogy to human persons collapses just at the point where we begin to speak of embodiment”.\(^{20}\) Against this, she argues that “although the notions involved in embodiment require qualification for their application to God, they


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 5-11. Jantzen indicates her theological reasons for affirming the wholeness of the human being but also cautions against the total rejection of the language and concepts of dualism.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 19.
are more illuminating than those which take the model of the relationship between God and the world to be a dualist conception of humanity”. 21 In making a significant link between the divine as personal and as embodied, she argues that her model of the divine based on the analogy to human persons needs to be very carefully nuanced but “it is the best model we have”. 22 She sets forth the hoped for positive consequences of holding to such a model in these words:

The model of the universe as God’s body helps to do justice to the beauty and value of nature, the importance of conservation and ecological responsibility, the significance and dignity of the human body and human sexuality…Those who have once seen themselves, and the world about them, as the embodiment and self-manifestation of God are unlikely to continue to treat it in a cavalier way or feel utterly alien or devoid of intrinsic significance or worth. 23

Graham Ward’s theological interests are also of note in this discussion. During the past fifteen years have he has focused upon Christology and its relation to embodiment, the nature of the erotic, divine and human desire, and sexual difference. 24 In his “The Politics of Christ’s Circumcision”, 25 he identifies two reasons for the recent theological attention to the embodiment and sexuality of Jesus and to the human body: first, as “a response to the fear of the body’s disappearance”, and second, as “a response to the new working conditions created by globalism that demand a machine’s optimum efficiency”. 26 Ward’s work on Christology, pneumatology and embodiment reminds us that none of our contemporary theology can be divorced from the context of politics and

21 Ibid., 19-20.
22 Ibid., 19.
23 Ibid., 156-157.
25 Ward, Christ and Culture, 179.
26 Ibid.
culture, especially the theology of embodied sexuality. Attention to Ward’s contribution on the body, redemption and grace will occupy us later in this Chapter.

One of the ways that Ward contributes to the task of countering dualism in Christian faith and practice is through his dismantling of Anders Nygren’s value-laden interpretation of the Greek words ἀγάπη agape and ερως eros. In 1932, Nygren argued that agape and eros are two opposed ideas of love; the first Christian, the other not; and that in their origin, development, and nature they are “completely antithetic”, yet have become totally interwoven with each other. “It is a fact beyond contradiction that the ideas of Eros and Agape belong to two different spiritual worlds.” The effect of Nygren’s dualism has been to cast out eros from a general Christian understanding of love and in turn cast out a proper appreciation of sexual love in its own right within the church.

Against this view, Ward argues that agape and eros belong together, even though eros is never used in the New Testament. It is perhaps the very absence of the word eros from the New Testament text (in my view) that leads both Nygren and Barth to isolate eros from agape and thereby set up a dualism in which only one aspect of divine and human love is valued—that of agape, as Graham Ward has pointed out. Ward and others have shown that the early Patristic theologians had no hesitation in making full use of eros alongside agape in relation to God and humanity. In fact, according to Ward, it was these same theologians “who reflected upon the relationship between the physical and the spiritual senses and developed thereby a theological phenomenology of embodiment”. Sarah Coakley makes the point that “for Origen, agape simply is Eros by another name”, while for Gregory of Nyssa, “Eros is agape (as

---

27 Nygren, Agape and Eros.
28 Ibid., 23, 24.
29 Coakley, “Pleasure Principles,” 20-33. Coakley notes Nygren’s fright at “the possibility of any safe channelling of the alarming erotic urge”.
31 Ward, “Erotics of Redemption.”
32 Ward, Christ and Culture, 99.
he puts it) ‘stretched out in longing’ toward the divine goal’.\textsuperscript{33} “True desire, desire for the other, is eschatological.”\textsuperscript{34}

Ward leads the discussion from the deconstruction of the dualism of agape and eros into the key element in all loving relationality, that of “difference”. As he does this, he reminds his readers neither to dissolve “the difference between Geist (spirit) human and Geist (spirit) divine; nor the sexual difference between male and female”\textsuperscript{35} To do so would be to confuse monistic “oneness” with a proper unity-in-diversity.

“What is loved in love is difference”, says Ward, and this difference is the clue to all human and divine desiring, and “operates according to the economies of both kenotic and erotic desire”.\textsuperscript{36} He urges us to recognise the importance of “difference” as a theological tool for understanding the relationship of the Trinity to human embodiment and sexual union.

The labour of Trinitarian love—of difference, in difference, from difference, to difference—prescribes the relation of the Godhead to creation and the relation that is possible between two women, two men or a man and a woman. Such a labour of love far exceeds, in its significance and influence, the biological.\textsuperscript{37}

In emphasising these relational distinctions Ward risks disparaging the biological and its linking of humanity to the wider relationality of the non-human creation.\textsuperscript{38} The graced body is concerned with the relational and the biological, the micro and the macro aspects of embodied life the whole of God’s animate creation—the whole is to be loved. What gender we are no longer matters; it is God’s love that matters and our responsive action in the light and grace of that love. As we have seen, this is also the conclusion that Elizabeth Stuart arrives at when she states that baptism matters more than whether we are opposite-sex or same-sex gender oriented.\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Coakley, “Pleasure Principles,” 9.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ward, “Erotics of Redemption,” 54.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ward, “Erotics of Redemption,” 71.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.: 71.
\item \textsuperscript{38} I am grateful to the Reverend Dr Scott Cowdell for drawing my attention to this point.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Stuart, Gay and Lesbian Theologies, 114. See the discussion of this in my previous chapter.
\end{itemize}
Gerard Loughlin asks, in an article entitled “Baptismal Fluid”, if the church might be better advised to “articulate and celebrate sexual difference, and to further reflect upon equality in difference?”40 In answering this question, Loughlin links together Karl Barth, John Paul II, and Luce Irigaray, as he says, an unlikely trio of thinkers from Poland, France and Switzerland, whose views on sexual difference between men and women he elaborates.41 In Loughlin’s view, all gendered sexual differences are washed away in the font of baptism, “for insofar as women are members of the body, they too are called to be Christ to others; so that they too must also act as ‘groom’ and ‘husband’ to the ‘bride’ and ‘wife’ of the other, whether it be an actual man or woman. For it cannot be said that within the community only men are called to love as Christ loves”.42 The effect of his argument is that given that “humanity is always fellow-humanity, always concretely gendered, always at least the difference that is two—” then it is coincidental whether the two are man and woman, man and man, or woman and woman. What deeply matters is that it is “the difference of one human and another; one human with another”.43 This last clarification by Loughlin is helpful because it draws to our attention the positive and inclusive interpretation of “difference” and the importance of “difference”—otherness—in all loving relationships; no longer need “difference” be feared: sexual, gender, ethnic or generational. He links the inter-relationship of the body, difference and the sexual expression of loving communion in the following quotation from “Refiguring Masculinity in Christ”.44

Every body is sexed and each body is different; and bodily difference calls forth the desire of communion, which when eroticized may lead to sexual congress. To suggest that sexual desire is the desire of communion with another—that is, to venture the infinite journey toward an other in his or her otherness—is of course a Christian speculation, here related to the story of Genesis, but also directly deriving

---

41 Ibid.: 262.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.: 269-270.
from the story of the God who, in Jesus Christ, ventures to come to us in order that we might risk the venture of an infinite communion with God. Those for whom sexual relationships are only procreational or recreational will not entertain this speculation, and even those who do might experience a certain indeterminacy of meaning in their erotic relationships. The Christian interpretation remains an invitation to venture a discovery.45

What would be helpful here, certainly from the perspective of this thesis, is some indication of the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing this confluence of embodiment, difference and sexual communion together. But here again, as in so much theological writing on embodiment and sexuality, the presence and role of the Spirit of God is assumed, understated, hidden or forgotten. However, to make this critical observation is not to discount at all the value of Loughlin’s insights. With this inclusive vision of difference, he provides a significant theological foundation for the inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians as fully active members of the church, with the right to participate fully in the decision making of the church about “their own kind”. Baptism is the key to ecclesial membership for both Elizabeth Stuart and Gerard Loughlin. It is not that being gay and lesbian is not significant but it is no more significant than being heterosexual. What matters in the end is being one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Loughlin also takes up the significant matter of human desire, the physical body and the ecclesial body and their relationship to Jesus’ sexuality. At one point in his *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* he remarks:

> On the understanding of the-body-of-Jesus become-the-body-of-Christ, the question of Jesus’ sexuality is not a question about his desire for John or Mary or whoever, but about the place of such desire, such a flight of yearning, within the body of Christ, the communion of the church. Are hetero and homosexuals within the body? Are they analogously related, not to the body of Jesus who was, but to Christ’s body that is coming and even now arriving? The question about the sexuality of Jesus is thus entirely legitimate, indeed vital, for a Cappadocian theology that understands salvation as incorporation into the story of Christ, the tissue of his flesh, the text of his body. And the question about the sexuality of Jesus is the question that he answers when he tells Mary not to hold on to him, but to return to the disciples. To

have waited on this question is to have waited with Jesus and Mary in the garden of
the tomb.\textsuperscript{46}

Loughlin draws together important issues here for gay and lesbian Christians and their
membership in the body of Christ—in fact for all Christians. Desire and sexuality are
not matters to be shunned or excluded from the sight and consideration of the church,
just as lesbians and gays are not to be excluded from membership and ministry in the
church. Mary Magdalene feared the disappearance of the earthly body of Jesus just as
same-sex oriented Christians fear the disappearance of their bodies from the Christ’s
sacramental and ecclesial body. These are important matters of context and culture.\textsuperscript{47}

In the theologies of Grace Jantzen, Graham Ward and Gerard Loughlin the
important but controversial work of Karl Barth on gender and sexual difference is
critiqued and built upon. Jürgen Moltmann’s more recent works on \textit{The Spirit of Life}
and the \textit{The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology} have not been overtly used by
Jantzen, Ward and Loughlin. However, his theological positions that support more
inclusive practices and open relationships in the churches and between all peoples are
encouraged by them indirectly.

\section{6.3 Integrating Body and Spirit}

The task of this section is to draw together the several diverse themes that have
been threading their way through this thesis: first, the relation of grace and Holy Spirit
to human beings and to the \textit{ecclesia}—the body of Christ; second, the relation of the

\textsuperscript{46} Loughlin, \textit{Alien Sex}, 265.
\textsuperscript{47} Terry Brown, ed., \textit{Other Voices, Other Worlds} (London: Darton Longman and Todd Ltd, 2006). Terry
Brown was Bishop of Malaita in the Anglican Church of Melanesia until his recent retirement. This
significant collection of essays explores some of the cross-cultural dimension of same-sex orientation
and practice from Third World regions within the Anglican Communion, including New Zealand and
the Pacific. Chapters by Jenny Plane Te Paa and Winston Halapua offer important insights to this
contextual discussion of same-sex sexuality. The recognition of the significance of context is especially
relevant for Australia and New Zealand because of the multi-ethnicity of these societies and the
proximity of other-cultural contexts within Southeast Asia and the island nations of the southwest
Pacific. Western theological and ecclesial traditions, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Protestant, about
the body and sexuality have overlaid local traditions. This includes the imposition of Western forms of
dualism onto existing indigenous dualisms.
incarnation and Christology to pneumatology and the graced body of the church.

Theologically, the meaning of the word “redemption” can include “sanctification” and “glorification” as well as “reconciliation”. Karl Barth certainly intended to use it as the overall title in *Church Dogmatics* for his planned volumes on pneumatology—the theology of the Holy Spirit. However, there is an observable tendency amongst theologians but in the subtle merging of sanctification into redemption the focus tends to be more on Jesus Christ the redeemer than on the Holy Spirit as the life-giver and sanctifier. With such merging, there is the possibility of failure to recognise when and where the Spirit and the human body meet. This can happen whether the body in question is “the historical and physical body each possesses, even Christ [or] the transhistorical, spiritual body that is Christ’s alone but which is made of several members constituting the Church”. 48 This inattention is a failure of contemplative vision; a refusal to see the Spirit in relation to the body: as personal, as ecclesial, as Eucharistic, and as eschatological as Graham Ward has pointed out. 49

In *After Our Likeness*, Miroslav Volf helps us to expand and clarify our understanding of the relation of the body and Spirit. To do so, he makes a clear distinction between human beings and divine Persons, as he explains:

But even the divine persons indwell human beings in a qualitatively different way than they do one another. …the interiority of the divine persons is strictly reciprocal, which is not the case in the relation between God and human beings. To be sure, it is not only the Spirit, and together with the Spirit also the Son and the Father, that is in human beings; human beings are also in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). They are not, however, internal to the Spirit as subject; otherwise, they would also be the subjects of the Spirit’s actions just as the Spirit is the subject of theirs; the Spirit does, after all, “blow where it chooses.” If human beings were personally interior to the Spirit in the same way the Spirit is personally interior to human beings, the conclusion “the wind blows where it chooses …so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3: 8) would be reversible. But it is not. This personal interiority is one-sided.

The Spirit indwells human persons, whereas human beings by contrast indwell the life-giving ambience of the Spirit, not the person of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{50}

Volf’s insightful reflection reminds us that we are creatures, not God. This echoes Karl Barth’s similar concerns about the danger of confusing the Creator and creature. However, Volf deals more successfully with the question of the relationship between our bodies and the Spirit. He achieves this by setting out the limits of the reciprocal character of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and human beings—the Spirit dwells in each and all of us in our bodies, but we dwell in the life of the Spirit, not the person of the Spirit. This is a helpful qualification. As a doctoral student of Jürgen Moltmann, Volf can be seen to be taking up many of the themes which concerned Moltmann and which are of interest to this thesis, especially the themes of embodiment, the Spirit of God and the life of human beings in community.

The Spirit is like the wind, invisible. It blows where it wills and comes whence we know not; but it can be felt and experienced.\textsuperscript{51} However, it may not be grasped, contained or possessed. The Spirit is not a thing; nor an “it”. The Spirit is God’s presence in power, love and relationship; it is never an abstract idea. Rowan Williams in making this distinction, keeps the concrete relationship of the Spirit before us:

It is not possible to speak of Spirit in abstraction from the Christian life as a whole: Spirit is “specified” not with reference to any kind of episodic experience but in relation to the human identity of the Christian.\textsuperscript{52}

His observation is important because it helps us to move from an episodic understanding of the Spirit’s activity that characterises many of the references to the Spirit in the Hebrew Scriptures and particularly in the Luke-Acts corpus in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{53} The move is toward a focus on the Spirit involved with the totality of our

\textsuperscript{50} Miroslav Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity} (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 211.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. John 3: 8.

\textsuperscript{52} Williams, “Word and Spirit,” 107-127; here 123. See also 119.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 118.
human life. Pauline pneumatology with its emphasis on the “eschatological character of the Spirit’s presence” illustrates and supports this interpretation,\(^{54}\) as Williams explains:

The central eschatological reality is identification by grace with the obedience of God’s Son, through which human beings are set “on the far side” of judgement and condemnation; so that the Spirit’s eschatological character is inseparable from the condition of the life lived “in Christ”.\(^{55}\)

He further explains that, among other things, the Spirit brings human beings into a freedom of relationship with the Father that is marked by adoption as sons and daughters of God, liberates us from slavery and invests us with the attributes of the Christ-like life. Life in Christ and life in the Spirit are one and the same. The various gifts of the Spirit in all their diversity—both the ordinary and extraordinary—form part of a whole life in the Spirit, personally and communally. “The Spirit is no longer specified by, and thus potentially limited to, the extraordinary and episodic.”\(^{56}\)

The Spirit or the Paraclete in the Johannine literature is personal “as active in and with the disciples, moving them toward Father and Son, as well as acting simply upon them”.\(^{57}\) Thus, the Spirit is witness, glorifier, the One who enables the forgiveness of sins, and the confession of Christ’s coming in human flesh. The Holy Spirit is a separate Person to the Father and the Son within the Trinitarian relations but is from them.\(^{58}\) The Spirit rests on the body,\(^{59}\) real personal bodies and gathered ecclesial bodies, but does not reveal its own “body” which remains anonymous, hidden and with veiled face. Williams suggests that the question “where” and “what” the Holy Spirit is may be unanswerable.\(^{60}\)

The traditional word “sanctification” does not succeed in addressing the totality of the mission of the Holy Spirit. “Sanctifying”, the making holy of human persons, is a

---

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 119.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid. See also Moloney SDB, *John*.

\(^{58}\) Williams, “Word and Spirit,” 119.


\(^{60}\) Williams, “Word and Spirit,” 123.
significant action of the Spirit but, in my view, this word does not totally describe the fullness of the Spirit’s presence and activity; no one word will be adequate. The Eastern churches’ use of the term “life-giver” to describe the agency of the Holy Spirit helps us here and adds a further dimension to our understanding.

Williams and others are overcoming past failures that have seen the merging of pneumatology into Christology. An answer to these failures is to keep before us the Trinitarian relations—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in their doctrinal form as creation, redemption and sanctification and to focus on the Spirit’s sanctifying and life-giving roles, especially in relation to the body. I have argued that this has positive implications for how Christians comprehend their physical bodies and their sexuality. It is in naming the Spirit in relation to the human body that we shall come to recognise the body as graced. To name the Spirit in relation to our physical bodies and sexuality will help to counteract the pervasive and persistent dualistic attitudes that puts mind above matter, heaven over earth, the divine beyond the reach of the human.

We focus now on the relationship of Christology and pneumatology in integrating an ecclesial vision of the graced body. Addressing what he terms “the incarnationalist consensus” and criticisms of it in his 1989 Gore Lecture, “Incarnation and the Renewal of Community”, 61 Williams recalls that incarnational theology has always to deal with the cross, with the real history of the person hanging and dying on it, his isolating trauma. 62 It has also to deal with the reality of sin, sin as concrete “gone-wrongness” in human life and in the social, political and economic life of human groups, including religious and ecclesial “gone-wrongness” (for example, child abuse by clergy and lay ministers). In one sense, incarnation addresses the condition of the world as other than God; not in the positive sense of other and otherness (that describe

62 Ibid., 229.
the human condition necessary for us to exist in community and to love) but in the negative sense, as an address from God toward all that is destructive of human life and love and hope in all its forms. In this, Barth’s theology addresses this reality: human creatures are far from the desires and values of their Creator. There can be no simple ratification of the human status quo, be it social, political, economic or sexual by the use of the doctrine of the incarnation, or for that matter by reference to the Holy Spirit’s “resting” on the human body. The graced body means, and is, more than this; more complex, more costly, more demanding. The “no” to “cheap grace” proclaimed so compelling to the German Church of the 1930s by Dietrich Bonhoeffer points us in the right direction. 63 This costly “no” has been compelling echoed in many prophetic challenges to the church and the world in the years since. The incarnation does not remove or diminish or protect from the cost of discipleship.

David Neville, writing about the proper and improper use of the incarnation in theological argument, warns: “I myself appeal to the Incarnation, especially in theological ethics, but I do not appeal to it in order to maintain or justify how things are. In other words, simply because the Word assumed or took on human nature does not legitimise everything human. In certain respects, the incarnation was a challenge to what is human, even if one can legitimately argue that the incarnation displays humanity for what it should be”. 64 Heather Thomson also draws our attention to the danger of using the incarnation as a general ratification of the existing state of affairs in any ecclesial body, Anglican or otherwise. Ecclesiology is to be driven by Christology if ideology is to be avoided. 65 However, I would add that ecclesiology needs both Christology and pneumatology. This will need to be a dynamic pneumatology that is

---

64 Personal email communication from Associate Professor David Neville, Head of School, School of Theology, Charles Sturt University, St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra, ACT, 12 October, 2010.
more than episodic in character. Both the ecclesial body of the church and the personal body of the human being are held in being by the Holy Spirit. They are not just occasionally visited by the Spirit.

### 6.4 Inclusive Contributions from Three Theologians

This section explores how the Spirit pervades both ecclesial and personal bodies, through the lens of significant theologians who have contributed constructively in a variety of ways to a theology of the body.

**Rowan Williams**

As we have seen, Rowan Williams has made significant contributions toward the development of a theology of the body and sexuality. However, he is not without his critics, and this section is a conversation between such critics and other theologians who take up his approach and offer constructive contributions toward a theology of the graced body. Williams holds that if any talk of the body’s grace is to make sense in human and Christian conversation, such theological and spiritual discourse requires an existing language of creation and redemption.\(^{66}\) Such a language must take into account and honour the pains and joys and real diversity of actual human sexual experience. Therefore, a theology of the body’s grace cannot be treated as some “marginal eccentricity in the doctrinal spectrum”.\(^{67}\) It relies very much on how we understand and trust in God, and it “depends heavily on believing in a certain sort of God—the Trinitarian Creator and Saviour of the world—and it draws in a great many themes in the Christian understanding of humanity, helping us to a better critical grasp of the nature and the dangers of corporate human living”.\(^{68}\) His interest in the nexus between

---


\(^{67}\) Ibid., 320.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
grace and sexuality goes back to an earlier address (1979), where he discussed the fruitful and mutual interchange that he saw existing between them:

As with all good metaphors, there is a play backwards and forwards between images and primary reality, a mutual illumination: to learn more about God’s grace is to learn more about sexuality, to grow in sexual maturity is to understand more about grace.⁶⁹

Put another way, God’s grace is just like mature sexual love. It has a reciprocal character to it: as you experience more of God, you give more of yourself away in love; in giving more love in embodied action, you come to experience more of God. So Williams is saying that human beings who live in mutual sexual love are embodying the shape of grace and living as God lives. As Volf reminded us above, to live in the presence and by the power of the Spirit does not make us into the Spirit. As creatures we shall never be God, but through grace we may become like God. This is the work of Christ, the Spirit and the Father: the loving and life-giving action of the Trinity.

It is important to recognise that Williams places his theological discussion of the body’s grace within the greater context of the wellbeing of the human body and the wellbeing of the body of Christ—the ecclesia.

Living in the Church entails the difficult knowledge that my identity as a believer is not my business alone and that I am affected by the failure of another. Christians live in one place as members of the Body—for good and ill. No one resolves the question of their salvation alone.

So this is a body in which the vulnerability of the whole organism is accepted, in which there is normally no quick solution to the problem of disease or malfunction by amputation, let alone by denial and the deliberate alienation of separating a “real” from a suffering or disabled body.⁷⁰

These thoughts from his address “On the human Body” given at the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops echoes some of Paul’s concerns about the body and the church in the Corinthian Letters (for example, 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 12:12–31; 2 Cor. 12:14–

---

⁶⁹ Williams, “Grace and Sexuality,” 15.
21). The metaphors of “the graced body” or “the body’s grace” suggest that God desires the flourishing of the “body”, whether the personal or the communal. Williams writes: “My bodily identity is the outcome of divine gift, divine gratuitous action. Whatever I physically am exists because God bestows life and intends joy”.71 This bestowal of flourishing as a gift of God’s grace cannot just be for the healthy (and Williams addressed the health of the body in the above lecture in 1998), it is also concerned with the flourishing of the broken, diseased, “dis-graced” bodies of the poor, disabled and socially excluded, the sexually marginalised, as well as for the well-being of the communities to which they belong. Theological discussion that advocates an inclusive human sexuality needs to occur within this wider context of the enactment of justice for all bodies. Feminist and other biblical scholars have pointed out that even Jesus had to learn that inclusion had wider dimensions than he imagined. The narrative of Jesus’ conversation with the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7: 26 is sometimes used as an example of his learning.72 It is the Holy Spirit who draws us into relational solidarity with both the graced and disgraced bodies of human beings and human communities; into proximity and nearness to otherness and difference in unpleasant and extreme forms. Saint Francis of Assisi discovered that relational solidarity with the feared lepers took him and his first brothers to live alongside them outside the walls of the city. There he discovered the grace that allowed the lepers to minister to him as well as he to them.73

Eugene F. Rogers Jr.

Eugene Rogers’ useful insights confirm that the relationship of the human body and the Spirit of God needs to be constantly affirmed in Christian theological

71 Ibid.: 411.
73 Short OFM, Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition, 72-80; especially 74-75. See also Jantzen, “Healing Our Brokenness: The Spirit and Creation,” 141.
anthropology because of the long tradition of separating one from the other.\textsuperscript{74} The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the body and sexuality is a crucial component of his work. In his chapter “The Shape of the Body and the Shape of Grace” Rogers asserts that the body takes shape as personal, as ecclesial, as Eucharistic, and as eschatological.\textsuperscript{75} He has been influenced in particular by Rowan Williams’ lecture on “The Body’s Grace” and uses it extensively—though not with an uncritical acceptance of Williams’ use of “grace”.

Rogers raises two objections to Williams’ concept of the body’s grace.\textsuperscript{76} First, that the manner in which grace is used by Williams is too vague; therefore it can be understood just as a type of “transforming, positive regard.”\textsuperscript{77} The danger here, according to Rogers, is that the grace of God is just exemplary. Some more substantial understanding of the grace of God is required—perhaps like Paul’s theological use of grace in comparison with the more generalised use of grace as a greeting at the beginning of his Letters. Grace for Williams certainly has substantial meaning, but it comes across as generalised rather than concrete, specific, at least for Rogers. The second objection is the danger of treating the body as abstract because the metaphorical concept of the body’s grace tends to psychologise the body rather than attending to its concrete particularities.\textsuperscript{78} The difficulty here, Rogers recognises, is to take the physicality of the body seriously in a positive way and yet not idolise it; that is,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[76] Williams, “The Body’s Grace.” Rogers is also aware of criticisms of his own use of ‘grace’ and of Williams’ work itself.
\item[77] Rogers Jr, \textit{Sexuality and the Christian Body}, 237.
\item[78] Ibid., 237-238.
\end{footnotes}
the temptation to give a general permission for all expressions of bodily life, especially sexual ones. This is exemplified by the frequent misquoting, misunderstanding and misuse of Saint Augustine of Hippo’s precept: “Love God, and do what you like!” It is not a general permission for indiscriminate sexual licence in the name of God. Williams warns that “…we must not fall into the trap of thinking that finding sexual love is receiving grace.” There is no automatic connection between sexual love and the discovery of grace. However, he does suggest that some experiences of sexual love, even those before or outside marriage, may convey a transforming experience of the body’s grace. Williams’ use of grace clearly has two different meanings in his lecture: grace as a gift from God, and grace as an experience of personal wholeness or “giftedness” recognised as an amazing, embodied sense of “undeserved”—wondrous acceptance. The underlying and perhaps unanswerable question of interest is the relationship of the Holy Spirit to these two experiences of grace.

In addressing possible objections to Williams’ term “the body’s grace”, Rogers’ central argument that links both the body and grace is that of the importance of the “particular” in space and time. Specifically he argues that for Jesus the particular is marked by two embodied facts that were the defining criterion of Hebrew membership in the body of the corporate Israelite community: male circumcision, and birth from a Jewish mother. But the defining criterion for Christians is baptism into the body of the crucified Christ now risen and alive in the community of faith. Thus, arguing from

---

82 Rogers Jr, Sexuality and the Christian Body, 238.
83 Ibid.
Paul, Gentiles can be engrafted and adopted into the people of God, even though their males are uncircumcised. Therefore, the underlying question to be answered for Rogers is: “Are some bodily forms, like gay and lesbian relationships, irredeemable, or can God sanctify them?” He concludes that if bodily circumcision has been overcome as a religious boundary for Paul then the contemporary religious boundaries between gay/lesbian and straight Christians can be overcome. They are in fact overcome in the sacrament of baptism and this overcoming is regularly renewed in the communion of the Eucharist. Our ecclesial belonging stems from our baptism and not from what people think of our sexual orientation.

In his longer answer Rogers continues to argue by analogy, according to which “related realities generate related meanings.” Thus, for a theological analogy to function effectively its “prime analogate” must in the first instance apply to God and then, secondarily, in a derived manner, to humanity. In other words, grace must first refer to the divine, to who God is and to what God does. Grace can then be applied to the human body. In support, he quotes Williams:

The body’s grace itself only makes human sense if we have a language of grace in the first place; and that depends on having a language of creation and redemption.

Explaining and illustrating the several ways in which “body” is used in Christian theology, Rogers draws us back to the primary analogate “the body of Christ”. In whichever particular use, the body of Christ locates the place “where God has chosen to become vulnerable to human touch and taste and hurt, ‘God with us’.” It is through vulnerability that human bodies are saved and sanctified, and this, for Rogers, is spelled out in the Eucharistic fraction, the breaking of bread at the Holy Communion, in which

---

84 Ibid., 238-239.
85 Ibid., 238.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 239.
88 Ibid.
90 Rogers Jr, Sexuality and the Christian Body, 240.
91 Ibid.
is enacted the breaking open of the Trinity and the incorporation of human bodies into the Trinitarian life. He sees this best set forth by Paul in Romans 8:11, “If the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, the One who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit that dwells in you.”

He goes on to claim:

That is the body’s grace \textit{par excellence}, the transfiguration of the body by the indwelling of the Spirit who just is grace, the Spirit trinitarianly defined as the Spirit of the One who raised Christ, where Christ is defined in turn as the one who was crucified. The body’s grace is first of all what identifies the Trinity by the crucifixion and reunites it in the resurrection.\textsuperscript{92}

What Rogers is arguing is that God is moved by desire for human beings and because human beings are embodied creatures this means that our human bodies too are desired by God and we know this best through our participation in the Eucharist in which, through a reciprocal desiring, “God desires to enter into human bodies and to be desired bodily by them.”\textsuperscript{93} In Rogers’ opinion, the \textit{eros} of human desire belongs with \textit{agape} in Trinitarian love. It is not to be excluded as the body is not to be excluded. It too is to bring forth “fruits of the Spirit that satisfy only as they sanctify.”\textsuperscript{94}

Discussing the relationship of Spirit and grace in his book, \textit{After the Spirit}, Rogers refers to Aquinas’ practice of “the way of remotion, in piling up qualifications, he takes language away.”

The language of grace is inadequate to the Spirit, but…it is not indispensable. It has its uses. “Grace” marks a reserve—even a reticence about the Spirit—strictly appropriate to this life. The Spirit would blow our minds, or enrapture us; it must be passed over in silence. But the language of grace does not silence human beings; rather it practices the reserve that alone permits language \textit{in via}.\textsuperscript{95}

I understand “remotion” to be a practice of reserve—of distancing—in how we speak of significant matters. If Rogers is correct, then this may explain something of our

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 241-242.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 242.
Western theological reluctance to engage wholeheartedly with the Holy Spirit as well as our reticence in speaking of the Spirit of the living God. In this sense the use of grace veils the power of the Spirit. Such reluctance may help to explain also our theological and ecclesiological hesitancy to link the divine Spirit with human desire and love; especially when sexual union is a possible consequence.

Graham Ward

In his “The Erotics of Redemption—After Karl Barth”, Graham Ward sets out some significant parameters for the discussion of the relationship of sexuality and divinity, reminding his readers that the Greek word *eros* never occurs in the New Testament, that *agape* tends to be the preferred word in the Pauline corpus, that some of the hesitancy in the use of *eros* may be connected to the “Eastern mysticism cults in which sexuality and religion danced seductively about each other.”  

96 He draws the reader’s attention to that proper distance (Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘interval’ or *diastema*), both theological and ontological, between creation and the Creator, emphasising that Godly and human desire are dissimilar. “I do not believe orgasm and revelation are the same thing or two forms of a similar self-transcendence.”  

97 Although Ward recognises that human desire and love can share in embodying the reign of God, he maintains their difference: “Divine desire and human desire are not the same, though human eros, aright directed, can participate in the greater movement of God’s desire for the salvation of the world.”  

98

In the passage chosen as an epigraph to this chapter, Graham Ward proposes that divine embodiment urges us to understand our own human embodiment, including its sexual relationships, as a holy place in which we may know the grace of the Holy

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
Spirit. Our embodied knowledge may in fact surpass what we presently know. He argues that being in touch with our sexual desires and embodied experience, and at the same time paying attention to the Spirit, may lead us through a process of personal transformation to a new recognition of embodied grace, to a fuller humanity. In this sense, grace is always relational, coming from God’s initiative of love reaching out to humanity. In response, our relationality is toward God and toward our fellow human beings.

The purpose of divine desire is to lead us out of our present selves to our new selves created as *imago Trinitatis* and, as Ward suggests, in this our own embodiment is affirmed through God’s embodiment. We become temples of the Holy Spirit: “as holy, as graced, as transcending our understanding”. As temples of the Spirit we are embodied both personally and ecclesially, as members together of the body of Christ.

### 6.5 Belonging in the Body of Christ

The Church is first and foremost the sacramental body of Christ. Its existence as institution, as an administrative organisation, is secondary to this primary definition which is derived from Trinitarian theology, more especially the disciplines of Christology and pneumatology: the church is continually called into being and sustained in its life by the crucified and risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. As the embodied gathering of all the baptised in Christ, locally and universally, its focal points are the Trinity and Christian people, and then the liturgical, prophetic and pastoral ministries raised up by the Spirit within local communities of the church, all directed outwards toward God’s world. Thus leadership is for the building up of the body; not the body.

---


100 In support of this interpretation see Walther Zimmerli’s discussion of the Hebrew הָסֶד hesed in his OT background to the NT Greek χάρις charis, in TWNT, Vol. IX, 376-387; here 382. “The freedom with which, esp. in the earlier narrative texts, הָסֶד hesed occurs in the most varied human relationships with no special theological emphasis, suggests that in the first instance the native habitat of הָסֶד hesed is the sphere of intra-human relations.”

for the leaders. Its sacramental character is always specific, particular, never abstract or
generalised. “Every local church is a catholic community because…all other churches
are part of that church, all of them shape its identity.”102 On the other hand, the local
church is not the whole of the church in a catholic sense. The term “sacramental” is
adopted here to specify the embodied contextual shape of this concrete human ecclesial
group that is born from, and held in being by the Holy Spirit.103 David Matzko
McCarthy expresses this well:

The church is called to be a sacrament of God’s promises to the world, and that
promise is a gift of the body: God’s Incarnation, a crucified body, a bodily
resurrection, and the Spirit’s enfleshment of the church as Christ’s body.104

The other reference points of the graced body are to the human body of Jesus of
Nazareth, the crucified and resurrected body of Jesus Christ, the Eucharistic body of
Christ under the forms of sacramental bread and wine, and, not least, the body of each
baptised Christian woman or man. Within this context, the adequacy of our
ecclesiological theology will be measured by whether we can include all persons and
communities who embody honest, caring and loving relationships within the body of
Christ as a sign of the inclusive Reign of God.

One significant test of this inclusive incorporation into the ecclesial “graced
body” is the willingness of the church to offer public blessing of the sexual unions of
gay and lesbian Christians. Another would be for lesbians and gays in such same-sex
unions who have been called, selected and trained to be ordained for the office and work
of liturgical and pastoral ministry within the church. A further test will be the
willingness for the governing bodies of the churches to engage in a committed and

102 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation,
51.
103 This definition is not to detract from the notion of the church as “the mystical body of Christ” which
embraces all Christians past, present and to come. Such ecclesial terminology always retains an
embodied meaning because all its members have lived, are living, or shall live as human beings. In this
sense the body is always concrete and contextual.
104 David Matzko McCarthy, “The Relationship of Bodies: A Nuptial Hermeneutics of Same-Sex
Unions,” Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality,
continuing listening to the experience and theological reflection of gay and lesbian Christians on their own Christian lives and how the Spirit is sanctifying them. Gay and lesbian Christians ask frequently why the church cannot listen to them, their stories, their suffering and their experience of their bodies being graced by God in their committed sexual love.

The underlying issue here is the relationship of the human body to the human spirit or soul and the relationship of the integrated human person to God. One aspect of this underlying issue is that sexuality is not openly discussed in any forum in Anglo-Celtic based cultures; and so the church is merely reflecting this social reality.

Part of the problem of ecclesial belonging for lesbians and gay men is that some Christians, theologians, and leaders of Churches (both Protestant and Roman Catholic) continue to interpret homosexual identity and desire as sinful or prone to sin. Therefore the acting out of such homosexual identity and desire in embodied loving relationship and bodily communion will always be judged by them as sinful actions because they are seen as contravening the direct words of Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church. As a consequence of such negative views a question is held over the heads of gay men and lesbian women about whether they image God in the fullness of their particular human identity.105 Charles Hefling argues, in particular reference to the situation in the Anglican Communion, that what is needed is an argument that supports the possibility of gay (and by implication, lesbian) sex being holy, leaving more sexual choices than sin or celibacy.106 The question of the holiness of gay and lesbian sexual relationships is explored in the next chapter.

105 Graham, Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care among Lesbians and Gays.
Chapter 7: Holiness and the Graced Body

Our solitary journeys into spiritual wholeness as gay men and women are not private affairs: they are social and communal acts, whose purpose is the spiritual transformation of the gay community, which in turn has the challenge of helping the larger community of Christianity to which we belong to continue its own long journey of transformation.

—M.R. Ritley, Gifted by Otherness: Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church

These words of M.R. Ritley point us forward to the tasks of this final chapter in which we draw together this project on “The Graced Body”. Briefly these tasks are the linking of theological anthropology, pneumatology and Christology with the human and sexual bodies of Christians, especially gay and lesbian Christians. The way I have chosen to do this is by focussing on how holiness and grace connect in embodied practices in the Christian community.¹

However, it is important to state that my focus is on theology and not specifically on moral theology and its concerns with the formation of Christians and the necessary disciplines and practices that support Christian life.² My argument is that moral theology is dependent upon the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, Christology and pneumatology. Throughout this thesis I have worked to establish a theological

¹ Queer Theology has taken up the significance of holiness as a proper theme in the study of sexuality. The stimulating and substantial article by Jane M. Grovijahn, “Godly Sex, a Queer Quest of Holiness,” Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality 14, no. 2 (2008): 121-142. draws theologically upon the doctrines of creation and incarnation as the foundation for her argument in support of body theology and of sexuality as a sacrament (124). Grovijahn’s work witnesses to holiness in queer experience through “an embodied sexual seeking of Spirit in right relationship” as “integral to their experience of being embodied and being ‘bodies in love’” (133). However, it would have been helped by a more focussed consideration of the role of pneumatology in bringing about queer holiness.

² On this see the works of the present Bishop of Southern Ohio in the Episcopal Church, Thomas E. Breidenthal; especially Thomas E. Breidenthal, Christian Households: The sanctification of nearness (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, 1997), 92-115, esp. 96-99; Sacred Unions: A new guide to lifelong commitment (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006).
anthropology that provides a fresh valuing and integration of the human body and soul. In turn this will sustain and enable a moral theology that is inclusive of persons of same-sex orientation and practice. Unfortunately there is not space to devote full attention to the issues of moral theology that follow from a theology of the graced body.

Two recent books, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*, (2001), and *Economy of Grace*, (2005), by Kathryn Tanner exemplify the holding together of Christology and pneumatology in the shaping of human life. This balance is focused in Tanner’s discussion of the good gifts that are expressive of the grace and love of God directed toward humanity by the Son of God and the Spirit of God. Tanner describes an economy of divine grace that is characterised by “non-competitive giving”. She elucidates well: “In this non-competitive understanding of things, being ourselves as the persons we are and having all that we have for our own good should not come, then, at the expense of our being other peoples’ own in community with them.”

The goal of Tanner’s work is not the matter of a theology of human sexuality—exclusive or inclusive—but rather the application of her brief systematic theology to how the grace of the intra-Trinitarian relationships create an economy of graced human relationships and actions. She writes:

> United with Christ, we are ourselves only as we incorporate what is God’s very own within ourselves; our acts are perfected only as we act along with and under the direction of God, whose powers become a kind of principle of our own, now compound operation, through the gift of Christ’s Spirit.”

Similar to my own argument, Tanner sets her discussion of humanity always within the context of the person in community. This is where grace is embodied. In *Economy of Grace*, she explains:

> The primary gift of God, …is not held by individuals; it is a gift directly to community, …it is the gift of a particular sort of community, one without boundaries and organised so as to make common possession rights a reality, a

---

community in which common possession rights are the social priority, a community dedicated to the well-being of all, without exception.  

She makes important links and distinctions between “owning” and “giving” in Trinitarian and human relationships which have (though unstated by Tanner) in my view significance for embodied human sexual relationships. The significance is that all human beings are included as recipients of God’s grace: nothing has to be earned or achieved. One does not have to become “straight” or for that matter “gay” or “lesbian” to receive God’s gifts of gracious love and acceptance. Although referring especially to the economic needs of the poor and destitute, Tanner argues that “The community of concern to human beings as the ministers of divine benefit should be as wide as God’s gift-giving purview”. Such a view has positive implications for the graced bodies of all human beings whatever their sexual orientation and practice. The gift-giving function of the Holy Spirit is offered to us all.

However, as Tanner makes abundantly clear, “God’s gifts can be blocked by our sins and the sins of others against us; but God does not stop giving to us because we have misused and squandered the gifts that God has given us”. Tanner sets before us a doctrine of atonement for human sin that is non-punitive and that disagrees with the various atonement theories of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth and others. This relies upon a doctrine of the Trinity that is non-competitive. “Son and Spirit are themselves and all that they are for the good because they are the Son and the Spirit of the Father, and the reverse.” This is liberating for those persons, not least gays and lesbians, who have been raised under the traumatic influence of the theology of penal substitutionary atonement. She explains her view in these words. “The fact that God cannot be repaid in principle and never by us sinners does not then establish an infinite,

---

6 Ibid., 75.  
7 Tanner, *Jesus, humanity, and the Trinity*: 86.  
8 Ibid., 86-88.  
unpayable debt, one, say, that only God can pay on the cross. Jesus is not punished in our stead; God simply does not punish in that way in response to sin. …There is no such requirement of obedience as a condition of God’s good favour.”

The body of the human being and the body of the ecclesial community are graced because God, the blessed Trinity, loves us and desires to be in relationship with us. As Tanner has made abundantly clear, there is nothing that we as human beings can do or need to do to earn that overflowing love. A direct consequence of that love is that holiness and grace are divine gifts given to us—same-sex or other-sex, male or female, young or old, or whatever our ethnic origins.

As we move to consider more of the embodied character of holiness and grace, there is one recent work that attends in a very complete but different way to “the hitherto-much-neglected doctrine of the Holy Spirit”. In Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life, Robert Davis Hughes, III, rewrites the story of spiritual, mystical and ascetical theology in a way that holds together Christology and pneumatology. Hughes provides important and helpful material on Christian marriage, celibacy and religious community life and on friendship. Significantly, he affirms gay and lesbian committed partners as drawing on the same “sanctifying sacramental grace” as monogamous other-sex partners and thus can be “instruments forming Christian character” and therefore a means of “sanctifying grace”.12

In 1996 the Canadian Anglican Archbishop David Crawley13 argued that the essential gay and lesbian issue for the church was not “ordination but the affirmation of same-sex relationships. To try to decide about the ordination of gay men and lesbians

---

10 Tanner, Jesus, humanity, and the Trinity: 87.
12 Ibid., 349.
13 Archbishop of Kootenay, Metropolitan of British Columbia and Yukon in the Anglican Church of Canada in 1996.
who are, or who hope to be, in committed relationships before we have decided whether
the church can affirm such relationships at all is to try to answer the secondary question
without first answering the primary one”.¹⁴

Crawley’s view depends very much on the expectation that every bishop, priest,
deacon will be sexually chaste (in terms of being married and faithful to one spouse, or
celibate, as a single person or as a faithful vowed-member of a religious community).
However, in the contemporary ecclesial conversations about sexuality and gender,
chastity is often described in terms of sexual purity. Sexual purity is often confused
with holiness; a common assumption is that purity is equivalent to holiness, and
holiness to purity.

The New Testament scholar, William Countryman, drawing on the work of
cultural anthropologist, Mary Douglas, explains about the association of purity and dirt:

Purity is thus a system with the human being at or near its centre. Dirt is what lies
outside the system, what is perceived as not belonging in association with people of
this particular society, whether as unfamiliar, irregular, unhealthy, or otherwise
objectionable.

The enormous differences in purity systems from one culture to another show that
humanity does not automatically attach the labels “clean” and “dirty” to the same
objects or actions.

…What is consistent from one culture to another is that purity rules relate to the
boundaries of the human body, especially to its orifices. This means that whatever
passes these boundaries has particular importance for purity law: foods, waste
products, shed blood, menstrual blood, sexual emissions, sexual acts, birth, death.
On these topics purity rules issue their directives, but always in terms dictated by the
specific system accepted in the local culture and by the history of its development.¹⁵

Countryman’s insights enable us to understand much of the scriptural background to
purity and holiness. An example of this is the “Holiness Code” in the Book of Leviticus
(17–26) that contains purity regulations for the people of Israel and especially rules of
sexual behaviour and relationship. Some of these purity rules are used to define the

¹⁴ David Crawley, “A Parish Transformed,” in Ourselves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the
here 207.
¹⁵ L. William Countryman, Dirt, Greed and Sex, 12-13.
matter of holiness for Israel; particularly about how close Israel as community and as individuals might come to God. In this, purity and holiness are connected but also often confused, and never more so than in relation to sexual desire and love.

Primarily, holiness is not about “dirt” or about “sex” but is descriptive of the being and the character the divine—of God. For Israel and Judaism Yahweh is the holy One. For Christians the blessed Trinity is the holy One. Secondarily, holiness describes the character of God’s people that comes to them as gift and grace through proximity to God. Yahweh’s challenge to Israel in Leviticus 11:14 “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” has been well heard by Christians also.

The notion of the graced body that I have been proposing may help us to attend to the complex reality of what constitutes Christian living and Christian holiness in our time. Holiness is important because it is the term we use to express the presence of God in the midst of the human environment, in relation to human community, as well as in the lives of Christian people and the church. Holiness is a word often, appositely, used to describe a human being as embodying the *imago Dei*—the image of God. It refers to the drawing together of nature, grace and glory in human beings as visible icons of Christ, and in Moltmann’s terms, of the Trinity as *imago Trinitatis*.

Holiness is not easily defined.\(^\text{16}\) It is characterised by the religious notion of “separateness” in reference both to the divine and human experience of the holy.\(^\text{17}\) Anthropologically, it is characterised by “completeness”, “conformity” and “non-confusion”.\(^\text{18}\) Rudolf Otto in his *Idea of the Holy* emphasises and explores the notion of separateness and its relation to human experience of the holy.\(^\text{19}\) Otto emphasises the notion of separateness as the human response to the experience of the Holy, “the


numen”. He described this in terms of two different categories of experience; human fascination with the divine, and human experience of God as tremendous, vast and great and all-encompassing of life. Marilyn McCord Adams has dealt helpfully with Otto’s work on religious experience in her study *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* in the chapter “Purity and Defilement”. She summarises Otto’s portrayal of the Holy and human response to the experience of the same in his three categories descriptive of God as “Tremendum”—God is “a worthy object of trembling and terror”; as “Mysterium”—God is experienced at one and the same time as “utterly unique” and thus the cause of great anxiety, and yet “fascinating and enticing” and of ultimate attraction; and, as “Augustus”—which Otto uses to express the contrast between “profane, unclean, sinful” the human being and God who “is experienced as pure and holy”. Adams reminds us that Otto understood all these category descriptions of human “feeling” response to the divine as “premoral”; they do not describe human behaviour rather they refer to the creaturely reality of being human in contrast to God.

Christian tradition has been concerned with the connection between sexuality, embodied life and practices, and the Holy Spirit’s formation of individuals and communities as the body of Christ since the very earliest Christian times. The church inherited this concern for holiness and holy living from its Hebrew-Jewish roots. However, what seems important in this experience is that a human being (or a human community) has some form of tangible or intangible experience of the divine. There is a “meeting point” or at least “a point of awareness” of a liminal place or time; what Countryman so nicely describes as “being on the threshold of the holy”.

---

21 Ibid., 86-105. McCord Adams cites Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy* and my reflection and writing are informed by her analysis of his work.
22 Ibid., 88-91.
As we have observed in Chapter 1, sexual renunciation became a significant practice alongside that of heterosexual marriage for Christians during the first five centuries of the Christian era. The purpose and meaning of sexual renunciation changed during this period and became more anti-body and anti-sex (especially for the clergy); at first the free choice of sexual renunciation had been an embodied practice expressive of the reality of the resurrection life lived in the here and now with Christ and the Spirit.

Within the ecclesial community, if human persons and human community are to flourish, then wholesome practices and disciplines of holy living need to be learned over the course of a lifetime in order to set the human being free for growth and the enactment of God’s purposes of justice, love and peace in the world. Holiness is not to be a narrowing of human life and vision but an enlarging but it may also involve the leaving behind of certain embodied practices, as the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians makes abundantly plain in responding to possible instances of Christians continuing to practice what he terms “licentiousness” and “impurity” with the emphatic message: “That is not the way you learned Christ!” (Eph. 4:17–20). Our practices of “holy living and holy dying” look toward the twofold reality of Christian life: the resurrection life begun and embodied now, and the resurrection of the body in the coming reign of God. Theologically this means that creation, redemption and sanctification point us towards God’s promised fulfilment in the reign of God. But in no way is this focus to be interpreted as “pie in the sky when you die”. Rather, it is the impetus for a fully engaged life in the present.

Human communities, especially religious communities, have developed embodied responses to their experiences of the Holy. Such holy disciplines or ascetic

---

26 Ibid. Contrast Brown’s assessment in Chapter 1, 5-32, with his Epilogue, 428–447.
27 Titles of two books by the Anglican divine, the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Connor and Down, Ireland; d. 1667.
28 As Jürgen Moltmann has proposed; see Moltmann, The Coming of God.
practices are believed to facilitate the presence of the Holy. Some theologians have argued that the vowed commitments of marriage and monastic or religious community life are such ascetic disciplines. “In a marital or monastic community, the parties commit themselves to practicing faith, hope, and charity in a form of life that will require plenty of exercise.” The purpose of ascetic discipline is to enhance the flourishing of human persons, of Christian households, and of the wider church community as well as to enable their service to the wider world. We look now at three relational practices of embodied love: marriage, celibacy and friendship. These three help us to bring together embodied holiness and grace—the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

7.1 Marriage

Rowan Williams states that one reason why the church publicly blesses sexual unions is so that the persons involved may have the gift of time to allow their relationship to be nurtured into maturity. There is space and time for the Holy Spirit to act and for the blessed persons to respond to each other and to God. The gift of the Spirit or, to use the more impersonal term, grace, is marked by freedom and faithfulness. Marriage is thus properly described as the sacrament of faithfulness. There are no bonds or laws that limit the openness of the two persons to each other. It is to be unconditional. The goal is mutual transformation. Williams qualifies this by arguing that it would be unreal—even silly—to expect that “every sexual partnership must conform to the pattern of commitment or else have the nature of sin and nothing

29 Traditionally Christian ascetic disciplines have been the regular practice of prayer (both the public liturgy of Eucharist and Daily Office and private prayer), periods of fasting, almsgiving and the compassionate service of others, especially the “poor”. There has also been the contemplative practice of space and time for silence and meditation.


He suggests that the experience of such graced transitoriness may lead to a desire for “the fuller, longer exploration of the body’s grace that faithfulness offers”. Williams understands that vulnerability and risk are ever-present possibilities in intimate human relationships, whether married or unmarried, heterosexual or homosexual, short term or long term.

Many lesbians and gays desire to have their loving sexual union ecclesially blessed in the presence of their friends and family; some desire this blessing to be recognised by church and the State as “a marriage” in much the same way that heterosexual unions are. I understand the blessing of human sexual unions to mean that the church will recognise, protect and celebrate such unions because they are characterised by loyalty, fidelity and holiness and an unconditional desire and will of the persons to commit themselves to each other for life. This is what the church calls the sacrament of marriage. The sacrament may begin in the church but it is lived out in the world in the ordinary lives of the human beings involved in it. It is not a “one-off” liturgical moment in time but a life-long “liturgy” of committed sharing together in time and place of the joys and sorrows, the successes and adversities of human life and love. Such loving unions are public and deeply personal commitments that can be seen to embody Christ and the Holy Spirit. To hold to such an expectation is more than we currently experience in reality from many opposite-sex unions that have been blessed by the church in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Theologically, in the Western church (Roman Catholic and Anglican particularly), the celebrants of the sacrament of marriage have been the man and woman desiring to be married; not the officiating priest or minister. In my view, the same understanding should apply to the blessing of same-sex unions. The celebrants of the marriage will be a man and a man or a woman and a woman. The arguments made in the previous chapter by Gerard Loughlin about

---

33 Ibid., 315-316.
34 Ibid., 316.
difference and communion are particularly helpful in affirming the possibility of the church blessing these same-sex unions.

In support of the blessing of sexual unions, an Episcopal priest in the USA, Ellen T. Charry, proposes that the one Marriage Service should be available for all couples regardless of sexual orientation. In her view “The homosexuality debate is not about individual rights, or Christian hospitality, or the goodness of the body, or friendship, or committed relationships, or pastoral care, or Scripture. It is finally about the responsibility of the church to the culture at this moment in time. The world is watching.” What I understand her to be advocating is that the “world” needs models of visible holiness for human relationships and this is something the church can provide if it chooses.

Importantly, Charry argues for a consistent use of baptismal identity as the determining criteria for membership of the body of Christ. The sacramental identity conferred in Christian baptism comes from Christology. Our being baptised into Christ, implies that Christians have a responsibility for other human beings and for all creation—the cosmos. This is the context within which she applies the theological theme of holiness within the Christian life. One consequence of this for her is that the sexual lives of all human beings have a public not just a personal character. This is especially true for Christians whose lives are always comprehended as set within community of the body of Christ. She remarks that the Jewish rabbis, St Paul the Apostle and the doctors of the church understood the necessity for the integration of both public and individual elements of sexual life. Charry claims that Augustine of Hippo, in his On the Good of Marriage, understood the need for the church to help order society in a world that was collapsing. Thus, marriage was added to celibacy as

the embodied practice that enabled the living of an ordered and holy life. Embodied holiness came to include “orderly sex, the proper management of the affections, and the proper nurture of children”.

Another problem is that in Chary’s view the church is responsible for the separation of homosexuality and heterosexuality by refusing marriage rites to homosexuals. Gay and lesbian clergy suffer especially in this because they are excluded from the sacrament of marriage by the church because of the rejection by many within the church of homosexual relationships as a permissible Christian practice. Part of the mythology surrounding lesbians and gays is that they tend to be seen as promiscuous and totally focused on physical sexual activity at the expense of a broader and more balanced life (which heterosexuals are presumed to have!). The clergy, it is argued, must be seen to be holy, therefore, marriage or celibacy (as single persons or in religious community life) are the only choices for them. However, it is certain that many clergy in different parts of the Anglican Communion are quietly living in committed and holy relationships and getting on with their priestly ministry and human lives, even if many people are surprised when they make the discovery that a gay or lesbian person is partnered to a priest. Peter Sherlock tells of this in his account “On Being a ‘Gay Anglican’”.

Chary’s criticism is that the church is attempting now in the liturgical blessing of same-sex unions to offer gay and lesbian Christians something that would privilege them above heterosexual Christians, and that this is in fact a second-rate option. In her view, it is second-rate because what gay and lesbian Christians desire (at least those who wish to be married) is the same marriage service as heterosexual Christians. Her

proposal is that the church should be offering all Christian people “who vow to live in loving monogamous relationship” (opposite-sex or same-sex) the sanctification of their relationships through the use of the one Marriage Service.  

Marilyn McCord Adams comes to a similar conclusion, calling on the Anglican Church to “reverse its so-called ‘teaching’ that heterosexual marriage or celibacy are the only routes to holy living, and—in consultation with gay and lesbian Christians—authorise the blessing of their partnerships”.  

She advocates that the celebration of committed same-sex partnerships by the church, especially those of bishops, priests and deacons, would enable the church to “make good on her obligation to publicise godly models for holy living for gay and lesbian persons not called to a single or celibate life”.  

There are at least two difficulties with Charry’s and Adams’ proposals—which are not exactly the same, even though they do promote the inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the church. First, in choosing the marriage service (for example, as in the BCP of 1662 or APBA of 1995) a debate may well arise among the partners involved concerning the definition of marriage. For example (whether same or other-sex), are we entering into this committed relationship as equals in each other’s sight? The modern Anglican marriage services treat the partners (at present meaning a man and a woman) as equals. In so doing, they encourage the partners entering into the marriage to work-through and define what each is bringing to the partnership—to set forth their

41 Marilyn McCord Adams, “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life,” Theology CIX, no. 850 (July/August, 2006): 243-251; here 248.  
42 Ibid.: 248.  
43 BCP is the acronym for the various editions of The Book Of Common Prayer, originally in the Church of England and then transported to the various British colonies. The title remains in use in many parts of the present Anglican Communion. APBA is the acronym for A Prayer Book for Australia.  
44 The Book of Common Prayer 1662, The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in the questions of Consent to the woman and in the marriage Vow itself the use of the word “obey” has been understood to support the patriarchal foundations of Christian marriage; and that this is no longer appropriate in our contemporary Western society. However, it is also clear that each partner is treated in the service as a unique “other”—and is therefore their own free person—in both the Consents and the Vows.
expectations clearly with each other. However, the actual marriage services do not solve this challenge for them. Rather, it blesses the relationship and the commitment in public. Hence, it is important that their marriage is blessed by a service that makes sense to them.

Second, although some gay and lesbian Christians are asking for the traditional sacramental marriage rites in the name of equality, others are looking for something quite different that is free of the patriarchal heritage that seems to come with the ecclesial blessing of most opposite-sex unions. Hence, not all gay and lesbian Christians, or even some “straight” Christians, will welcome them.

Contrary to Charry, this thesis argues that the contemporary debate about human sexuality, and particularly about the inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians in the church, is fundamentally about the goodness of the human body and its relationship to the Holy Spirit. I argue this because I observe that both heterosexuals and homosexuals are plagued by our ecclesial and cultural dualistic inheritance that interprets the body and sexuality as bad, or at least suspect. Theologically this is wrong because it refuses to receive the best of our Christian theological tradition that proclaims the wholeness and holiness of the body because created, redeemed and sanctified by God.

Sarah Coakley chooses, contra Ellen Charry, not to promote the terminology of marriage for gay and lesbian unions.45 Rather she advocates “lifelong vows of fidelity” as a more neutral and helpful term and “a better expression theologically”.46 She locates her discussion of the current ecclesial conflict over homosexuality and clerical celibacy within the broader context of the place of “the workings and siftings of ‘desire’

---

45 For an Australian view against the use of the term “marriage” for same-sex unions, see Gaden, A Vision of Wholeness. Gaden argued that there was a symbolic confusion to use marriage for homosexual unions because, in his view, marriage referred properly to the union of a man and a woman. However, he was not against same-sex unions being blessed as Christian committed partnerships.

and our culture’s loss of desire for God”.\textsuperscript{47} She writes: “Seen thus, and theologically, the crisis is about the failure, in this Web-induced culture of instantly commodified desire, to submit all our desires to the test of divine longing”.\textsuperscript{48} It is not just the desires of gay and lesbian Christians that are in crisis but the desires of all Christians, especially those in the affluent parts of the world. In moving us beyond the strictures of what she terms “libertarianism and repression”, Coakley offers us all a new vision of freedom determined by a “certain (freely chosen) ascetic narrowing of choice, fuelled finally by prioritising the love of God”.\textsuperscript{49} Here we are all faced with how we discern and choose, as members of the graced body, one desire from another desire—sexual or economic or something else.

7.2 \textit{Celibacy}

The embodiment of desire and delight can take many forms for human beings in general and for Christians in particular. Holy matrimony and Profession in Vows in religious community life—often called “monasticism”—embody the nuptial mystery of the Church as the bride of Christ.\textsuperscript{50} There is a sense of a complementary relationship between these two states of life; both involve κοινωνία \textit{koinōnia} (partnership) and κενοσία \textit{kenōsis} (self-giving) that leads to transformation. Eugene Rogers, in his chapter on “The holiness of the people of God”, observes that opposite-sex or same-sex persons, whether in marriage and monasticism, benefit from the time for transformation that comes with commitment to one of these forms of life.\textsuperscript{51} At the same time, this transformation draws together \textit{eros} and \textit{agape} and unites them through the Spirit: on the one hand, through the falling in love with God or another human being (\textit{eros}); on the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 336.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 336-337.
\textsuperscript{50} See Evdokimov, \textit{The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of Orthodox Tradition}. See also McCarthy, “The Relationship of Bodies: A Nuptial Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Unions,” 96-112.
\textsuperscript{51} Rogers Jr, \textit{Sexuality and the Christian Body}, 83.
other hand, through the experience of nearness in the person of the brother or sister or neighbour (agape).  

Celibacy by definition refers to the “unmarried state”; sometimes described as the “single state”. Within the Catholic Church, celibacy has been imposed, almost universally, on deacons, priests and bishops since the early twelfth century whereas in the Anglican and other churches it has been and remains a choice. From a theological perspective, celibacy is a charism and therefore cannot by definition be forced on every, or any, “single” Christian. What the notion of charism invokes is God’s free gift of grace, of the Holy Spirit resting freely where it wills and imparting all that is necessary for a particular form of Christian life. The imposition of compulsory celibacy as an embodied form of life raises considerable theological difficulties about the freedom of the Holy Spirit to give the necessary grace for the life chosen, as well as questions of human freedom and Christian vocation. These difficulties are not easily resolved. 

One particular difficulty is the expectation that the choice between married or single life is the only choice for Christians other than the vowed religious community life. Gareth Moore emphasises the transforming opportunity of celibate Christian community; nevertheless, he reminds us that the celibate vocation, in community or individually, is not for everyone—gay, lesbian or straight. It is wrong to assume that single gay or lesbian Christians will find happiness and fulfilment in religious community life without possessing a specific vocation. Nevertheless, as Moore observes:

There is clearly a middle way between the stark alternatives of marriage and desiccation that Rogers proposes: Christian celibacy, which is not the suppression of sexual desire but its transformation, a self-giving, not to one person but to a community. Rogers himself continually stresses the importance of celibacy. It is a

---

52 Ibid. See also Breidenthal, Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness.  
vital preliminary to his thesis, however, to argue that Christian conservatives should not claim that all gays and lesbians have a vocation to celibacy.\footnote{Ibid.: 115.}

Moore’s critique directs us to Roger’s discussion of how the sexual desires of Christians can be embodied. Rightly, Rogers is concerned that the renunciation of human desire, whether homosexual or heterosexual, can be ultimately destructive of a person’s humanity; it “confuses human beings with—desiccates them into—angels”.\footnote{Rogers Jr, \emph{Sexuality and the Christian Body}, 232.} Roger’s insight is that the removal of desire, especially fleshly, sexual, bodily desire in any human person leaves God with “no hook in the flesh” by which to bring about their redemption.\footnote{Ibid.} So he is not proposing the removal of embodied desires from the celibate or from any one. He wants rather the transfiguration or transformation of desire. “For that transformation to take place even the celibate must accept his or her desire as a gift from God, good in itself, and not a natural disorder, worthy of return to God and neighbour.”\footnote{Ibid., 233.} What Rogers perceives as necessary for all Christians, especially gay and lesbian Christians, is a proper ascetic practice that allows their bodies to express the covenanted love that is the fruit of divine desire. He recognises the place of the Spirit in this holy task:

Under conditions of holiness, under the tutelage and rule, that is, of the Spirit gathering human beings into the love of the Father and the Son, the love of a committed sexual partner for the other can express the love of God for the partner, since God does love us with that love and has inscribed that love in us as God’s image, the image of the marriage of God and the human being in the Son.\footnote{Ibid.}

Sister Sandra Schneiders, theologian, biblical scholar and a writer on the theology of Religious Community Life, argues that the vow of embodied chastity—what she terms “consecrated celibacy”—is the central and ruling element for those persons who undertake this radical commitment. She describes it thus, making an analogy between sexual abstinence for the celibate and sexual faithfulness in marriage:

\footnote{Ibid., 233.}
Consecrated celibacy carries the obligation of sexually abstinent chastity, but this is the consequence, the implication, of the exclusive love of Jesus Christ that is expressed in the choice to remain unmarried for the sake of the Reign of God. It is analogous to the role of sexual fidelity in monogamous marriage. Marriage is not about not having sex with anyone but one’s spouse, but the latter is a symbol of the former, a perceptible living of the exclusive love relationship with one’s spouse, which is what marriage is about. Similarly, Religious Life is not about not having sex, but genital abstinence expressive of the lived choice not to engage in any other relationship as the primary commitment of one’s life is the symbol of the immediate and total self-gift in love to Christ, which is what Religious Life is about.\(^\text{59}\)

Her theological foundation for this view is a doctrine of creation that describes human beings as *imago Dei*. Schneiders explains this likeness to God as residing in the human being’s “spiritual nature” which is focused particularly on human intellect, will and capacity to transcend oneself.

…the specific dignity of the human being among all God’s creatures lies in the human capacity for self-transcendence, for reaching beyond oneself toward the other and, finally, toward the ultimate Other who is God, not in order to possess but in order to give oneself in love. The human being is creation become conscious and therefore relational.\(^\text{60}\)

In her understanding, therefore, human beings who engage themselves in the radically challenging enterprise of religious community life are not entering into a non-relational form of Christian life, anything but that. It is just that the embodied form of relationality is different and directed primarily toward God. And, as Schneiders emphasises, the vow of consecrated celibacy is absolute.\(^\text{61}\) She alludes to the fact that in the turmoil and change that has marked religious community life since the transformations initiated by the second Vatican Council (1962–1965) there have been various proposals to permit Religious brothers and sisters to live under vows but also to engage in a faithful same-sex or other-sex sexual partnership. Such an alternate

---


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 126-127.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 129.
practice, in Schneiders’ view, would neither be legitimate monogamous marriage nor consecrated celibacy.\textsuperscript{62}

The English Roman Catholic theologian Laurence Paul Hemming cautions against a recent trend in Catholic sexual ethics which “has attempted to stabilise and prioritise the family over society”\textsuperscript{63} and which, following the lead of Pope John Paul II, promotes marriage and celibacy as the only God-given forms of relational life for Christians.\textsuperscript{64} Hemming argues that marriage and celibacy have never been the only options for Christian men and women. He sets out various communal examples of how Christians have lived together “as cities-in-miniature: sometimes sexually mixed\textsuperscript{65} (the extended family above all), shared homes, hospitals, schools, universities, etc., and some single-sex (schools, priories, nunneries, monasteries, beguinages—the list is long and complex)”.\textsuperscript{66} The critical point is that such places are communal “entities in which a greater than singular life can be lived for a variety of purposes (under God), even if this life is not sexual”.\textsuperscript{67} Gerard Loughlin makes a similar observation, developing further his work on difference and communion and embodied love. He describes the difference between the Trinity and creation as “endlessly articulated in God’s world”; noting the infinite variety of how these articulations are manifested “in the practices of the church” that he creatively refers to as “ceaseless experiments in Christic practices or performances”.\textsuperscript{68} He refers to the celibacy of religious community life as one illustration of embodied performance.\textsuperscript{69}

As mentioned at the beginning of the discussion on marriage, Rowan Williams has frequently highlighted the significance of time in committed human relationships.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Hemming, “The Undoing of Sex,” 59-72; here 63.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.: 64-65.
\textsuperscript{65} Hemming does not specify whether he means men and women and/or homosexual and heterosexual.
\textsuperscript{66} Hemming, “The Undoing of Sex,” 64-65.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{68} Loughlin, “Refiguring Masculinity in Christ,” 405-414; here 412.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 412.
His advice is equally important for those men and women committed to the different intimacy and struggles of celibate religious community life and who consecrate their lives to God in the Solemn Vows of monastic or religious community life.\textsuperscript{70}

When we bless sexual unions, we give them life, a reality not dependent on the contingent thoughts and feelings of the people involved; but we do this so that they may have a certain freedom to “take time” to mature and become as profoundly nurturing as they can. …In other words, I believe that the promise of faithfulness, the giving of unlimited time to each other, remains central for understanding the full “resourcefulness” and grace of sexual union. I simply don’t think we would grasp all that was involved in the mutual transformation of sexually linked persons without the reality of unconditional public commitments: more perilous, more demanding, more promising.\textsuperscript{71}

Here are wise and helpful words for the married and the celibate, for all human beings.

7.3 \textit{Friendship}

Alongside marriage and celibacy as forms of Christian life, there is another, somewhat different, relationship in which human beings delight. This is the relationship of friendship.\textsuperscript{72} Similarly to Jürgen Moltmann, Archbishop Peter Carnley draws our attention to the two types of friendship depicted in Holy Scripture: first, that between God and particular human beings (both Abraham and Moses are each referred to as the friend of God), and second, that between other human beings. Carnley mentions the significant and celebrated same-gender friendships between Ruth and

\textsuperscript{70} Williams, “Eugene F. Roger’s Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God,” 82-85, here 85.

\textsuperscript{71} Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 315.

Naomi and David and Jonathan. Naturally, Carnley and other Christian writers on friendship move on to consider Jesus’ witness to friendship. Eugene Rogers remarks:

Jesus refrained from making public commitments of marriage or celibacy, retaining a freedom for the ultimate donation of his body in a sign of embodied reconciliation: “This is my body given for you”.

Jesus did make a powerful statement about friendship, as we find in John 15:15: “I have called you friends.” But more than this, the New Testament witnesses to his friendships in the accounts of his relations with the sisters Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus, as well as with his closer companions within the band of the Twelve disciples. In using such references we need to be careful to avoid the anachronism of reading our contemporary understandings of friendship back into the time of Jesus and the cultural environment of the first Christians.

Nancy Elizabeth Bedford provides a helpful insight in the following observation about friendship (the Greek word is *philia*) in the ancient Mediterranean classical world:

One of the characteristics of such *philia*, both in classical and in New Testament understandings, is its material component: friendship is a material practice that is reflected in the way we live; in other words, it requires a commitment that has concrete and practical consequences. This element is too easily forgotten in theological reflection if we consider friendship in the abstract or if we paint a concrete individualized picture of Jesus the Friend.

Friendship was clearly a material practice that engaged the graced body communally and personally. Aelred of Rievaulx, the eleventh century Cistercian monk in Yorkshire, wrote of spiritual friendship and described the embodied possibilities and necessary boundaries involved in such friendships within monastic community. He wrote at a...
time when friendship was a valued personal and political relationship in European society. Aelred’s text on “Spiritual friendship” reminds us not to lose sight of the distinction between the sensual or sensuous and the sexual in relationships, or that between intimate affection and passionate love.\(^{79}\) The monks at Rievaulx were permitted to hold hands but not to engage in genital activity; but for them and for Aelred, this freedom and limit was possible (permissible) because their hearts and lives were engaged in the love of God.\(^{80}\) Perceptively, Elizabeth Stuart remarks:

Aelred seems to have realised that our sexuality is the seat of our relationality, the part of ourselves which enables us to relate to the rest of the world. It determines how we relate to God, friends, lovers, art, animals, nature and so on. Therefore, to declare someone’s sexuality to be disordered is to declare all their relationships disordered. It is to say that he or she does not bear the image of God and to condemn them to loneliness, isolation and despair, to deprive them of life. Aelred believed that his sexuality had led him to God—it was not disordered. A disordered sexuality is one that manifests itself in the exploitation and abuse of others and heterosexual people are equally likely to manifest such disordered behaviour as gay and lesbian people.\(^{81}\)

The relationship of friendship was nothing casual for Aelred and his monks nor for the people of his era. In the following century it is possible to discern its significant embodied “material” character in English society through archaeological and literary remains.

The gay rights activist and British historian Alan Bray (1948–2001) explored and documented the relation of friendship from the twelfth century CE until early modern times. He identified the significant change in the meaning and practice of friendship during this period evidencing its movement from a public relation of kinship

---

\(^{79}\) Allen, ed., The New Penguin English Dictionary. Sensual refers to the gratification of the senses or preoccupation with the same, sometimes as opposed to the intellect or spirit. Sensuous refers similarly to gratification of or appeal to the five senses. Its use tends to be more neutral than sensual that sometimes suggests self-indulgence, sexual desire and pleasure.


to a private and personal relationship. His research examined tomb memorials in Turkey and England which identified the relationship of “sworn” or “wedded brothers or sisters” as a particular form of embodied friendship. Such relationships were set within a wider social and ecclesial frame of reference than we understand today. Friendship was once one of the available forms of kinship. Bray was especially critical of the current practice of linking friendship to sexuality within a narrow personal framework.

The inability to conceive of relationships in other than sexual terms says something of contemporary poverty; or to put the matter more precisely, the effect of shaping concern with sexuality is precisely to obscure the wider frame.

This wider frame of reference includes the practice of the virtue of loyalty and fidelity as well as the freedom to engage in the sensual intimacy of touch without the expectation or demand of sexual expression. A powerful contemporary example of this can be found in the Melanesian societies of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands where male friends can be observed regularly walking or sitting holding hands in friendship. As Bishop Terry Brown witnesses, Melanesian culture abounds with visible “multiple, deep and affectionate same-sex relationships and friendships” that extend across generational, familial, status, language and sexual orientation distinctions.

In line with Rowan Williams’ advocacy for the security of time and space in sexual relationship, friendship also needs time and place. In contrast to marriage or religious community life it knows fewer boundaries. It is available for all, whether single, married, divorced, or in religious community life or similar communal

---


83 Ibid., 316–318.

84 Ibid., 6.

85 Terry Brown, ed., *Other Voices, Other Worlds* (London: Darton Longman and Todd Ltd, 2006), 3. Brown remarks that such “same-sex friendships (usually without but occasionally with sexual intimacy) are developed beyond anything imaginable in contemporary western culture”.

231
commitment. It is freely there waiting to happen for heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transgendered persons. Friendship is an example of the Holy Spirit blowing where it wills, breaking boundaries, establishing fresh forms of relationship, giving hope, reaching out with new life across previously exclusive or fear-ridden barriers. Andrew Cameron criticises Rowan Williams' failure to be totally comprehensive in his discussion of sexuality. For Cameron, this lack of comprehensiveness is signalled by Williams' omission of an account of “the many ways in which the body may heal and enlarge the life of others through friendship”. At first reading it seems a significant omission on Williams’ part. However, the telling reason why Williams omitted a discussion or even mention of friendship may be because of his sensitivity towards his audience of members and guests of the London Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. The term friendship carries both weight and freight in the gay and lesbian community. One such piece of freight is that “friendship” within the lesbian and gay community is a euphemism for a sexual relationship—a “sexual friendship”. It is strange that Cameron is so critical of Williams for his sensitivity about this matter.

Jeffrey John, an Anglican priest and Dean of St Albans Abbey, believes that we make a moral mistake if we equate friendship and same-sex relationships. This is not to deny the significant place that friendships play in both heterosexual marriage and gay and lesbian partnerships. He argues that “in Christian doctrine a marriage, even considered apart from procreation, is far more than friendship, and the term friendship is

---

87 Hughes III, *Beloved Dust*, 111-14; 290-94; 342-55. Hughes makes very creative use of the ideas of Simone Weil on friendship, especially in regard to her recognition of the important distinction of “difference” and “otherness” of the friend. Simone Weil, *Waiting on God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 205; ibid; ibid. “Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is as necessary to him as food.” (See Hughes, *Beloved Dust*, for other specific references to Weil).
90 Cameron, “Desire and Grace,” 159.
wholly inadequate to cover what marriage and sexual commitment imply theologically”. 91

John lays out a strong case for monogamy for all Christian sexual unions, be they heterosexual marriages or covenanted same-sex partnerships.

According to John, friendship may be part of such relationships but it does not describe the sexual component of them.

John discusses the approach to relationship in the work of the gay and lesbian theologians, Elizabeth Stuart and the late Michael Vasey. Stuart argues for friendship as the preferred term for all lesbian and gay sexual relationships. She rejects the use of marriage and monogamy for lesbians and gays because of the associations these terms have with the enslavement of women in institutionalised patriarchy. 92

Her further point is “that acts of physical intimacy have no inherent meaning”. 93 “Consent, honesty and non-exploitation” are the necessary criteria for determining the worth of any sexual act. John disagrees because he believes that sexual expression, be it same-sex or opposite-sex, cannot be divorced from the wholeness and integrity of the human person which implies the context of the Christian community—the ecclesia—to which a Christian belongs. 94

Vasey, according to John, rejects marriage as a model for gay partnerships, arguing that there are no set patterns or “blue-prints” that should be imposed upon Christian or non-Christian gay relationships. 95 John sees both these theologians avoiding the essential issue facing same-sex preferring Christians in their partnerships i.e., what is distinctively Christian about their relationships. He names four understandings from the Christian tradition that make a difference in such relationships:

---

93 John, Permanent, Faithful, Stable, 34-35.
94 Ibid., 30, 37-38.
- knowledge that sex is holy;
- sexual integrity requires discipline;
- an ethical structure, and
- wise discernment enables emotional and sexual health.\(^{96}\)

Against John’s argument, Peter Carnley argues that the prior task in all discussions on friendship and same-sex relationships is “to pause and reflect and to re-frame the understanding of homosexual relationships themselves within parameters set by the category of friendship”.\(^{97}\)

Cameron’s own point is somewhat similar to John’s claim that integrity and wholeness are essential attributes of human personality. Personal human identity should not be reduced to sexual identity alone; for embodied relationality extends beyond the sexual to the ecclesial and to other areas of life. In desiring to locate his critique of Williams’ work on desire and grace within the framework of the New Testament, Cameron nicely holds together the eschatological goal of all Christian relationships in the coming reign of Christ when we shall “all participate as ‘bride’ (whether brother or sister) of Christ”.\(^{98}\) “It is as if all are celibate, yet all are married to the Lamb, and intimate with each other through intimacy with him.”\(^{99}\)

The grace of this intimacy is love and love is known in both wholesome and broken relationships that experience the depths of pain and joy. Countryman observes:

…all expressions of love are interrelated. Friendship is a passionate expression that does not require sexual expression. On the other hand, a rich and enduring sexual partnership probably does require friendship as an element in it.\(^{100}\)

---

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 37-38.

\(^{97}\) Carnley, “Faithfulness in Fellowship,” 138.


\(^{99}\) Ibid.

7.4 **Grace embodied**

Grace is embodied in human and Christian lives that are lived in freedom and love. It does not matter whether such persons are opposite-sex or same-sex preferring persons. What matters is that they are open to the life enhancing and transforming love of the Trinity.\(^{101}\) To be open in freedom and love to God’s grace requires commitment and wisdom. This in turn is sourced from a theological vision of a humanity that is fully alive in the totality and wholeness of its being and that understands its sexuality and its desire for loving sexual union as gifts from God.

Mark Jordan believes that love is the only real criterion or rule for discerning what is appropriate in the Christian moral tradition. Leaping off from St Paul’s celebrated eulogy in praise of love in 1 Cor 13, he writes that without love, moral rules are nothing, in fact “not moral teaching at all”; and conversely, new and “different words spoken out of newly discerning love can be entirely continuous with earlier moral teaching”.\(^{102}\) This is a helpful insight as we seek to move beyond the impasse within the churches regarding human sexuality.

Jordan observes that different contexts mean there is always the possibility of “misunderstanding, misapplication or misdirection”.\(^{103}\) In *The Invention of Sodomy*, he stands against all essentialisms in theological anthropology. Churches and theologians have too easily accepted “un-Christian notions about gender differentiation and reproduction”.\(^{104}\) The production of progeny, the care and raising of children, the respect and care of children for their parents is not the focus of the Christian’s life or that of the Christian community—or even the Christian family; rather the focus is on the

\(^{101}\) In her two recent books, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, and *Economy of Grace*, Kathryn Tanner exemplifies the holding together of Christology and pneumatology in the shaping of human life. This is focused in her discussion of the good gifts that are directed by the Trinity to humanity and which are expressive of the grace of God.


\(^{103}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 174.
creation of spiritual offspring who are embodied into the crucified and risen Christ in and through their baptism. He argues that such things are not bodily but spiritual matters.

Jordan employs the term “unbiological” to describe Christian love and notes the “painstaking care” that marked the first attempts at Trinitarian theology in distinguishing body from spirit in this matter. The implication is that we should be engaging in the same quality of painstaking discernment now. His point is that Christians should be mostly concerned with discerning what bodies require for “wholeness” rather than reproductive functions of the body.

This conclusion applies not simply to personal bodies but also ecclesial bodies—local and national and international church communities for whom wholeness, wholesomeness and holiness are important issues. It is patently clear that Jordan is deeply concerned for the healing, wholeness and upholding of gay and lesbian bodies within the body of Christ as well as opposite-sex bodies.

Jordan goes on to contend that these unbiological relationships of Christian love are not disembodied. Rather they are embodied within a different context; the context of the present body of Christ through the κοινωνία—the partnership and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they are embodied ecclesiologically.

Two important outcomes arise from this discussion. The first is Jordan’s weaving together of the Christological, the pneumatological and the ecclesiological. The second is that there are echoes here of Eugene Rogers’ similar focus on the unbiological character of adoption in baptism in which belonging and relationship are conferred as a Trinitarian gift through the action of the Spirit.

---

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
The Holy Spirit is concerned in this matter with the overcoming of everything that divides woman from man, that empowers man over woman; everything that removes equality and mutuality from human and therefore Christian intimacy. In fact, to recast Jordan, Christians ought to pray to the Spirit to liberate themselves from their bondage to “the tyranny of gender hierarchies”. Christian bodies, according to him, need “healing and embracing”.\(^{108}\) This is what leads to wholeness. In the Synoptic Gospels, “Jesus heals by touch, by graphically recounted intimacy, the contact of body with body. In these stories, rather than in scraps of pagan morals, the Christian should find indications for what the body is”.\(^{109}\)

James Alison, in his liberating book, *Broken Hearts and New Creations: Intimations of a Great Reversal*, reinterprets the story of another body—the body of Jesus. He sets before his readers the great Johannine story of Jesus as the shepherd and the gate (John 10:1–10, and cf. 11–18), who in “going to his Father” is “going to Death”.\(^{110}\) In this Jesus occupies “the space of shame and wrath” and converts it into “a pasture. ...where we can be nourished, and find wholeness, health and story to live by”.\(^{111}\) Alison understands in this story, the gift of the Holy Spirit breaking down the shame and toxicity—“the wrath” that has for so long “run” lives of gay and lesbian people. This is a powerful statement of the resurrection and redemption specific to lesbians and gays. He describes this new space where there is nothing to lose because one’s life belongs to another and therefore, this new space allows one to “develop a tender regard for those who are like one, and a tender regard leads to a creative imagination, and a playful generosity of heart”.\(^{112}\) With this understanding, human


\(^{109}\) Ibid.


\(^{111}\) Ibid., 52. Alison’s suggestion about story links in with Stanley Hauerwas’ similar suggestion first made in 1998 and mentioned earlier in Chapter 4 Cf. Hauerwas, “Virtue, Description, and Friendship,” 289-305.

\(^{112}\) Alison, *Broken Hearts*, 52.
beings no longer need to occupy the place of wrath. Alison believes that the Holy Spirit is beginning to draw forth from the gay and lesbian community “stories that are irrefutably Christian; where Jesus has made us not ashamed and not frightened of occupying the space of shame”. 113 This is a place in which the graced body can truly be liberated and loved, where the body and sexual love may be seen and heard as the place of holiness—thus, near to the heart of the Trinity.

The grace of ecclesial “belonging” received in baptism does not confer automatic rights to the rite of blessing of relationships—in marriages, civil unions or some other form of committed sexual friendship. No Christian persons enjoy automatic rights to such sacramental blessing whatever their sexual identity may be. Nor do any Christians enjoy automatic rights to be ordained to the sacramental ministry of liturgical and pastoral ministry. In theory at least, if not in practice, some form of recognised “holy life” is supposed as the foundation. What many same-sex preferring Christians are seeking is an order of holiness that will strengthen not just their sexual union but also the whole of their committed relational living. Not all of them are inclined towards taking over the traditional or even contemporary forms of heterosexual marriage, or, for that matter, engaging in the recently legislated civil unions. What more can be done for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons who desire the Church to embrace them rather than exclude and expel them?

A new and generous act of acceptance by the Church is required that will tangibly convince the excluded same-sex preferring persons that their physical bodies and their experiences of loving sexual relationship are graced by the Spirit. One issue here may be the relationship between the graced body and Christian holiness. Some Christians might suggest that there can be no link between same-sex oriented or practicing persons and holy living; that anything to do with same-sex practice cannot be

113 Ibid.
holy. On the other hand, what might holiness look like in embodied relationships for same-sex preferring persons? Would it be formed and shaped differently to the holiness of other-sex preferring Christians? In fact as we listen to and tell the stories of the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons who are seeking to live the gospel of Christ, we discern there hints and traces of the presence of holiness, of the Spirit resting on countless unexpected Christians and other human beings, as Hauerwas, Williams, Rogers, Alison and others have argued. The goal is being willing and able to include us with the so-called “normal” heterosexual Christians as equal members of the graced body that is the holy Church of God.

On the other hand, there is much human sexual activity that is unlovely, destructive, sinful, wicked and “disgraceful”, and this ought not to be blessed. This is true for both other-sex and same-sex loving and practice. The purpose is not to “baptise”—normalise—all sexual activity and call it good. However, a key concern is for the Church to move forward out of its past paralysis about human sexuality based on a renewed theology of the graced body, in relation to the sexual needs and loves of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons (who have been labelled as homosexual perverts because they love differently to so-called “normal”—“straight”—human beings). How do we move forward in this time of polarization and dissension on sexual practice that has been described as “cultural wars” within the Western church and society? What new possibilities lie open to us? The argument of this thesis has been that the way forward will include a better resolution of the centuries long Christian “disease”/“unease” with the human body and the theological temptation to isolate the body from the soul and by implication from the gracious “embracing” presence of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

This thesis has set out to tell a story about the relationship of the human body and the Spirit of God that I have called “The Graced Body”, more specifically it has been concerned for the inclusion of the fullest range of human sexuality within the discipline of theological anthropology and looks toward a fresh and inclusive theology of sexuality. As a means of assisting the church in its theological task of refining and relating the Christian understanding of humanity for the contemporary ecclesia and society, the thesis has proposed that Christology and pneumatology need to be held in a balanced and creative tension for the working out of this proposed theology of sexuality.

In Chapter 1, I proposed that human sexuality and the human body are properly comprehended through the indwelling of the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—in all human beings irrespective of their sexual orientation, desires and relationships. Further, I proposed that human sexual love is included in the love of God, comes forth from God, and is—as is all love—a consequence of the love of the Trinitarian Persons for each other and flows forth from them to human beings, the world and the whole cosmos. The thesis considered the past traditions of theology and scripture that have brought the church and us to the present and noted the contribution of recent anthropology about bodily boundaries in human society. It recognised the complexity of human attitudes to the body and sexuality because of the influence of a number of ancient and modern dualistic understandings of the world. In the telling of this story, we began a journey of successive revelation toward a fuller Christian valuing of the human body and sexuality.

In Chapter 2, the thesis used the lens of Karl Barth’s Christologically focussed and Spirit based theological anthropology to explore the themes of identity, relationship
and unity in the constitution of the human being. We critiqued Barth’s particular understanding of the gendered character of humanity.

In Chapter 3, I critiqued Barth’s particular understanding of the gendered character of humanity and presented the resolutions of other theologians to some of the problems inherent in his theological anthropology.

In Chapter 4, the story moved to one of Barth’s successors in European theology, Jürgen Moltmann who picked up some of Barth’s concerns but developed them in his own unique and creative manner. Not the least of these developments concern the relationship of the Trinity, human embodiment and the Holy Spirit. In this Moltmann provides a significant resource in the refining and development of a more inclusive theological anthropology that views the body as “graced”, not least because of his emphasis on the all-encompassing totality of the Spirit’s work in human persons and human community.

Chapter 5 critiqued Moltmann’s contributions and noted the difficulty he has in connecting his open vision of humanity with the specifics of everyday human life in relation to sexuality and sexual love.

With Chapter 6, the story considered the work of contemporary theologians who have deliberately included sexuality in their theological anthropology and have addressed the theological issues of the inclusion of practicing gay and lesbian Christians within the life of the body of Christ. I looked particularly at the themes of bodily wholeness, the valuing of difference, and the integration of body and Spirit.

Finally, in Chapter 7, we considered the themes of holiness and grace in relation to the lives of same-sex Christians, and examined three embodied practices—marriage, celibacy, and friendship—that are of particular interest and concern for lesbian and gay Christians.
The resolution of contemporary ecclesial and cultural conflict can be achieved by a carefully nuanced spelling out of the theological relationship between Christology, pneumatology and theological anthropology focused on the graced body of the church and the Christian. What this means for the church is the acceptance that we need a fresh place to engage in discussion and debate. Some attention has been given in this thesis to the interpretations by both conservative and revisionist exegetical scholars of the traditional biblical passages used to condemn homosexual practice. Equal consideration was given to the theological implications of these exegetical studies by theologians and ethicists of widely different views. Exciting new work has been undertaken by gay and lesbian theologians and by queer biblical scholars and theologians on questions relating to the graced body. While some of this work is at a popular level a great deal has been achieved also in terms of solid and robust and creative scholarship.

The church remains at an impasse because many of its episcopal leaders believe that its unity is at stake; with a split to be avoided at all costs. However, the notion of unity, that is, being secure and protected, is not the unity that the New Testament scriptures suggest as coming to us as gift from Christ and the Spirit. The desire to keep as many Christians as possible within the body of Christ at the expense of a smaller group that is excluded and disenfranchised is an unworthy one. It will not promote the health, holiness and wholeness of the body of Christ. Rowan Williams, in his address on making moral decisions at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, expressed it well: “Unity at all costs is indeed not a Christian goal; our unity is Christ-shaped, or it is empty.”

By excluded and disenfranchised I mean all the gay and lesbian Christians and other sexual minorities who are not consulted by the governing and magisterial bodies of the church in determining their future, their role and their ministry within and to the

---

1 Alison, Broken Hearts, 209-210. As René Girard and James Alison have made clear this is a form of scapegoating through violent exclusion.
body of Christ and the world. The most obvious exclusion within our western ecclesial culture is their exclusion from full liturgical and sacramental participation in the body of Christ. In effect, their embodied sexuality is held to be not graced by the Holy Spirit—even though they have been baptised, catechised and confirmed as children, young people or adults. They are in practice treated as sinners in need of continual repentance because of their sexual orientation and same-sex practice. Like other Christians of the “straight” variety they are sinners by virtue of being human beings. But they too have been saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And while there are occasions when gay and lesbian Christians engage in sexual practice in a manner which bears no note of the holiness of life which is to mark the life of the Christian person and Christian community, likewise some Christians who are heterosexual in orientation and practice also fail here. What gay and lesbian Christians face is the ongoing condemnation of their loving and “ordered towards holiness”, monogamous same-sex partnerships by their church. As this thesis has argued, this judgement is inexcusable. One liberating response for churches that profess a Christian witness, and commitment to the transforming action of the Holy Spirit would be of offering to publicly bless and affirm the partnerships of gay and lesbian Christians.

Lesbian and gay Christians want to share fully in working this out, describing how embodied grace will be lived out themselves, rather than being told how it shall be by the dominant straight group, whether theologians or not. There may be much that is similar in what the description of embodied gay and lesbian holiness will be. However, the church expects that “straight” clergy, gay and lesbian clergy, and Christians in general will engage in faithful rather than promiscuous behaviour.

There will be transitional experiences in the development of graced embodiment—good and bad, successful and unsuccessful—as the practicalities of embodied holiness are sorted out in the graced and enspirited lives, partnerships and
ordained ministries of gay and lesbian Christians. In a similar manner, clerical marriage had to be sorted out at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century where such changes to ecclesial and social life did not happen automatically or without trauma. Time, patience, encouragement and support, responsive criticism and openness to change are what the life-giving Holy Spirit asks of the church as the body of Christ now.
Bibliography

———. “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.” *Theology* CIX, no. 850 (July/August, 2006): 243-251.


