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# Belonging to Another: Christ, Moral Nature, and the Shape of Humility

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## Abstract

This article reflects on Paul's Christology in the Epistle to the Philippians and the operative notion of humility that is both implicit and explicit in his paraenesis. Through a theological exegesis of the famous Christ-hymn in particular, three consequential aspects of humility come to the fore: its grounding in Christ's love, as well as its definition by and distinction from Christ's own humility. Humility thus has a Christological foundation in a twofold sense because Christ not only exemplifies this virtue but constitutes the moral nature that defines those who belong to him. When the shape of humility is discerned in this light and explicated in relation to the theological virtues, it is understood as a form of eschatological belonging that finds concrete expression in faith working through love.

## Keywords

Christology, humility, theological virtues, nature, Philippians

## Introduction

Most salutary treatments of humility are attended by some recusation. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, writes a treatise on the upward call of humility by talking about what he insists is more familiar to him: the downward steps of pride.<sup>1</sup> This is fitting because paradigmatically it is God who humbles Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2-16; Ps. 102:23), testing **them** <what/who is the subject here?> to see what is in their hearts, whether they will obey his commandments, and so instructing

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Humility and Pride* XXII.57, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 142.

them in the way of wisdom and blessedness (Ps. 1:2; Prov. 3:33-34; 21:2-4). Apart from God's initiative, we have not yet been brought low enough to the ground to see humility. And so it is that recusation should accompany prayer: 'My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!' (Ps. 119:25). But speaking about humility is no more complicated in this regard than speaking about any gospel reality. Here as elsewhere theology is an ectypal wisdom and thus a matter of attestation rather than autobiography. The psalmist's prayer teaches us that we may speak on the basis of exegetical attentiveness about things like humility that so often remain foreign to us this side of glory. Recusation thus reminds rather than prohibits theology to pursue its unique vocation.

In this vein what follows reflects on Paul's Christology in Philippians and the operative conception of humility it presupposes in order to outline dogmatically the shape of humility in relation to the Christological foundation of moral existence. The argument is twofold: that moral nature is defined by Christ with a corresponding temporal and spatial shape, and that humility thereby acquires its form. I propose to do so in two steps: first, by identifying some constituent features of humility as it is grounded in Christology, including how Christ defines moral nature (about which more will be said in due course); second, by exploring some of the ways that this Christological ground informs a materially explicit theology of humility as an evangelical grace in its relationship to faith, hope and love. When seen in this light, humility is a virtue predicated upon a particular form of belonging and dispossession that is worked out in concrete acts of love for God and neighbor, and which has the church's unity as its immediate *telos*.

## The Christological Ground of Humility

Like all elements of the moral life, we learn about humility by learning Christ. In this first section, then, we turn to a classical locus for teaching about Christology and humility alike in order to learn first Christ himself, and then in his light, the specific shape of humility that follows from the reconstitution of moral nature in Christ. The chief reason for this approach is that recent work on the New Testament conception of humility shows how this virtue is more textured than traditional discussions often suggest.<sup>2</sup> Typically, humility is treated as a lowly self-estimation or disposition (hence, **ταπεινοφροσύνη**), arising from a recognition of our dependence on God by nature and grace,

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<sup>2</sup> See here Reinhard Feldmeier, *Power, Service, Humility: A New Testament Ethic*, trans. Brian McNeil (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2014); Eve-Marie Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut bei Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Jacob Thiessen, 'Demut als christliche Lebensweise. Eine Studie zu den Paulusbriefen in ihrem hellenistischen und biblischen Kontext', *European Journal of Theology* 24.1 (2015), pp. 5–18.

and which is conducive to acts of self-renunciation corresponding to this knowledge.<sup>3</sup> None of this is untrue, but neither is it sufficiently transparent to other significant associations humility carries in Scripture, among which is that it serves in some sense as a ‘religious *identity-marker*’ with an ecclesial referent.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly acute in Paul’s letter to the Philippians where such associations are grounded in Christ. Examining humility in light of its systematic relations to Christ displays more of its nuances and context, providing a positive foundation for the negative admonition to self-renunciation. Consequently, the present discussion sets forth the coordinates of humility descriptively in terms of Christ’s example and our union with Christ, leaving several issues aside.<sup>5</sup> However one classes humility or relates it analytically to other virtues will succeed to the extent that it fits the description. So what does such an approach suggest?

The moral elements of Paul’s Christology in Philippians 2 and particularly the famous Christ-hymn ground his general exhortation to the church to pursue unity as a body, but they do so best when seen in light of the full scope of that Christology. That is, Christ determines not only the content but the form of Paul’s moral exhortations. The general concern is that as members of the body, we should be united by the fact that we take our bearings from one and the same Lord. The concord of the church’s ethos follows from its confession of the same Logos. The apostle’s desire is for the church to put away vainglory and ambition, and instead to privilege one another because this is the humility that defines them as a body whose head is Christ (Phil. 2:3-4). Paul’s Christological appeal acquires its moral relevance from its ontological depths, as we see when he grounds his exhortations with reference to Christ’s deity and the economy of his reconciling acts in the servant form of human flesh. Additionally, the Christology suggests something about the makeup of the church’s being ‘in Christ’. Indeed, both elements—the ontological depths of Christ and the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> For some examples, see Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanau, 1615), 9.12, p. 606; Bénédict Pictet, *La morale chrétienne ou l’art de bien vivre*, vol. 3 (Geneve: Compagnie des Libraires, 1709), pp. 416–30; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), vol. 4, pp. 67–77.

<sup>4</sup> Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut*, p. 218. See also the insightful account by Kent Dunnington, ‘Humility: An Augustinian Perspective’, *Pro Ecclesia* 25.1 (2016), pp. 18–43, who argues that humility involves our dependence on God for our identity. In basic agreement, I think the overall point is best secured dogmatically with reference to more comprehensive categories than ‘identity’; hence, the emphasis in what follows on ‘nature’.

<sup>5</sup> A recent and impressive attempt to address many of these issues—whether humility is an acquired virtue, its relation to temperance, and so forth—may be found in Matthew Levering, ‘On Humility’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19.4 (2017), pp. 462–90.

in Christ—are bound up with one another. Insofar as Christ himself embodies at once God *and* God’s will, then he embodies the truth of human nature and its corresponding vocation. We may survey the relevant aspects of Paul’s Christology here in three broad strokes relating to the hymn’s three moments of condescension, humbling and exaltation (Phil. 2:6-11).

Locating his discussion of humility within the Son’s downward movement from his conspicuous to his hidden glory, Paul defines humility not by offering a detailed anatomy of its contents but by setting forth narratively an *exemplum* for our imitation.<sup>6</sup> This is no ordinary example, however, because who Christ is demands an important recognition of his uniqueness (which is irreducibly ontological) in any attempt to follow him. The subject who is an example is decisive. Jesus ‘does not will to be alone, but to have fellow-participants and witnesses of his life: men in whom both His humiliation and exaltation, His death and resurrection, are reflected (although not repeated); in whose existence there is a correspondence to His life’.<sup>7</sup> What this means is the *exemplum* is first and foremost a *positum* for our acknowledgment, which must register Christ’s qualitative distinction from all things—us included.

The first thing to observe, then, is how narration of Christ’s humility begins by pointing us to the Son’s eternal relation to the Father and Spirit in the blessed life of God in himself. Christ’s divinity is intrinsic to the unique authority of the imperatives that flow from his person. Christian **φρόνησις** is therefore downstream from contemplating Christ, and in the first instance he is the eternal Son: ‘who, being in the form of God (**μορφῇ θεοῦ**), did not regard equality with God something to be exploited’ (Phil. 2:6). Here we must exercise some care that the Christology govern Paul’s **μορφῇ**-language, suggesting as it does ‘figure’ or ‘shape’, because the subject in question dwells ‘in unapproachable light’ (1 Tim. 6:16). This Son bears ‘the name that is above every name’, which is the name of God: ‘I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other’ (Isa. 42:8; 48:11; Phil. 2:9). We need not equate **μορφῇ θεοῦ** with ‘divine essence’ to see that the two are nevertheless mutually implicated: the Son’s divine form is his glory, his on account of the divinity

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<sup>6</sup> Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut*, p. 217. On the extent and limitations of imitation, see John Webster, ‘Christology, Imitability and Ethics’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), pp. 309–336; Philip Ziegler, ‘Discipleship’, in Kent Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel (eds), *Sanctified by Grace: A Theology of the Christian Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 149–60.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark International, 1958, 2004<Which edn are you citing?>), p. 325. Paul gestures towards this throughout Phil. 2:9-11 by focusing on what God does *to* Christ, removing any sense that following Christ is simply a matter of ‘imitation’.

belonging to him equally with the Father and Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> What is the significance of discussing the Son's divine glory alongside his mindset not to consider what it represents as 'something to be exploited' <please check clarity of this sentence> (ἄρπαγμός)? Considered with reference to his antecedent divinity, there is nothing the Son lacks or could acquire and so he does not look to exploit his riches. This has nothing to do with an abstract ideal of self-forgetfulness; it is *because of* and not *despite* his divine blessedness that the Son humbles himself in this way (Phil. 2:7).<sup>9</sup> Why? Because God is love, and the way of God's love is to give us nothing less than Godself (1 Jn 4:8; Jn 3:16).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Contra* Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), pp. 117–29, whose critical exegesis of the whole hymn against the background of metamorphic myths depends on a series of false dichotomies surrounding μορφή θεοῦ: invisibility or perceptibility, essence or appearance, equality with God or inequality. The result manages to combine subordinationism and Docetism. Even confessional interpreters fall into such false dichotomies when excessive attention to the natural properties of the text obscures its function and location in the divine economy, as happens with Joseph H. Hellerman, 'ΜΟΡΦΗ ΘΕΟΥ as Signifier of Social Status in Philippians 2:6', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52.4 (2009), pp. 779–97, who argues μορφή θεοῦ represents 'social status—and the potential to exercise power that comes with such status—without any corresponding ontological component' (p. 796). Among other problems, the idea that we can bracket God's 'status' and power from God's being is itself an ontological judgment. Rather, we should note that in this passage μορφή signifies being *indirectly* because it signifies 'form' or 'shape' *directly*: Christ's μορφή θεοῦ is the radiant glory that is his with the Father eternally (Jn 1:14; 17:5) because they have one and the same essence: a glory that is nevertheless invisible unless revealed (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16; Exod. 33:18–20; Matt. 17:2; Mk 9:2). Likewise, the Son's μορφή δούλου is the particular shape that is his in his mission, which he undertakes only as he *is* genuinely human (cf. Heb. 2:17; 4:15; Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4).

<sup>9</sup> Thus reading ὑπάρχων in 2:6 as causal. That Christ's eternal fullness he possesses with the Father has some fundamental role in moral orientation is commonly ignored or downplayed, perhaps seen as ethically relevant only if it has been set aside; e.g., Heiko Wojtkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik im Philipperbrief: Studien zur Handlungsorientierung einer frühchristlichen Gemeinde in paganer Umwelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 94. In this article, I abstain from extended interaction with the literature surrounding this contested passage from biblical scholars. An introduction to some of the debates may be found in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (eds), *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Girolamo Zanchi, *In divi Pauli apostoli Epistolas ad Philippenses, Colossenses, Thessalonicenses et duo priora capita primae Epistolae divi Johannis commentarii*, 2nd edn (Neustadt an der Haardt,

The connection between humility and love is most visible in a parallel passage in the Gospel of John, where Jesus washes his disciples' feet (Jn 13:1-20). There we are told, before **Jesus puts on the servant form of the towel**<OK?>, that, 'having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (Jn 13:1). And when Christ tells his disciples to love another in accordance with his example, he suggests that beatitude is the eschatological reality hidden within these acts of love: 'If you know these things, blessed are you (**μακάριοί ἐστε**) if you do them' (Jn 13:17; cf. Matt. 5:5).<sup>11</sup> When taken together, these statements suggest a coherent portrait. It is with reference to the love and blessedness that God is from all eternity that God remains completely self-consistent in the Son's humiliation, and this suggests that humility is an effect of the Son's merciful condescension.<sup>12</sup>

The second observation we must make is that the Son has procured, by his obedient death on the cross and his resurrection, a people who are 'his own' (Phil. 3:12; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). Jesus determines the moral pattern of those who belong to him such that Christian **φρόνησις** is ordered to his person: 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5). To be mindful of that which is 'in Christ' is to discern the kinds of moral existence proper to that domain of reality over which Christ reigns, in which believers are now citizens (Phil. 3:20; 1:27; Col. 1:13). This involves discerning and seeking that life of ours which yet remains hidden in him (Col. 3:1-3) as those who have 'encouragement in Christ' and 'participation in the Spirit' (Phil. 2:1). That Christ is definitive of moral existence in an absolute way is suggested both by how Paul describes Christ's humanity and then relates it to himself and his audience. In his condescension, the Son 'emptied himself by taking the form of a servant' (Phil. 2:7; cf. Jn 13:4-5). Servanthood is not one role among other possibilities set before the Son in his human flesh, but instead Christ's whole humanity is

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1601), p. 129 (col. 1): 'This affection of the divine nature in the Son was nothing else than his love towards us: his will and decree to take up our flesh, to suffer in it and die, which is the cause of our salvation. And this affection was perpetually in the Son, both before and after the incarnation'. Zanchi perceives well that the transition from the Son's divine being to the economy in our flesh is rooted in an eternal resolve that is itself consistent with his divinity. Jesus' humility is thus ontologically downstream from what is more fundamental: his divine beatitude. In traditional terminology, the Son's humility belongs to economy, not theology.

<sup>11</sup> See in this connection the discussion of **μακάριος** by Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), pp. 41–67.

<sup>12</sup> Hence, while Christ certainly renounces the visibility of his divine glory, he doesn't renounce anything of his divinity (*Attributverzicht* or *Fähigkeitverzicht*) precisely because his servant form has this backward reference without any competition; *pace* Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut*, pp. 97–98.

described as the form of a servant (**μορφή δούλου**). What it means to be a servant in the mold of Christ therefore acquires definition from the whole course of the Son's incarnate economy, including his humiliation and exaltation. This is why Paul understands his own moral existence to be defined with a Christological teleology and setting. As Christ tread the path of the cross (Phil. 2:8), so Paul says he wants to **<add: 'be'>** 'conformed (**συμμορφιζόμενος**) to his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead' (Phil. 3:10). As Christ was subsequently exalted and glorified, so we are to wait on him 'who will transform our humble body (**τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον**) to be like his glorious body' (Phil. 3:21). For Christ to be 'formed (**μορφωθῇ**)' in us (Gal. 4:19) is for the moral existence he defines in his **μορφή δούλου** to be appropriated by 'faith working through love' in the Spirit's power (Gal. 5:6; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

As Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's work suggests, none of this is possible by virtue of principles intrinsic to our created natures, which is why it rests on the Father's predestining believers 'to be conformed (**συμμόρφους**) to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29). Conformity is more central to the apostle's concern than imitation, though the former embraces the latter (Jn 13:15). Hence, what is in view concerns moral *being* as much as *activity*, all of which is encompassed in the concept of 'moral nature'; that is, human nature considered formally as to the principles and ends of moral agency such that in Christ we learn of our being and therefore activity.<sup>13</sup> In this light, the notes of figure and shape in Paul's **μορφή**-language are not incidental. Human nature itself has concrete spatial and temporal shape (*räumliche Gestalt* and *Zeitgestalt*) in individual humans whose dignity necessitates that actions by and towards them appreciate this shape.<sup>14</sup> Respecting human dignity means (in part) not domesticating artificially its temporal and spatial integrity: we should neither murder nor maim, for instance. When this same nature is considered according to the adventitious moral principles and ends that attend the disciple's union with Christ by the Spirit, then they are uniquely figured in both space and time. In turn, this figuring involves a conformity to the servant form of Christ such that Paul can call himself a **δούλος Χριστοῦ** (Phil. 1:1).<sup>15</sup> To anticipate some details of the discussion to follow: disciples are those who honor Christ with their humble bodies (Phil. 1:20; 3:21), who belong to the wider body of Christ (Phil. 1:27–2:4), and who do so with a view towards the coming Judge (Phil. 4:5; Jas 5:9). Paul's exhortation to unity through humility is

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<sup>13</sup> John Webster, "'Where Christ Is': Christology and Ethics', in *God Without Measure*, vol. 2, *Virtue and Intellect* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 11–15.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Spaemann, 'On Human Dignity', in D. C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (eds and trans.), *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God, and the Human Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 106–108.

<sup>15</sup> On which, see Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut*, pp. 130–37.



not burdensome because it is already the truest thing about us in Christ, but it is a truth that must be embraced by faith, tempered and provoked by hope, and set forth in love.

Finally, the hymn's narration of Christ's humility concludes by pointing us to the Son as the eschatological judge **<Judge is capitalized above, check consistency throughout>**, who will return one day to universal acclamation of his Lordship unto the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:9-11; Isa. 45:22-23; Rom. 14:10-12). The contemplation of Christ therefore perceives not only that the eternal 'life in himself' he shares with the Father (Jn 5:26) is the basis for the humble love with which he makes us his own, but also that he has been exalted 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion' (Eph. 1:21), and that as such he will return to judge 'every knee' (Phil. 2:10)—those within the church included (2 Cor. 5:10). None of this is immaterial to Paul's purposes. 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5)—not 'was' in Christ Jesus, but 'is'.<sup>16</sup> Christian **φρόνησις** is directed to something not merely past or future, but present because 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb. 13:8). The Lord is **ἐγγύς**, 'at hand', by virtue of his Spirit (Phil. 4:5; Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:33). Two observations: First, there is an important sense here in which Christ transcends and stands over against the church, which the end of the hymn stresses in particular. Though they must not be separated, the distinction and irreducible dissimilarity between the Lord and his disciples cannot be erased. Christology and ecclesiology are distinct, not least because the unity to which the church is called remains an active summons. The church may not, therefore, achieve unity by any means other than love working through humility, for 'an imposed unity can never command the authority of love'.<sup>17</sup> Second, when we are exhorted to 'press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus', to appropriate that being and activity that is ours in him, we should understand that the Christian's vocation answers to the living, reigning, and present Lord (Phil. 3:14; Col. 3:1-4). Obedience to this summons occurs as Christ agitates his followers by his

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<sup>16</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A&C Black, 1997), pp. 123–24; see also Bockmuehl, 'The Personal Presence of Jesus in the Writings of Paul', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70.1 (2017), pp. 39–60.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Oliver O'Donovan, *Ethics as Theology*, vol. 3, *Entering into Rest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), p. 22. Caution is necessary so that the Lord remain unconfused with his church in those proposals that would read 'in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5) as a reference to the *totus Christus*, especially its visible and institutional forms. For example, Jean-Noël Aletti, *Épître aux Philippiens: Introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Paris: Gabalda, 2005), pp. 133–36; Michael J. Gorman, 'A New Translation of Philippians 2:5 and its Significance for Paul's Theology and Spirituality', in J. Gordon McConville and Lloyd K. Pieterse (eds), *Conception, Reception, and the Spirit: Essays in Honor of Andrew T. Lincoln* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), pp. 104–121.



Spirit (Phil. 1:6; 2:12; 3:15; 4:13). The summons is ‘upward’ because the wisdom from which humility springs is ‘from above’ and therefore not earthly (Jas 3:15, 13).<sup>18</sup> The being and activity that is ours in Christ comes to us *ab extra*, depending in this way on the presence of Christ for its actuality. As it comes down from above, it makes the church’s members strive ‘side by side’ and to elevate one another above themselves (Phil. 1:27; 2:3). The spatial aspect of the new nature is horizontal because it is first and foremost vertical: ‘For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar’ (Ps. 138:6).

What this brief glance at the Christological hymn in Philippians reveals is Christ’s sole authority (a) to define humility in his loving condescension towards others in service; (b) to define moral nature with a particular spatial and temporal shape; and (c) to summon us towards the enactment of this nature that is ours in him, empowering such efforts by his Spirit and presiding over them as the living judge. What does all this suggest about the shape of humility as an evangelical grace?

## The Shape of Humility and the Theological Virtues

Having surveyed something of the Christological grounds of humility and the moral nature from which it springs, we may now venture some thoughts on the shape of humility as a virtue. In the second of his four quartets, ‘East Coker’, T. S. Eliot reflects on the unrelenting inertia with which time returns all things to the ground (*humus*) from which they came. In view of this, our attempts to impose order on the world and ourselves are impertinent and foolish. He notes that our accumulated knowledge only imposes false patterns on the world, in contrast to a knowledge received and in which ‘every moment is a new and shocking Valuation of all we have been’. Likewise, he wants to know nothing of the so-called ‘wisdom of old men’ who fear ‘possession’, that is, ‘belonging to another, or to others, or to God’. Rather, ‘the only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility’, for this is ‘endless’.<sup>19</sup> The notion of ‘belonging to another’ as ‘the wisdom of humility’ is a good heading for the shape of humility that follows from its Christological ground canvassed in the previous section. The idea of ‘belonging to another’ states the positive, and materially prior side of humility apart from which lowmindedness and self-renunciation easily lose their evangelical character. This is because belonging is bound up with the positive reality of sanctification, in which God purifies a people ‘for his own possession’ (Titus 2:14). We may see this sufficiently if we look at how humility is related to faith, hope, and love. Throughout we will only touch upon the negative side of humility indirectly, but it remains intrinsic to the notion all the same.

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<sup>18</sup> Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut*, pp. 122–23, 194, makes much of these *Raummetaphoriken*.

<sup>19</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘East Coker’, II, lines 86–87, 94–98.

## Humility of Faith

In the first place, as with all evangelical virtue, humility springs from faith in God's reconciling grace extended to us in Christ. The tight relationship between humility and faith in some medieval theology was a particular concern for the Reformers, who wanted to ensure that humility was not preparatory for saving faith (*facere quod in se est*).<sup>20</sup> The Protestant tradition has therefore typically made humility something logically subsequent to or at least coextensive with faith in God's grace. Faith trusts Christ and that which he secures for us by his humility rather than any lowliness we can muster. In this respect faith is an act of intellect and will: it apprehends what humility is, approves of it, and makes the crucial move of trusting that humility is the road down which the promise of blessedness is found.

One of the chief effects of faith is union with Christ, which is especially relevant for humility since it is apprehended 'in Christ' (Phil. 2:5). United to Christ by faith, we consequently are given his benefits and his Spirit by which we are conformed to him in humility.<sup>21</sup> Luther comments that faith's relation to Christ is as vital and operative as Christ himself, so it forms humility in us as it forms Christ in us:

Christ lives, and not only lives but works, and not only works but also reigns.

Therefore it is impossible for faith in Him to be idle; for it is alive, and it itself works and triumphs, and in this way works flow forth spontaneously from faith. For in this way our patience flows from the patience of Christ, and our humility from His, and the other good works in like manner, provided that we believe firmly that He has done all these things for us, and not only for us but also before our eyes ... as an example.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, faith trusts in Christ's humility and only thus sets us in motion to be conformed to it. In this, God both offers us salvation and calls us to it; 'our duty is to embrace by faith what he gives and to

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<sup>20</sup> See Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Bast (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 153–78; Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.xi.1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960, 2006<Which edn are you citing?>), p. 725.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews*, trans. Walter A. Hansen, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 29, *Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1968), p. 123.

respond by obedience to his calling, but we have neither from ourselves'.<sup>23</sup> Faith embraces the moral nature God gives and thereby acknowledges a twofold sense in which we are not our own, but God's (*non nostri sumus, sed Dei*).<sup>24</sup> Respectively, we belong to God as his created and redeemed possession.<sup>25</sup>

Humility may therefore be understood in the first instance as the faithful embrace of and response to our union with Christ. As such, humility is basic to the practice of true religion and so has a definitive connection to the concept of moral nature itself.<sup>26</sup> Christ's 'self-emptying' (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) is parallel with his 'self-humbling' (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν); they amplify one another and suggest that accepting the form of a servant is intrinsic to his humility (Phil. 2:7-8).<sup>27</sup> Accepting this form, the Son accepted its terms: his body, life, and even death belonged not to him but to his Father; he was *God's* servant. Our own act corresponding to this is one of belonging to God in Christ, which is why the Christian φρόνησις of humility is ours only in him. The New Testament thus talks about moral nature chiefly in reference not to what we possess in ourselves but to whom we belong. This is

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<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Philippenses* 2:13, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* [CO], vol. 52, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetske and Son, 1895), col. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* III.vii.1 (vol. 1, p. 690).

<sup>25</sup> Insofar as humility stems from our belonging to God as our creator, then it is still basic to proper creatureliness (as Levering argues in 'On Humility'). But belonging to God as our Redeemer means something more, so the gospel brings something new to humility just as it does to creatureliness: εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καὶ νῦν κτίσις (2 Cor. 5:17).

<sup>26</sup> Thus Polanus, *Syntagma* 9.12, p. 606, who locates humility and patience after saving faith, hope and love, as basic elements of true religion, which he defines as the 'virtue of our soul introduced or infused by God through the Holy Spirit, which effects in the religious and pious that we rightly know and acknowledge God from his will revealed in the writings of the prophets and apostles. For the only true religion exhibits constantly and sincerely the worship and honor due to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that his word requires' (*Syntagma* 9.1, p. 575 [col. 1b-c]). Polanus differs from Aquinas here in that he makes *religio* an infused virtue (cf. *Summa theologiae* [ST] IIaIIae.81.5).

<sup>27</sup> To be clear: incarnation is *exinanitio*, whereas Christ's obedience unto the cross is *humiliatio*: Christ's exemplary humility nevertheless includes both, rooted as it is in God's loving decree mentioned earlier (on account of which it belongs to economy, not theology). Hence, in his apostolic example of humility corresponding to the three moments of the hymn, Paul considers any gain of his own 'as loss' (Phil. 3:7), strives to be conformed to Christ's death (Phil. 3:10), and to attain the resurrection (Phil. 3:11, 14). Christ's humility and his *status humiliationis* are thus distinct.

how Paul frames his discussion of the fruits of the Spirit, for example. Paul contrasts the old nature with the new and says that we are to ‘walk by the Spirit’ so as not to ‘gratify the desires of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:16). Works consistent with the nature animated by the Spirit are ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’ (Gal. 5:22-3). These works characterize the new nature, not as a discrete possession of the ethical agent in abstraction from the history of the missions of the Son and Spirit, but rather because ‘those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’ (Gal. 5:24). We belong to Christ if we have the Spirit of Christ, and to this extent have a nature with a particular filial shape (Rom. 8:9-17). All of this is had by faith (Gal. 3:25-9; 5:5-6).<sup>28</sup> Thus the apostle seeks to ‘be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith’ (Phil. 3:9). And because humility defines the moral nature that belongs to the faithful in their belonging to Christ, then it also defines the acts stemming from this nature. For this reason, John Owen says that in ‘walking with God, we are to humble ourselves in bowing to the law and rule of his grace’.<sup>29</sup>

To root humility in saving faith is therefore first of all to say that humility consists in an acknowledgment of what *is* that embraces our given nature as new creations in Christ and trusts that this is good (2 Cor. 5:17). Humility thereby acknowledges that we have nothing in ourselves, including the ‘self’. Thus it is that we are ‘transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) by the renewal of the mind’ (Rom. 12:2), such that we may be mindful of that which is ours in Christ. At least two consequences for humility are worthy of note, namely, that we live and know ourselves as those belonging to God in Christ.

First, humility involves an acknowledgment that Christ has made us ‘his own’ (Phil. 3:12) and a corresponding embrace of the moral nature that is ours by the Spirit’s working. This means that we entrust our bodies and souls to him, as well as understand with Paul that ‘to live is Christ’ (Phil. 1:21); ‘I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God’ (Gal. 2:20). Union with Christ means that we are grafted into his death and are animated by his

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<sup>28</sup> The metaphor of belonging might also suggest that what is most important in *habitus* is not what belongs to us, but that we belong to God; the ground of *habitus* is the ‘*inhabitatio Dei*’, Christ’s presence with us through the Spirit. Consequently, the metaphor focuses our thought about virtues, which are fruits of the new nature animated by the Spirit of Christ and thus upheld only by the power of God (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Apart from God’s gracious presence and working, infused *habitus* are worthless.

<sup>29</sup> John Owen, ‘Of Walking Humbly with God: Sermon VII’, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 9 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 103.

power, ‘just as the sprout draws its sap from the root, only by coalescing into one nature’.<sup>30</sup> Calvin continues: ‘It is an extraordinary thought, that the faithful live outside themselves, that is, in Christ. This cannot happen but that they have true and substantial communication with him’.<sup>31</sup> Humility as receptivity to moral nature means therefore a form of life lived from a state of empowerment outside ourselves: we speak oracles *of God*, we serve by strength supplied *from God*, and this form of life lived outside ourselves is the form of life lived unto the glory of God (1 Pet. 4:11).<sup>32</sup> Humility is life lived under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. :6<4:6?>), the strong arm of the Lord that liberates his people (Exod. 3:19).<sup>33</sup> It is trust in the God who holds us in his hands and strengthens us in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). This recognition of belonging to God and being strengthened by him opposes humility to pusillanimity; humility is a form of ‘moral strength’ precisely because it knows that weakness within us corresponds to God’s power outside us. The true glory of belonging to God characterizes our being in union with Christ: only he is the fullness of God, and only in him are we filled (Col. 2:9-10). Thus in humility ‘we address ourselves to the performance of the greatest duties, being fully persuaded that we have no strength for the least’. And yet, ‘the duties required of us are not proportioned to the strength residing in us, but to the supply laid up for us in Christ’.<sup>34</sup>

Second, since we belong to Christ and not to ourselves, then our self-estimations belong to him and not to us; they must be as eccentric as our lives.<sup>35</sup> Humility’s sense of lowliness and contrition for sin certainly involves self-examination, but it does not trust the fruits of introspection as such. Paul considers it something ‘very small’ that anyone should judge him because he does not even judge himself: ‘I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges’ (1 Cor. 4:4). Paul’s own self-estimate has an eschatological orientation towards the Judge, ‘who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes

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<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas* 2:19 (CO 50, col. 199).

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas* 2:20 (CO 50, col. 199). Calvin continues to note how ‘vivit Christus in nobis dupliciter’, namely, governing and directing our actions by his Spirit and granting us a participation in his righteousness. CO 50, col. 199. These remarks tap into the essential insight of federal thought: spiritually, we live and die only outside ourselves (cf. 1 Cor. 15:21-2; Rom. 5:12-21).

<sup>32</sup> Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> Feldmeier, *Power, Service, Humility*, p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, ‘Of Walking Humbly with God: Sermon VII’, in *Works* 9, pp. 108–109.

<sup>35</sup> I focus in this paragraph on awareness of indwelling sin, but the note on eccentricity applies equally to any accommodation of Aristotle’s account of modesty. See here Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), pp. 221–23.

of the heart' (1 Cor. 4:5). Prideful knowledge is the opposite of a knowledge that arises from being 'known by God' (1 Cor. 8:3). Fixated on Christ, humble self-estimations are oriented towards the truth. Bernard says, 'after I had come to believe in Christ, that is, to imitate his humility, I learned the truth and that truth is raised up in me by my confession'.<sup>36</sup> Humility here arises from an encounter with Christ, and not simply with sin in the abstract.<sup>37</sup> 'True humility consists more in believing than in being sensible of sin', because unless we find our rest in Christ, our own consciousness of sin can become the foundation of our rest and result in false humility and self-righteousness.<sup>38</sup> But humility does involve a sense of sin because it is faced with Christ, and not simply 'grace' abstracted from Christ the living and active judge: our servant nature merely corresponds to his, *ceteris imparibus*, but does not repeat it. A sense of the difference between the Lord and his disciples is again essential at this point.<sup>39</sup> We cannot stop here, though, because Christ is also the life and the way, giving life where there would otherwise only be death and showing us the way our confession must travel. Confession of sin is thus directed to the cross and resurrection. Without its identification with Christ's cross, humility is another means by which we try to merit God's favor, and apart from his resurrection, humility is not the form of life lived from 'the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe' (Eph. 1:19-20).

## Humility of Hope

In relation to faith, humility is our receptivity to the moral nature that is ours because we belong to Christ, and so it clings to God for strength and to Christ for the truth about ourselves: faith trusts not what we have, but that we are had (Matt. 19:22; Jn 10:28-29), and not what we know, but that we 'are known by God' (Gal. 4:9; Jn 10:14). Turning to humility's relation to hope, we discover that our moral nature as constituted in Christ stands under the promise of exaltation, and therefore an even fuller belonging to come (Gal. 3:29; Eph. 1:14). Humility is the eschatological disposition answering

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Humility and Pride* IV.15, in *Selected Works*, p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, 'A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX', in *Works*, vol. 6, p. 378; see also Polanus, *Syntagma* 9.12, p. 606 (col. 2).

<sup>39</sup> Strictly speaking, Albrecht Ritschl is correct that 'the feeling of guilt against God ... is not one of the essential conditions of humility, for we know that humility was also an element in Christ's character'. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, vol. 3, *The Positive Development of the Doctrine*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900), §65, p. 636. But part of our own humility is recognizing the distinction between Christ's humility and our own, which will involve a sense of our sin because it has been overcome by Christ.



to this hope, issuing forth in ‘holy industry’<sup>40</sup> confident that the shape of its activity rooted in faith fits the temporal shape (*Zeitgestalt*) of the moral nature we have in Christ.

Again, the hope that is humble comes from without, and so it relies for its understanding of its future on the word that comes to it from outside itself.<sup>41</sup> This eschatological word pronounces something already and not-yet, announcing non-competitively the overlap of Christian obedience and divine action. Paul therefore tells the Philippian church to continue ‘holding fast to the word of life’ (Phil. 2:16). Put differently: ‘receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls’ (Jas 1:21). Implicit here is an exhortation to endure in obedience: ‘work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 15:10). The word calling us to an enduring obedience consistent with our new natures also pronounces an authoritative divine judgment on that obedience: ‘he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 1:6; 3:21–4:1).<sup>42</sup> Since we belong to Christ in our new nature, so too we belong to him in our new vocation. The whole history that this new reality begets is embraced by Christ’s exaltation, transcending the whims of self, circumstance, tradition and culture; just so we are protected against dysteleology. Moral history flowing from being in Christ *endures* because the Spirit of Christ is the ‘deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory’ (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22). Especially in Ephesians, the Spirit’s blessing (1:3) of a present redemption we have in Christ (1:7) anticipates an eschatological consummation (4:30). The reality of being redeemed and possessed by God is thus eschatological. This promised, fuller belonging is God’s work and so elicits our efforts without being actualized by them: ‘whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it’ (Eccl. 3:14). As it is determined by hope, then, humility provokes action in pursuit of true glory.

On this basis humility is not opposed to magnanimity if properly defined such that it does not suggest selfish ambition or vainglory<sup>43</sup>—‘empty-glory’ (κενοδοξίαν)—but rather has the appearance of emptiness and the reality of fullness precisely in sacrificial love for Christ’s bride (Phil. 2:3).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, vol. 3, p. 324.

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *ST IaIIae*.63.1.

<sup>42</sup> See John Webster, ‘Hope’, in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005, 2016<Which edn are you citing?>), pp. 205–210.

<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *ST IIaIIae*.132.2.

<sup>44</sup> Genuine magnanimity complements humility because it is the nobility of service: ‘humility does not consist in ongoing lesser willing, since Christ, the most humble, wills to be the highest in goodness of the human species, since the more humble a man is, the swifter he is in God’s service, and as such he



Oriented by hope, true glory (ἀληθοδοξία) and nobility of spirit issues from a place of ultimate rest and thus dispossession rather than the agonies of self-realization: ‘You have not embraced Christ through your virtue, but Christ has embraced you through his advent’.<sup>45</sup> In this sense humility strives for great things, ‘forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead’ (Phil. 3:13).<sup>46</sup> We await exaltation on the other side of taking up our cross daily, and we know that God will perfect our natures in Christ as pure gift. If we may ‘rejoice in the hope of the glory of God’ (Rom. 5:2), it is because the ‘Lord of glory’ is ‘at hand’ (Jas 2:1; Phil. 4:5) and fixes our eyes on him so that we are ‘transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) from glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Hope makes ‘every moment ... a new and shocking valuation of all we have been’, precisely because it is not mere ‘anticipatory imagination’.<sup>47</sup> It is not read off the observable patterns of our present or past. Appearances to the contrary, hope tells us that beatitude is hidden this side of the resurrection; the meek truly are ‘blessed’ (Matt. 5:5) because their ‘citizenship is in heaven, and from it [they] await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 3:20). Humility is thus the eschatological disposition that answers to the promise of God: ‘He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her

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clearly considers himself to be a minister of God. And Christ is more humble in this way, because He is the swiftest in the service of God and of the church’. John Wyclif, *Triologus* III.11, trans. Stephen E. Lahey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 141. Protestant theologians have at times registered concerns about magnanimity because of its connotations with the desire for honor, and its lack of reference to grace. Rather Christians are to feel joy if ‘counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name’ (Acts 5:41; cf. 1 Cor. 1:28; Ps. 8:3), together with a sense that they are what they are by God’s grace (1 Cor. 15:10). For example, see Johan Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus Theologiae Christianae*, 2nd edn (Zürich: Ex officina Heideggeriana, 1732), vol. 1, *locus* xiv, *sectio* iii.xiv (p. 566, col. 1). Hence, Peter van Mastricht defines humility as a kind of ‘pious pusillanimity’ by which we prostrate ourselves before God, being answerable to his will unto his glory, in *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 3rd edn (Utrecht: Apud W. van de Water, 1724), *Idea theologia moralis*, I.5, p. 1205. Without denying the substance of this, one may still affirm that the greatness to which genuine magnanimity aspires is service of God and church (Matt. 20:26-28). We will elaborate on this further below, when discussing love.

<sup>45</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *De humilitate* §4, in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, trans. Mark DelCogliano (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas, *ST IIaIIae*.161.2.ad 2.

<sup>47</sup> O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, p. 151; cf. Webster, ‘Hope’, p. 209.

the joyous mother of children' (Ps. 113:7-9; cf. Lk. 1:35, 48). The lowliness to which we are called embraces the pursuit of a glory it will only find at Christ's advent, but which it *will* find.

## Humility of Love

When we come to humility's relation to love, we come to its proximate principle and end. Speaking of his having been created and redeemed, Bernard remarks, 'Given and given again, I owe myself in return for myself, twice over'.<sup>48</sup> What we owe to God by virtue of this double belonging we consequently owe to one another, being mutually indebted in love (Rom. 13:8). Love is the humble way we enact the spatial shape of our moral nature in Christ because it shows us that in this nature we as members all belong to one body.<sup>49</sup> United to one Lord and Head the church's members are communicants of the same nature and thus vocation. Through hope, humility rests ultimately in a promised exaltation, and through love, humility rests provisionally in the community of the faithful because this community is the proximate end of its moral reasoning.<sup>50</sup> Why is this so, and what does it mean?

First, humility is found in response to an encounter with God's love in Christ. Insofar as love is the impetus and first cause of the Son's assumption of human flesh, that same love is the cause of his flesh's definition as the 'form of a servant'—inseparable as this whole movement is from the Father's election and the Spirit's anointing, which are in turn grounded in the mutuality of love within the processions of the Son and Spirit from the Father in all eternity. Here, Jonathan Edwards argues, is where we find the locus of registering God's qualitative distinctness as it is conducive to humility: 'Merely having a sense that God is infinitely above us, and that there is an infinite distance between him and us in greatness, will not work humility; it will signify nothing towards making the heart humble, unless we are sensible there is an infinite distance between him and us in respect of his loveliness'.<sup>51</sup> Pride may still reign within a cognizance of God's greatness on account of the law's

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<sup>48</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* V.15, in *Selected Works*, p. 186.

<sup>49</sup> Humble love does not suggest that they belong to one another directly; Paul restricts such intimate belonging on the horizontal plane to husband and wife (1 Cor. 7:3-4). Parts do not belong to other parts, but to the whole (1 Cor. 12:21-26). It is as members of one and the same body that they are 'members of one another' in an indirect sense (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25).

<sup>50</sup> See here O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, pp. 19–21.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits* 6.II, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 244. 'Christian humility has decisive orientation, not toward God in general or God in everything or God gravitating downward, but toward God in Christ freely seeking the lowliest by an act of love'. Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*,

condemning power, just as it does with the demons who know of God's majesty. It is only God's eternally self-sufficient love towards us in Christ's humility that makes us humble in turn. In Christ, we see that 'divine love implies humility... If the knowledge of God as lovely causes humility, then a respect to God as lovely implies humility. And from this love to God arises a Christian love to men. And it therefore follows that a true love both to God and men implies humility'.<sup>52</sup> Like the Lord, we should by our conduct show our 'works in the meekness of wisdom' (Jas 3:13). As our lives take on the shape that Jesus' life took there are differences, but the point of correspondence between his humility and our own is that it finds its root in the gift of love poured into our hearts through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Empowered thus by the triune God, our love is humble as it is conformed to Christ's servant form, which is that of a living sacrifice to God that pours itself out for the church. Hence, we are not to be 'conformed' to this world, because that is the opposite of offering our bodies as 'living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God' (Rom. 12:1-2). Conformity to Christ's humility works a conformity to his love, not only for God but also for his church.

Second, as a living sacrifice to God, humility is worked out in love for our neighbor, and thus has a necessary reference to the community. The 'power of charity is brought to perfection in the weakness of humility', Augustine says, which we can say is found in this reciprocal, mutual reference of the members.<sup>53</sup> Love for the neighbor is our proximate end that is part of our sacrificial offering to our ultimate end, God. In Christ we have 'the same mind' and 'the same love' to count others more significant than ourselves, to look beyond our own interests to those of others (Phil. 2:2-4). In this way we seek the interests of Christ himself (Phil. 2:21). Barth is right to note that such sacrificial love is only possible against the background of repentance, for we must know ourselves and others as Christ does: sinners in need of grace. Only thus will we not turn away from the needs of others with some form of action that says, at bottom, 'God helps those who help themselves'.<sup>54</sup> Nor will we consider ourselves higher than we ought (Rom. 12:3).<sup>55</sup> However, sacrificial love is also

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p. 223. 'You won't become humble unless you look at the one who became humble for your sake'. Augustine, *Serm.* 68.11, in *The Works of Saint Augustine (WSA)*, vol. III/3, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), p. 230.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits* 6.II, p. 245. As Feldmeier states the point, the 'humble person takes the path that answers to the path God has taken to him'. *Power, Service, Humility*, p. 117 n. 82.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *De trinitate* 4.1.2, trans. Edmund Hill, *WSA* I/5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), p. 153; Feldmeier, *Power, Service, Humility*, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 422.

<sup>55</sup> Wyclif, *Triologus* III.11, p. 141.

possible because as those belonging to Christ, we know that God has lavished upon us a dignity and worth higher than the measure of the present, and so we know ourselves as those <add: 'who'?'> can afford to count others more significant than ourselves without loss to our own dignity.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, by the Spirit the new nature transcends an economy of competition in the church and sees that it is better to give than to receive because everything we have is given by the inexhaustible God (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 4:7; Jas 4:1-10). It is on the other side of this prodigality to one another, answering the prodigality of God towards us, that humility declares itself.

Oliver O'Donovan speaks about some such intentional disposition of the members in relation to the whole body in terms of 'communication'.<sup>57</sup> The church's fellowship is a condition effected by the Spirit's working (ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) and an active relating of the members to one another in the common cause of the gospel (Phil. 1:5; 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:13). In so doing, the members attend to the good they share and to its being shared.<sup>58</sup> That is to say, the community communicates. Unpacking this, O'Donovan argues that communications of material and spiritual goods always involve the communication of meanings, which is perhaps another way of arguing that the end of the work (*finis operis*) and the end of the agent (*finis operantis*) must always be considered in any moral evaluation of an action. Only where both elements are 'common' is there genuine community of action between members; if my action towards my neighbor does not have as its end some communicable and public character within the church, it compromises community.<sup>59</sup> In the church, love is this end, arbitrating the process through which intention becomes action and thereby respects peaceful consensus and regard for one another. Because love comes to us from God, it breaks in as gift and transcends any normal economy of reciprocity in which initiatives are merely returns for things already received from one another.<sup>60</sup> On these terms the fundamental sin against the community is pride, which 'begins in *self-immanence*, <emphasis original or added?>preoccupation with one's own life and tasks, withdrawing the precious self from the harsh light that encounter with others might shed, declining to find peace in community'.<sup>61</sup> Pride refuses to find some proximate finality in the community, and therefore closes itself off to the claims of having 'the same love, being in full accord and of one mind' (Phil. 2:2). It refuses Paul's injunction: τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ, 'to

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<sup>56</sup> Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 114.

<sup>57</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, pp. 45–71.

<sup>58</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, p. 51.

<sup>60</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, p. 68.

agree in the Lord' (Phil. 4:2). What does this account of the community and the sin against it suggest about pride's antidote, humility?

Pride wanders from God's upward calling, and roosts in more readily available, less demanding pursuits. Pride rests in anything but God; it mistakes *usus* for *frui*, and cuts short the true nobility of the soul. That is, pride deracinates moral nature by emptying its *actus primus* of any significance for moral deliberation.<sup>62</sup> It wants nature without teleology, so it bends the cosmos towards the preservation of a self that belongs to itself. Opposed to this is the humility that embraces the moral nature Christ gives us and therefore embraces its appointed telos (cf. Phil. 2:8; Jn 13:1; 19:30; cf. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4). The humility that finds its root in faith declares itself in love and aims at unity because the humility formed in us is the humility of Christ.<sup>63</sup> Thus Jesus prays to the Father, 'The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one' (Jn 17:22).<sup>64</sup> The glory in question is the true glory pursued by humility, hidden in weakness and service to others, but visibly declared in love all the same. Love that did not issue out of an embrace and trust in the moral nature constituted in Christ would not have this particular spatial shape (*räumliche Gestalt*) in the power of the Spirit, but only the 'appearance (*μόρφωσιν*) of godliness' (2 Tim. 3:5; cf. 1:5-7).<sup>65</sup> As this teleology takes shape, God evokes genuine love of neighbor: 'love

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<sup>62</sup> See Robert Spaemann, 'Bourgeois Ethics and Non-Teleological Ontology', in *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, pp. 45–59.

<sup>63</sup> Asking whether faith is 'formed' by love, Polanus comments: 'a thing is recognized to be perfect when it acts. As philosophers teach, form is not perfect when taken as *actus primus*, but when regarded as *actus secundus*: for by operating it stretches out its powers and declares itself. And in this manner faith is made perfect from love, not in that by nature or essence faith is completed and finished through love, but because it declares and discloses itself through love. And this is not proper to one work, like love, but common to all virtues: as James says elegantly, faith is made perfect by WORKS' (Jas 2:22). *Syntagma* 9.6, p. 585 (col. 1i–k).

<sup>64</sup> In this respect, Calvin's exegesis should not be discounted: Christ is the 'exemplar of perfect beatitude', in whose human nature 'the semblance of the Father's glory has been engraved, in order that he may transfigure (*transfiguret*) his members into it'. Calvin, *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis* 17:22 (CO 47, col. 388).

<sup>65</sup> Paul says in the same verse that the community should shun (*ἀποτρέπου*) such external appearances. Given the argument thus far about the spatial shape of moral nature, Bengel's comment is apropos: '*ἀποτρέπεται* is said of one who *ἀναχωρεῖ*, withdraws, and spontaneously shuns'. Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. M. Ernest Bengel and J. C. F. Steudel, trans. James Bryce, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1860), p. 306 (on 2 Tim. 3:5).

without mixed motives, without conceit, without arrogance, without deceit'.<sup>66</sup> Humility means love that transcends the self's preoccupations, and which therefore opens itself to others—principally those fellow members of the same **body**. Discerning the spatial figure of our new nature means that honoring God in our individual bodies might require deferring to others in the larger **Body**<**body not capitalized above – OK?**> of which we are now part. Hence, one of the distinguishing marks of humility: *non nobis, sed publico vivimus*.<sup>67</sup> This opening is not private, though, as if humility were simple self-renunciation *tout court*—this would scarcely make humility's political claim more than an abstract check on individualism.<sup>68</sup> Humility does in the first place refer the individual to Christ, but because it does this it also refers them to Christ's bride as the immediate context in which Christ claims their obedience. Our love for Christ's bride aligns our love with Christ's love. Humility therefore opens itself to the claims of the love common to the church which enjoys 'fellowship' in Christ's Spirit (Phil. 2:1) so that it may stand firm in 'one spirit' (Phil. 1:27). In so doing we lower ourselves in correspondence to Christ, because we do not seek our own benefit; we restrain our own prerogatives for the sake of edifying our neighbors, thus strengthening the church's unity in love: 'none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself ... whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord' (Rom. 14:7-8). Paul says this in the context of encouraging the 'strong' in the church to regard the strength of their conscience not as a means of power over others and service to the self, but as a means of loving service that 'welcomes' those who are 'weak' (Rom. 14:1).

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<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Serm.* 142.12, trans. Edmund Hill, *WSA* III/4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), p. 421.

<sup>67</sup> van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, p. 1206. Elsewhere, he characterizes humility towards our neighbor in complementary fashion: 'Humilitas, qua parati sumus, fratribus nos subicere in eorum bonum'. Ibid., *Theologiae moralis*, III.iv, p. 1250.

<sup>68</sup> Humility could easily become a manipulative tool making the church resistant to reform, since self-assertion is so contrary to the lowliness required by humility. However, conflict is not always a matter of mere self-assertion. Correction and reform consistent with humility is patient and kind, free of resentment and the delusion that we alone are authors of the corrective course to be taken, much less that we alone are the objects of injustice (1 Cor. 13:4). Because an injustice against one member is an injustice against the whole body, then correction of policies, actions and structures that hinder the church's common good also protect its individual members. More to the point, such manipulative uses of so-called 'humility' are employed by those who assume the role of judge (Col. 2:18), forgetting that Christ alone is the judge of his church. Heidegger remarks, '*humility* is not the distorted sort by which someone subjects themselves to **καταβραβεύετω**, the defraud of a reward'<emphasis original or added?>. *Corpus Theologiae Christianae*, vol. 1, *locus* xiv, *sectio* iii.xliv (p. 578, col. 1).

Alongside this correspondence to Christ lies an incongruity: by opening ourselves to the claims of the love common to the society of God, we also open ourselves to being served by others. We may have to learn from others, share their experiences to the extent we can, be recipients of extrinsic goods that only others may communicate. The good of love poured into our hearts through the Spirit belongs to the fellowship the church enjoys in common, so if we are humbly receptive to the claims of love we will not withdraw from the unity of the church and from finding our place therein as but one member in the service and need of others.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

Augustine famously summarized the rules of the Christian religion with ‘humility’, and Edwards likewise states that if everything about humility were to be mentioned, ‘that would in some way or other include the whole of our duty, both towards God and towards man’.<sup>70</sup> If humility is bound up with the kind of belonging suggested here, then it indeed **ambitions**<OK used as a verb?> some such comprehensiveness. We therefore risk describing too much when describing humility in this fashion. As rooted in faith, humility is our trusting acknowledgment and embrace of the truth about ourselves: that we are not our own in the most radical sense, that we have nothing in ourselves, and so our weakness is the vehicle of God’s strength. As this faith gives substance to hope, humility is an eschatological disposition that answers to the promise of exaltation on the other side of cruciform discipleship by pursuing true glory counterintuitively. Finally, humility is as vital as the faith in which it is rooted and so it works by love that corresponds to the love of Christ. These are the positive associations in light of which traditional admonitions to self-renunciation make sense. Humility is in this light the inner and outer acts by which we live into our possession by God. It is our active belonging to God our creator and redeemer in the present with the anticipation of a fuller belonging to come, and the form this eschatological dispossession takes in the present through our belonging to one and the same body with fellow disciples. In all of this the new nature that is ours in Christ is figured temporally and spatially in our belonging to another. If the wisdom of this belonging is ‘endless’, as Eliot suggests, then it is so because ‘love never ends’ (1 Cor. 13:8).

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<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *Serm.* 125.6 (*WSA* III/4, p. 258).

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits* 6.I, p. 238; Augustine, *Letter* 118.3.22, in *WSA* II/2, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), pp. 116–17.