REVISIONING TRANSFORMATION:

TOWARDS A SYSTEMATIC

PROTO-EVANGELICAL PARADIGM

OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Within the contemporary church, usage of the term *transformation* has become commonplace. However, the way it is understood is often misguided. This study provides an original synthesis that points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation.

Self-identified "evangelicals" continue to explore the possibility of authentic transformation. There is now a proliferation of perspectives on the nature and process of Christian formation, some of which attempt a revision through ecumenical "ressourcement" or interdisciplinary methods. These often-conflicting approaches leave a landscape characterised by pluralism, division, fragmentation, confusion, relativism, individualism, pragmatism and subjectivism. Although evangelicalism is seen by some as a restorationist movement that seeks to draw the church back towards a prototypal faith, self-identified "evangelicals" clearly exhibit differences in their beliefs and practices. Both the absence of a common, coherent and integrated vision, and the lack of transformation itself, are often simply accepted and affirmed.

In this thesis, it is argued that the only way to move towards the possibility a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology, is through an approach that is grounded in rational-linguistic truth. Such a method is typified by J. I. Packer. His approach to integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality is used as the initial basis towards pursuing a "proto-evangelical" approach to Christian formation. In order to determine the breadth of Packer's approach, he is brought into dialogue with Maximus Confessor. This critical conversation between two "theologians of the Christian life" allows exploration into the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and the seeking out of common characteristics in its nature and practice. This all provides a solid basis upon which to be able to outline an original synthesis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Problem

Within the contemporary church, usage of the term *transformation* has become commonplace. However, the expressions of what it is, and how it occurs, are often misguided. The divine call is for the whole church to be continually formed towards Christlikeness and unity, in accord with the will of God. The ecclesial focus often shifts towards more human-centred forms of development, which results in a plurified ecclesial landscape characterised by fragmentation and relativism. This problem can be seen within evangelicalism. Self-identified "evangelicals" have continued to explore the possibility of authentic transformation. This has led to a proliferation of perspectives on the nature and process of Christian formation, some of which have attempted a revision through ecumenical "ressourcement" or various interdisciplinary methods. Although evangelicalism may be seen as a restorationist movement that seeks to draw the church back towards a prototypal faith, self-identified "evangelicals" clearly exhibit plurality in their beliefs and practices. This thesis sets out to demonstrate the need to move towards expressing and living out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation. It is argued that the only way this can be done is through an approach grounded in rational-linguistic truth.

Rather than providing a solution to the aforementioned ecclesial problem, the so-called "evangelical" landscape appears to affirm it. As a means of denoting a distinct religious identity, the term *evangelical* has progressively become more ambiguous. This "identity crisis" may be due to the fact that so-called "evangelicalism" appears to be becoming increasingly more fragmented rather than demonstrating unity. Today, this supposed cross-denominational movement is believed to be so broad and diverse that it has become increasingly difficult to define the commonalities.[1] The term *evangelical* has been used to express anything and everything; consequently, in one sense it has come to mean nothing. Brian Harris has warned: "Evangelicalism is in danger of becoming a

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[1] Various perspectives have been expressed in Andrew D. Naselli and Colin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

hyphenated movement. Increasingly its adherents find it necessary to qualify what kind of evangelical they are."[2]

Despite being seen as a wide and diverse movement, it is often assumed that evangelicalism is united around specific doctrinal tenants, promising a unified theological understanding, rather than being disjointed and divided. Theologians such as J. I. Packer have sought to defend the doctrinal unity within the movement.[3] The reason for doing so is clear – without the recognition and demonstration of a unified expression of belief, the movement stands to express openness towards conflicting beliefs and practices that stem from the individual will, rather than divine intention. If there is singular objective truth that God is willing and able to make known, then by definition it would be illogical for persons to celebrate, affirm and accept contradictory and irreconcilable perspectives. A true evangelical approach stands or falls on the possibility of there being a common and universal narrative that persons are able to continually grow in the knowledge of.

The well-known quadrilateral put forward by historian David Bebbington (i.e. "biblicism," "crucicentrism," "conversionism" and "activism") has been thought to define the central characteristics of evangelicalism.[4] In offering a broad framework that is grounded in phenomenological study and research, Bebbington's intention was not to provide criteria that would lead towards orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Because of its flexibility and ambiguity, his framework allows space for some form of relativist plurality to be permitted within the movement, over and above true unity around theological convictions. Today, the evidence of such plurality is demonstrated by the diverse beliefs seen across the

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[2] Brian Harris, "Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era," *Churchman* 122, no. 3 (2008): 201.

[3] This is demonstrated in James I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004). Various other attempts have been made to outline common beliefs among self-identified "evangelicals." For example, see John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 2005); Christopher J. H. Wright, ed. *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011).

[4] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

so-called "evangelical landscape."[5] Given that a phenomenological study of self-identified "evangelicals" is unable to provide any objective criteria for discernment or orthodoxy, it would appear that so-called "evangelical" identity is becoming increasingly confused.[6] In regard to the presence of pluralism within the movement, Steve Porter makes an important point:

> The problem with pluralism of any kind is that if we do not actually have knowledge of the reality in question independently of the plurality of perspectives, then we cannot develop any criteria to determine which perspectives or which parts of various perspectives correspond to the reality in question. And if we do not have the means to discriminate between the various perspectives or their parts, then all perspectives and each part becomes either equally valid or equally invalid. Relativism or scepticism prevails – take your pick.[7]

As well as there being diversity in beliefs, the lived practices and expressions of faith demonstrated in the lives of self-identified "evangelicals" appear to be increasingly diverse. From a phenomenological perspective, it is difficult to describe a distinctly "evangelical spirituality," there appears to be so much fragmentation, complexity and variety. Indeed, it is questionable whether it exists as a distinct and fresh expression, given that it would have grown out of a wide variety of traditions that preceded it, traditions both within and outside of

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[5] For a range of views, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). See also Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011). Smith suggests that the plurality of perspectives stems from a lack of biblical clarity. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "May We Go Beyond What is Written After All? The Pattern of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 764. Vanhoozer believes that Smith "…fails to distinguish the naive biblicism characteristic of *solo scriptura* from the critical biblicism that characterises *sola scriptura*."

[6] Within a British context this is demonstrated in Robert Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); Steve Clifford, ed. *21st Century Evangelicals: A Snapshot of the Beliefs and Habits of Evangelical Christians in the UK* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2011); Stephen R. Holmes, "Evangelical Theology and Identity," in *21st Century Evangelicals: Reflections on Research by the Evangelical Alliance*, ed. Greg Smith (Watford, UK: Instant Apostle, 2015). The problem is that a sociological method will always allow forms of individualism and relativism. Whether something is right or true (or "evangelical") becomes subjectively determined by specific individuals/groups (who are self-identified as "evangelical"), rather than by an objectively revealed Word. A sociological method cannot lead to any true consensus because there is the observance of beliefs and practices that (to a greater or lesser extent) will always be distorted by the sinful nature of humanity.

[7] Steve L. Porter, "On the Renewal of Interest in the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Methodological Reminder," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 3 (2002): 421.

Protestantism. Bruce Hindmarsh affirms that "...evangelicalism emerges as a devotional movement in continuity with older traditions of Christian spirituality."[8] Given its broad heritage, so-called "evangelicalism" does not appear to express anything new, so never forms an isolated spirituality. Moreover, due to the various historical influences both from inside and outside Protestantism, it is far from monolithic.[9]

If there is such thing as a distinctly evangelical expression of the Christian life, then what is it? Many commentators have made attempts to properly define the parameters and distinctive characteristics of "evangelical spirituality."[10] The problem is that each of their descriptions has far less in common than one would like. Ian Randall has provided one of the more comprehensive phenomenological studies.[11] The conclusions of his research serve to reinforce the kaleidoscopic and eclectic nature of "evangelical spirituality," to the point where one wonders if it represents anything cohesive at all. Among self-identified "evangelicals" there are

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[8] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "Seeking True Religion: Early Evangelical Devotion and Catholic Spirituality," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 119.

[9] Richard Turnball, *A Passionate Faith: What Makes an Evangelical?* (Oxford, UK: Monarch, 2012), 150.

[10] For example, see Peter Adam, *Roots of Contemporary Evangelical Spirituality* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1988); Bruce Waltke, "Evangelical Spirituality: A Biblical Scholar's Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 1 (1988); Chris J. H. Hingley, "Evangelicals and Spirituality," *Themelios* 15, no. 3 (1990); James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: SPCK, 1991); David Parker, "Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1991); John Goldingay, *Evangelical Spirituality* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1992); David K. Gillett, *Trust and Obey: Explorations in Evangelical Spirituality* (London: DLT, 1993); John Cockerton, *Essentials of Evangelical Spirituality* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1994); Robert H. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic and Biographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999); Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1999); *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London: DLT, 2005); Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds., *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008); Simon Chan, "New Directions in Evangelical Spirituality," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2, no. 2 (2009); Ian M. Randall, "Recovering Evangelical Spirituality," *European Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (2010); Evan B. Howard, "Evangelical Spirituality," in *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, ed. Bruce Demarest (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); Stephen E. Olsen, "Evangelical Perspectives on Spirituality," *European Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (2010); Susan B. Ridgely, "Connected Christians: New Practices in Evangelical Spirituality," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 14, no. 1 (2014); Tom Schwanda, ed. *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016).

[11] See Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*. Diversity is also apparent in sociological research on the spiritual lives of self-identified "evangelicals," see Steve Clifford, ed. *Time for Discipleship?* 21st Century Evangelicals: A Snapshot of the Beliefs and Habits of Evangelical Christians in the UK (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2014).

tensions and irreconcilable differences. Any concept of a coherent movement, or coherent spirituality within the movement, appears to be a construct of the historian and sociologist. In reference to Randall's research, David Parker states:

> ...the vast number of examples of different types and varied instances of spirituality that appear in this work sometimes giving the appearance of a mere catalogue or smorgasbord rather than a coherent movement with substantive content presents a challenge of categorisation. Although the structure (from Keswick onwards, in opposites and variations) provides a useful analytical scheme, which the author exploits fully, there are many instances where exceptions, anomalies, tensions and paradoxes are noted, suggesting that the data is perhaps more complex than the author's theoretical framework allows. Furthermore, Bebbington's quadrilateral, a key factor in the analysis, may not be a sharp enough instrument to handle what is certainly revealed to be a 'kaleidoscopic' phenomenon.[12]

The problem is not simply the presence of God-given diversity; there is clearly the need for broadness within the Christian life.[13] However, this cannot be confused with an unqualified and uncritical embrace of everything as a possible source and expression of the divine good. Although so-called "evangelicalism" may be understood to contain within it diverse God-given expressions that are healthy, necessary and complementary, it can also be seen to express a plurality that is both contradictory and conflicting. While diversity is proper and necessary in any given context, the presence of a relativistic plurality is inherently problematic because it denotes irreconcilable divisions that stem from the human will; as opposed to a paradoxical unity-in-diversity that reflects the Triune God.[14] A true God-given diversity can only occur as a result of persons having a unified and singular identity.

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[12] David Parker, "Book Review – Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28, no. 4 (2004): 375.

[13] A broad evangelical approach is suggested in John Tiller, *Puritan, Pietist, and Pentecostalist: Three Types of Evangelical Spirituality* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1982). For attempts at holistic approaches to the Christian life, see Dennis Hollinger, *Head, Hands & Heart: Bringing Together Christian Thought, Passion and Action* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005); Joel R. Beeke, *Developing Healthy Spiritual Growth: Knowledge, Practice, and Experience* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2013). Both Hollinger and Beeke have recognised the need for balanced approach. The need for a "broad" approach drawing from across the Christian tradition has been advocated in Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

[14] Donald A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1996), 443f.

Evidence of plurality is seen in the wide variety of incompatible and irreconcilable approaches that have been put forward as possible ways of understanding the nature and practice of spiritual growth.[15] In reference to the differing views, Steve Porter states: "Confusion reigns when there is no meta-theory which deals appropriately with divergent theoretical voices."[16] Such confusion stems from individualism, where the focus is on personal preference rather than obedience to the divine will.[17] Douglas Groothuis warns against such self-styled spirituality, which, at its root, has no concern for absolute truth. He believes that what is needed is a "...spirituality as set within a framework of objective truth. Otherwise Christian spirituality will be seen as simply another pragmatic, relative, subjective option."[18]

The apparent absence of transformation in the lives of many self-identified "evangelicals" has certainly contributed to the proliferation of approaches to Christian formation that have been put forward in recent years. In the early 1970s, church historian Richard Lovelace commented on the failure of so-called "evangelical" Christians to grow in spiritual maturity, a phenomena he coined the "sanctification gap."[19] More recently John Coe has spoken of this gap as being "...the awareness of an immense distance between where we should, could or

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[15] This plurality is revealed in various studies. For example, see Stanley N. Gundry, ed. *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987); Donald L. Alexander, ed. *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988); Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1999); Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); Evan B. Howard, "Advancing the Discussion: Reflections on the Study of Christian Spiritual Life," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008). See also Simon Chan, "New Directions in Evangelical Spirituality," ibid.2, no. 2 (2009); Chris Armstrong, "The Rise, Frustration, and Revival of Evangelical Spiritual Ressourcement," ibid., no. 1.

[16] Porter, "Doctrine of Sanctification," 420.

[17] It has been suggested that there is the specific path that individuals are required to take, being dependent on their own "personality type" or "spirituality type." See Allan H. Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990); Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1995); Julia McGuinness, *Growing Spiritually with the Myers-Briggs Model* (London: SPCK, 2009); Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

[18] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 165-166.

[19] Richard F. Lovelace, "The Sanctification Gap," *Theology Today* 29, no. 4 (1973). See also Steve L. Porter, "Sanctification in a New Key: Relieving Evangelical Anxieties Over Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (2008).

ought to be spiritually and where we in fact are…."[20] It has been assumed by some that self-identified "evangelicals" in pursuit of real change, depth and authenticity, need to look outside of their own "tradition."[21]

There have been attempts to present ways to rectify the "problem" of the lack of depth amongst self-identified "evangelicals." Some commentators have called for renewal, based upon the understanding that so-called "evangelical spirituality" is narrow, rather than broad and holistic.[22] There has been increased exploration into how authentic transformation can occur, with different approaches being put forward. In recent years a need for revision has led to a greater ecumenical "ressourcement," through which self-identified "evangelicals" have become exposed to an ever-increasing array of "spiritual practices," and a confused understanding of what constitutes a "deeper" Christian life.[23]

This trend can be seen most evidently within the "spiritual formation movement" which surfaced in the late 1970s. This movement began among those who were concerned to see authentic transformation within the church, partly in reaction to the emphasis on a salvific conversion experience and correct doctrine.[24] Despite the merits of this movement in highlighting the need for authenticity and spiritual maturity, it has not had continued success, with the plurality of approaches to

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[20] John H. Coe, "Spiritual Theology: A Theological-Experiential Methodology for Bridging the Sanctification Gap," ibid.2, no. 1 (2009): 4.

[21] This understanding is expressed in Foster, *Streams of Living Water*; Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*.

[22] See Simon Chan, "Spiritual Practices," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 247. Some of the studies that have advocated the broadening of an "evangelical" view are Parker, "Evangelical Spirituality"; Philip Seddon, *Gospel and Sacrament: Reclaiming a Holistic Evangelical Spirituality* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2004); Christopher Cocksworth, *Holding Together: Gospel, Church and Spirit – The Essentials of Christian Identity* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2008); Chan, "New Directions."

[23] Parker, "Evangelical Spirituality," 123; Chan, "New Directions," 219; "Spiritual Practices," 249. The need for ecumenical "ressourcement" is reflected in Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, eds., *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990); Foster, *Streams of Living Water*; Boa, *Conformed to His Image*; Keith Beasley-Topliffe, ed. *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003); W. David Buschart and Kent D. Eliers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

[24] Some of the main figures at the start of the movement were James Houston, Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard and Richard Foster. The movement has been noted for both positive and negative contributions, see Armstrong, "Rise, Frustration, Revival"; Rick Langer, "Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement," ibid.5, no. 2 (2012); Steve L. Porter, "Is the Spiritual Formation Movement Dead?" ibid.8, no. 1 (2015).

spiritual growth doing little to provide a comprehensive or coherent understanding of the Christian life.[25] At best, the openness to diverse theories and practices has provided a view of the Christian life that is "piecemeal." It has reinforced the absolute value of personal preferences, and led to an emphasis on some areas at the expense of others, rather than allowing for a common and integrated view. Furthermore, rather than the movement grounding spiritual growth in a solid Protestant soteriology, it has expressed overdependence on a series of imperatives and practices, or "spiritual disciplines," and so demonstrated a misunderstanding of the critical connection between belief and practice.

The conflicting approaches to Christian formation that have been offered have left a landscape characterised by confusion, pluralism, fragmentation, relativism, individualism, pragmatism and subjectivism, which (to a lesser degree) serves to reflect the cultural zeitgeist. Steve Porter believes that many self-identified "evangelicals" "...become disillusioned and frustrated with the Christian life, as they are confronted with a welter of divergent perspectives."[26] Much of the contemporary search for authenticity in the Christian life appears to have added an unnecessary level of complexity, and perhaps elitism, beyond that which is presently accessible to the ordinary Christian who simply desires to be a "faithful follower of Jesus."

Amongst some evangelical groups there has been growing concern to reform spirituality in accord with biblical teaching.[27] At best, evangelicalism has been seen to be about persons seeking to be biblically faithful, standing under the authority of the biblical text, in order that it may be allowed to continually form them. Those assuming such a method would argue that any alternative approach to reforming the Christian life would only take away from, rather than add to, the possibility of spiritual depth, transformation and authenticity. This would mean that reliance upon anything outside of Scripture (as a central means through

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[25] "Doctrine of Sanctification," 421.
[26] Ibid., 426.
[27] An attempt at expressing a biblical understanding of sanctification can be seen in David G. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995). For an attempted outline of a broad biblical perspective on the Christian life, see Andrew M. Davis, *An Infinite Journey: Growing Toward Christlikeness* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2014).

which to explore Christian formation) would ultimately only weaken a commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. As a result, this would lead to a quasi/distorted understanding and experience of so-called "transformation," rather than being truly authentic.

Those advocating a more biblical focus believe that rational-linguistic communication has a central and irreplaceable function, and is the only means that can lead towards a holistic approach to spiritual growth. The term *rational-linguistic* denotes a logocentric method of communication that reveals knowledge. It is "rational" in terms of involving mind-to-mind communication that is to be understood, and "verbal" in terms of involving the spoken word. In the Christian faith, that which is to be communicated in such manner is the gospel and the fullness of biblical teaching, in correspondence with the objective revelation of God already spoken forth in history. Many recognise that the simple need is to reform based upon a commitment to the biblical gospel, and to accept Scripture as *the* central source and authority for understanding the nature of the Christian life, while recognising the proper place for tradition, experience and reason.[28] The assumption here is that a core understanding of transformation and the central practices and principles that lead to transformation are clearly revealed in Scripture. In light of this, the only reform and renewal that is seen to be required, is that which is done in accord with scriptural teaching, and involves the right use of Scripture as *the* foundational "spiritual practice."[29]

It is suggested that contemporary Christian expressions of transformation are problematic to the degree that they move away from (what this thesis proposes to

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[28] See Donald A. Carson, "When is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (1994); Donald S. Whitney, "Defining the Boundaries of Evangelical Spirituality," in *The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Colorado Springs, CO, 2001); Robert L. Plummer, "Are the Spiritual Disciplines of Silence and Solitude Really Biblical?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (2006); P. Adam McClendon, "Defining the Role of the Bible in Spirituality: "Three Degrees of Spirituality" in American Culture," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (2012); *Paul's Spirituality in Galatians: A Critique of Contemporary Christian Spiritualities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

[29] For example, see Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading and Applying the Bible* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014).

be) the only effectual "centre," i.e. rational-linguistic truth.[30] The reason for any move away from rational-linguistic communication may be because it is seen as a limited medium that relies too much on the inadequacies of human language and the rational faculties. It could be construed that a rational-linguistic focus can only lead towards a narrow/limited expression of Christian formation, rather than a holistic one, and is therefore unable to assume a central place. The thesis argues that the aforementioned "transformation problem" (which ultimately stems from the human condition and the desire for autonomy from the divine will) cannot be solved by rejecting/suppressing rational-linguistic communication, or allowing it to be peripheral.

In the section that follows I will present the aim of the thesis in light of the problem that has been outlined. I will then begin to lay the foundation of the thesis by introducing the central subject matter (i.e. the nature of transformation in the Christian life), and set the trajectory for what is being called a "proto-evangelical" approach.[31] Following this, I will give an explanation of the methodology that will be used, and introduce the two dialogue partners, whose thought will be examined in the early part of the thesis. Finally, there will be a literature review and conclusion.

1.2 Aim of Research

In light of the problem expressed, the central aim of the thesis will be to outline an original theological synthesis that points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation. It is argued that the only way to move towards the possibility of a cohesive vision of transformational theology is through an approach that is grounded in rational-linguistic truth.[32] The presentation of an original synthesis

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[30] This refers to various works cited in this chapter that (to some degree or another) are not fully grounded in a rational-linguistic centre.

[31] A *proto-evangelical* approach is understood to involve the concern of being grounded in the original core message of the Christian faith, the "first gospel" that God spoke in history (in his Son), which was proclaimed as "good news" by the early church, in accord with the Scriptures. Consequently, it also denotes a core commitment to the witness and authority of the Scriptures, which God has already spoken in history.

[32] "Transformational theology" is being understood as a systematic framework of theology solely orientated towards the central goal of the Christian life – namely, transformation into the image of Christ.

will prove the importance of this centre, and in doing so, solve the aforementioned problem. The model that is produced must express a broad, balanced and internally consistent approach to Christian formation, both in terms of understanding and practice.

An effectual transformational theology needs to fully express integration, through eliminating dualism and dichotomy. I will demonstrate that it is possible to construct a holistic model that does not dichotomise, but instead holds together the important elements of transformational theology without breaking them apart, or placing undue emphasis on one area at the expense of others. The premise is that formation does not occur by means of an isolated "part," given that nothing can be understood except in relation to everything else. It cannot be authentically or accurately understood, or expressed in ways that are rooted in modes of separation or false dichotomies, where emphasis is placed upon "part" rather than "whole." Therefore, the need is to express an organised outline of transformational theology that allows for a focus on the nature of the connections between all the parts, embracing the whole rather than being "piecemeal" by just focusing separately on the parts.

The premise is that the problem outlined can only be solved by exploring a proper relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality, i.e. suitably integrating doctrine, experience and praxis. It is suggested that an integrated approach to Christian formation requires the construction of a well-developed framework for a "theology of the Christian life," where an appropriate understanding of the Christian life can be located within the proper theological framework. Therefore, the need is to provide a way of formulating a theological framework that fully embraces orthodox beliefs with practices, a theology of formation of that does not allow a dualistic separation between theology and life.

The framework of transformational theology to be put forward must be seen to demonstrate a broad and diverse approach, while also expressing common characteristics. It is argued that there is a need for it to be grounded in a distinctly "proto-evangelical" centre (which is characteristically rational-linguistic in nature)

under the premise that it can only show both breadth and integration through the implications of a clearly defined centre. The model will need to hold together the central concerns of transformational theology without the methodological premise of this centre being compromised. In developing an integrated model, I will seek to explore both central characteristics of Christian growth, and central means that nurture formation. In doing so, the purpose will be to demonstrate the necessity of embracing unity-in-diversity. This will mean showing the need for common points of agreement about the nature and practice of Christian formation, while at the same time integrating broad concerns, without conflict.

1.3 Area of Research

1.3.1 Transformation and the Christian Life

The central subject matter of this thesis is the Christian life, with the specific focus being the nature and process of transformation, as understood from (what is being called) a "proto-evangelical" perspective. In this section, I will set the context for understanding transformation and the Christian life, and in the subsequent section discuss the meaning of evangelicalism.

The starting point for understanding the Christian life is recognising that it is rooted in the redemptive narrative. The biblical story portrays human existence as being "disordered" as a result of persons being alienated from their original state of union with God. It also portrays God's relation to his people as being redemptive. In Christ, God has revealed himself in human flesh, demonstrating both divine and human life in its fullness. Through his salvific work, Christ brings forth the possibility of reconciliation, so that God's people may be able to more fully reflect his life to the world. In light of this, Christ calls people to live distinctive and counter-cultural lives. He confronts the world with the call to repentance and conversion. His teachings call for radical obedience, for persons to continually turn away from a self-glorifying and disorderly existence, towards a life lived in relation to the Triune God.

An imitation of Christ's earthly life must stem from personal faith in the risen Christ; otherwise it leads towards autonomous personal morality. Through faith, the Christian life is grounded in union with Christ's death and resurrection. It

involves the continual movement of persons losing their own life to find new life in Christ. As persons continually seek to follow Christ, they increasingly come to reflect his image more. The Christian life is also characterised by the work of the promised Holy Spirit, who has been poured out upon the church as a result of Christ's salvific work. It is only through the presence and power of the indwelling Spirit that persons are able to live in a distinct way. Rather than being an individualistic experience, formation happens as a result of persons seeking to follow Christ together, in the power of the Spirit, the end goal of transformation being corporate, rather than private.

This thesis focuses specifically on examining the nature of the Christian life through use of the transformation motif. Various different terms and phrases have been used when referring to the central need in the Christian life, e.g. "spiritual growth," "spiritual [trans-]formation," "Christian [trans-]formation," "spiritual development," "spiritual maturity," "holiness," "sanctification," "discipleship," "piety," "godliness." Without overlooking the clear nuances and distinct meanings of each of these, the common trajectory they indicate is the movement towards Christian distinctiveness, a process that may best be encapsulated by the term *[trans-]formation*.[33] Although this motif only represents one angle from which to explore the nature of the Christian life, its value lies in the fact that it denotes the central telos, the goal of the Christian life being that persons are changed into the image of Christ.

The need for transformation is of central concern given that it is a mark of authenticity, and a sign of God being actively at work in a person's life. Given the depths of human depravity, there may be disillusionment over the possibility of experiencing authentic transformation, and the question asked as to whether sustainable change can really occur in a person's life before the eschaton.[34]

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[33] The importance of the term is demonstrated in Kees Waaijman, "Transformation: A Key Word in Spirituality," *Studies in Spirituality* 8 (1998). Though the terms *formation* and *transformation* may be used interchangeably, it could be suggested that "formation" denotes any marginal change, while "transformation" points to a more marked and dramatic change. The term *Christian formation* is perhaps the most suitable phrase to describe a distinctly Christian approach to [trans-] formation.

[34] The struggle for transformation has been expressed in Steve L. Porter, "The Gradual Nature of Sanctification: Σάρξ as Habituated, Relational Resistance to the Spirit," *Themelios* 39, no. 3 (2014).

Although the absolute fulfilment of the telos will occur at the eschaton, the Scriptures affirm that distinctiveness in the Christian life is both possible and necessary in this present age.[35] The question then only concerns the degree to which the inseparable relation between eternity and history will allow the in-breaking of Christ's risen life in the present witness of his church.

In the contemporary church, use of the term *transformation* has become commonplace. Self-identified "evangelicals" have continued to explore the possibility of authentic transformation through a variety of different approaches. Some of these approaches have been characterised by a notable shift, in that focus has moved away from a need for ecclesial transformation towards a "wider" understanding that is supposedly more "holistic" and "inclusive."[36] This drive towards "holistic" transformation may in part be due to disillusionment over the authenticity of ecclesial transformation. It also reflects the desire to integrate all areas of human life, and to understand the connections, rather than to compartmentalise or dichotomise. This has led to a shift of focus towards areas of

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There has been various research carried out to determine how Christian formation occurs, see Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004); Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008); George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2009); Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010); Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012); Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014); Thomas E. Bergler, *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). There are also various published studies suggesting how change occurs, see Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); Tim Chester, *You Can Change* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008); Timothy S. Lane and Paul D. Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008); Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); David G. Benner, Larry Crabb, and Gary Moon, "How We Change [Special Issue]," *Conversations: A Forum for Authentic Transformation* 8, no. 1 (2010); Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, 3rd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2013).

[35] An attempt to understand transformation as a central motif in Pauline theology can be found in David A. DeSilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul's Gospel* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

[36] There are many examples of attempts to provide a "holistic" approach through integrating the concerns of human development with Christian formation. For example, see Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian: Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007); Jeannine K. Brown, Carla M. Dahl, and Wyndy C. Reuschling, *Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

human development outside of a redemptive schema, with many approaches seeking to "integrate" by expressing an understanding of Christian formation that incorporates insights on development from other disciplines.[37]

There have also been approaches put forward that are "holistic," in terms of focusing on the need for the church to place a central emphasis on bringing about various forms of empirical change across society.[38] Within these approaches God's present redemptive mission is often portrayed as being primarily about fulfilling all "human needs." Consequently, ecclesial mission is broadened to include all that individual Christians do in their societal roles to meet needs that are common to all.[39] The main problem here is that, in seeking to be "broad," ecclesial mission is portrayed as including God-given activities that are common across *all* humanity, and as a result can easily shift from being distinctly Christian (i.e. away from the central need for the glory of Christ to be revealed through his church), and not allow this focus to dictate any subsequent societal change that

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[37] David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 219f. One of the most ambitious attempts to provide a "holistic" transformational theology is by Adrian Van Kaam. Van Kaam is the author of a dense eleven volume integrated work on spiritual formation: a seven volume set on "formative spirituality," that sought to integrate formative service, anthropology and theology, and a four volume set with Susan Muto that is more strictly understood as a "formation theology," as well as numerous other books on formation studies. A helpful summary of Van Kaam's contribution is seen in James C. Wilholt, "Only God's Love Counts: Van Kaam's Formation Theology," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (2008). See also Susan Muto, "The Unfolding Project: Science, Anthropology, and the Theology of Human and Christian Formation," ibid.4, no. 1 (2011).

[38] Disillusionment with personal or ecclesial transformation can result in persons shifting to focus on human-centred goals, i.e. looking towards a more concrete and universalistic understanding of "transformation," which involves society becoming subject to the socio-political action of the church, in an attempt to "redeem culture." The problem is that human-centred goals are being pursued through activity common to *all* humanity, and such is not necessarily synergetic with persons becoming conformed to reflect the glory of the risen Christ.

[39] For an attempt to justify this from Scripture, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Leicester, UK: IVP Academic, 2006). This approach has arisen out of the "transformational development movement." Within this movement, the term *transformation* has specifically been used to describe "holistic" forms of change that occur as a result of all that Christians do for the common good. This approach confuses the distinct mission of the church, with the wide range of God-given callings individual Christians (and non-Christians) have within society. The "transformational development movement" has been well documented in Al Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008). Academic articles on "transformational development" have appeared in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*. In particular, see Chris Sugden, "Transformational Development: Current State of Understanding and Practice," *Transformation* 20, no. 2 (2003). Other key works affirming this approach have been Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds., *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Bryant Myers, L., *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

may occur. Though this "inclusivism" may be thought to lead to "holistic" (or "whole-life") transformation, it can lead the church towards the exact same focus and concerns as secular culture, rather than the primary focus (and distinct mission) being to make the glory of Christ known to the ends of the earth.

The emphasis in this thesis is on the distinct transformation that can only be seen to occur within the life of the Christian community. As a result of identification with the salvific work of Christ, and a dynamic relationship with the living God, Christian formation can occur. The process of formation cannot be controlled or fully understood. It transcends a reductionist, prescriptive or formula driven approach. However, persons can create opportunities for formation to occur by means of continually nurturing their "personal relationship" with God. Rather than beginning with a precise and/or narrow definition of transformation from a Christian perspective, what follows is a simple yet broad definition that will later be developed upon in a holistic way:

> *(A) Transformation begins with the work of the divine agency.*
> Christian formation is grounded in the redemptive work of the Triune God. God initiates formation in human life based upon his own will and purposes, and provides the means for it to be able to occur.

> *(B) Transformation requires intentional human co-operation with "A" – the divine agency.*
> Christian formation occurs where persons demonstrate the intentional willingness and appropriate response to what God is seeking to do in their life. This requires both a desire to change, and a continual commitment to live in consecration and obedience to God.

> *(C) The purpose of "A"+"B" is for persons to be progressively conformed to the image of Christ.*
> Christ expresses the fullness of the divine life in human flesh. The goal of Christian formation is for the whole church to reveal the image of Christ, to the glory of God.

When grounded in a soteriological narrative, these three elements articulate how Christian formation can be clearly differentiated from human development, both in terms of its central goal and central means. The definition allows for a proper understanding of Christian growth and formation that transcends fragmented expressions. The central dynamic here is of a "personal relationship" with God, in which God initiates and persons respond, where God reveals himself, and persons choose to co-operate with him in order that they may come to reflect his character more. The above definition provides the ground upon which to develop a broad, holistic and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology.

1.3.2 The Meaning of "[Proto-]Evangelical"

This thesis sets out to explore a "proto-evangelical" view of transformation. The term *proto-evangelical* is being used to describe an understanding that is grounded in a biblical-theological method. In this section, I will attempt to deconstruct the usefulness of understanding "evangelicalism" as a phenomenon constructed upon historical and social science approaches, before reconstructing a biblical-theological (and protological) understanding that holds to a rational-linguistic centre. It is proposed that this understanding, deemed to be "proto-evangelical," is the only meaningful way that the term *evangelical* can be understood.[40]

The term *evangelical* has become notoriously hard to define.[41] D. A. Carson notes: "Giving definition to evangelicalism is not only difficult, but is growing even more

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[40] The need for a biblical-theological approach has also been expressed in Donald A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's Renewing the Center," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard Erickson, J., Paul Helseth, K., and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 43-44. Carson affirms: "I have long argued that 'evangelicalism' must be defined first and foremost theologically, or else it will not be long before the term will become fundamentally unusable to its core adherents." Other works that focus on a more biblical-theological approach are David M. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992); Mark D. Thompson, *Saving the Heart: What is an Evangelical?* (London: St Matthias Press, 1995); John H. Armstrong, ed. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1996); Robert C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003); R. Albert Mohler, "Confessional Evangelicalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew D. Naselli and Colin Hansen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Joel R. Beeke, *What is Evangelicalism?* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2012).
[41] For an introductory discussion on the different perspectives, see Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views*. Different attempts to describe evangelicalism can be found in Timothy Larsen, "Defining

difficult as a wider and wider group of people apply the label to themselves. It may be, as some have suggested, that the term will eventually so lack definition as to be theologically useless – much like the term *Christian* today…."[42] Given that the term *evangelical* is often designated to a eclectic variety of groups, there is an increasing need to ask what type of evangelical we are talking about. As Colin Hansen states: "Simply labelling ourselves evangelical no longer suffices. We are conservative, progressive, post-conservative, and pre-progressive evangelicals. We are traditional, creedal, biblical, pietistic, anti-creedal, ecumenical, and fundamentalist. We are 'followers of Christ' and 'Red Letter Christians.' We are everything, so we are nothing."[43] Because of the variety of meanings that have come to be associated with the term *evangelical,* the word has become virtually meaningless.[44]

Although evangelicalism may be defined in a variety of different ways, there are essentially only two ways to go about the task of looking for a definition, through either a *historical-sociological* approach or a *biblical-theological* approach. Bruce Hindmarsh explains:

> …the most common way to define evangelicalism is by trying to determine the distinctive, universally shared characteristics of the movement. This can be done from the inside, as it were, by an evangelical theologian such as J. I. Packer, who writes from conviction about what evangelicalism *ought* to be, or from the outside, by a historian such as David Bebbington…who describes from a more neutral point of view what it seems the movement *is* (or what it *was*). Whereas Packer identifies a syllabus of ten doctrinal convictions that *ought* to characterise evangelicals, such as the authority of Scripture,

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and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Mark A. Noll, "What is 'Evangelical'?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010); David W. Bebbington, "About the Definition of Evangelicalism," *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* 83 (2012); Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark A. Noll, "Defining Evangelicalism," in *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History & Culture in Regional Perspective*, ed. Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); Brian C. Stiller et al., eds., *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

[42] Carson, *Gagging of God*, 444.

[43] Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views*, 9.

[44] See Darryl G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 16. Hart affirms: "Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist. In fact, it is the 'wax nose' of twentieth-century American Protestantism."

the supremacy of Christ as Saviour and Lord, the necessity of faith and holiness, and so on, Bebbington argues that only four characteristics have really distinctively characterised evangelicals throughout their history, namely, their emphasis on personal conversion, the Bible, the cross of Christ, and active Christian service....[45]

There are commonalities, but also vast differences between the approaches of Packer and Bebbington. Packer's biblical-theological approach involves seeing evangelicalism primarily as a renewal movement that is based around doctrinal norms, while Bebbington defines evangelicalism historically, based upon what he sees as phenomenological commonalities across a broad movement. In defining evangelicalism within a historical-sociological framework, Bebbington has sought to find commonality across the evolving beliefs and experiences of Protestant groups. He points to four broad and imprecise characteristics as being present, i.e. "biblicism," "crucicentrism," "conversionism" and "activism."[46] The underlying problem with Bebbington's approach is his understanding of the origins of the movement. Brian Harris summarises the controversy over Bebbington's thesis:

> ...Bebbington argues that the origins of the evangelical movement should be linked to the renewal movements of the eighteenth century and that evangelicalism should be dated to the pivotal events of the 1730s that marked the start of an extended period of spiritual awakenings. As this challenges the notion of gospel successionism popularised by leading evangelicals such as Packer and Stott, who argue that evangelicalism is essentially New Testament Christianity, as recovered by the Reformation, reinforced by the Puritans and popularised by the awakenings from the 1730s onwards, it is not surprising that some have been critical of Bebbington's work.[47]

Although Bebbington's quadrilateral may in some way describe broad commonalities amongst self-identified "evangelicals," it cannot provide any means of expressing or holding to aspirational norms, i.e. orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Consequently, it leaves room for pluralism, division and contradiction within the so-called "evangelical world." For Bebbington, evangelicalism is more

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[45] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "Contours of Evangelical Spirituality," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 150.
[46] For discussion on some of the weaknesses in Bebbington's theory, see Kenneth J. Stewart, "Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century?: An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2005). See also Haykin and Stewart, *Emergence of Evangelicalism*.
[47] Harris, "Beyond Bebbington," 202.

about the present and evolving state of the beliefs and behaviours of a wide variety of social and ecclesial groupings, than it is about solid theological convictions or aspirational virtues. Furthermore, Bebbington's quadrilateral does not provide any characteristics that can be said to be exclusive to evangelicalism, and so suggests a false view of unity and cohesiveness within one subset of Christianity over another. Some if not all of the four characteristics described by Bebbington would apply in some way to other Christians who do not identify as "evangelical."[48]

From a phenomenological perspective, so-called "evangelicalism" has become so broad and fragmented that the possibility of a common "evangelical" identity appears to be futile. Robert Warner has pointed out the increasing diversity within (what he understands to be) "evangelicalism," demonstrating that it is an increasingly fragmented movement.[49] Ironically, his accurate observations of self-identified "evangelicals" ultimately only serve to reinforce the futility of the observation itself. "Evangelicalism," sociologically understood, is indeed evolving and moving, because those self-identified as "evangelical" have themselves defined what it is, both in terms of belief and practice – it has become a "wax nose." A historical-sociological method is unable to find a solid and workable framework, because it is rooted in a subjective observation of subjective experience, and consequently subject to the relativism that arises from this. It will invariably include observing the plurality of beliefs, behaviours and experiences of fallen and fallible human beings. In summary, any attempts to properly observe and describe a true movement of God phenomenologically prove to be futile. In the truest sense, this kind of "evangelicalism" is a mirage – it does not exist.[50]

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[48] See Mohler, "Confessional Evangelicalism," 73. In regard to the quadrilateral, Mohler affirms, "...these criteria are so vague as to be fairly useless in determining the limits of evangelical definition. Construed in such general terms, it is hard to see how many Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants would not consider themselves included. They, too, believe that lives need to be changed, hold 'a particular regard for the Bible,' place a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and seek an activist demonstration of their faith. So, even as Bebbington's descriptive argument is helpful, it hardly solves the problem of evangelical identity and definition."

[49] See Warner, *Reinventing Evangelicalism*.

[50] When Christian identity is not framed by biblical language it can become subject to language that is sociological/political, which leads to tribal labels, e.g. "conservative," "moderate," "liberal," "charismatic," "open/progressive," etc. Such groupings are a simplistic attempt to pigeonhole groups and individuals. These designations inevitably lead to the acceptance and

As an alternative to the historical-sociological understanding, it is suggested that the term *evangelical* may, in its truest sense, only be defined by its protological ground. Therefore, it is only a biblical-theological method that is able to provide the means towards an objective and meaningful definition, and so orientate a "proto-evangelical" understanding. By taking this approach it is possible to understand central evangelical commitments, convictions and aspirations.

In seeking to follow a biblical-theological approach, Packer has for the most part sought to describe evangelicalism through the lens of theological orthodoxy. His approach has involved laying out doctrinal markers that he sees as being necessary and common to self-identified "evangelicals."[51] While these markers may indeed be congruent with orthodoxy, in order to define the essence of what it means to be evangelical, the imperative should not be to start with a focus on the specific boundaries of a movement, but instead to define its core convictions. An understanding of what it means to be evangelical has to arise out of a clearly defined centre, and the recognition of how persons would be seen to relate to that centre, in order that they may be able to increasingly come to express the norms and aspirations of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It is through continually seeking to be faithful to this centre that persons can gradually be formed.

Packer's understanding of evangelicalism is not only rooted in "confessional" orthodoxy, but also in evidence of a transformed existence. He states: "Should persons who endorse this ideal notionally fail to pursue it practically, the right thing to say of them is that they are not real evangelicals."[52] The point Packer is making is that being truly evangelical involves seeking to conform with both the doctrinal ideal (the "conceptual norm"), and the behavioural ideal (the "aspirational norm"). While this would be necessary for evidence of authenticity, the achievement of such an ideal is always something that persons are called to work towards. A person's commitment to be faithful to the aforementioned

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affirmation of contradictory perspectives, under the guise of "inclusivity," "broadness" and "diversity."

[51] See Packer and Oden, *One Faith*; James I. Packer, "Reflection and Response," in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 179-181.

[52] "Reflection and Response," 183.

rational-linguistic centre should lead to a change in their beliefs and actions, causing them to be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ.

A biblical-theological understanding is rooted in protological concerns. Only when the definition of evangelical is determined protologically can it have any real meaning, for it becomes rooted in the proper historical ground, leading to proper convictions and aspirations. Don Payne points out that Packer does understand evangelicalism as being "…rooted in Reformational theology, Puritan-type pietism, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideals of evangelistic outreach."[53] Packer does not see himself apart from the post-reformation "evangelical tradition." However, at the same time he recognises the need for "norming norms" which stem from historical continuity with the "Great Tradition."[54] Packer refers to the:

> ...mutation of the former self-image of evangelicals as the marginalised faithful remnant within liberal-led Protestantism into a sense of being truly the core of God's church on earth. Evangelicalism is more and more viewing itself as the mainstream in relation to which non-evangelicals, whether so by adding to the biblical faith or subtracting from it, are deviating eddies....[55]

While Packer believes that evangelicalism is both historical and theological in nature, his understanding of it remains within the context of "gospel successionism." He does not see evangelicalism as simply being a narrow post-reformation movement affirming "confessional" truths, but first and foremost as a people seeking to bring the church back within the "Great Tradition" characterised by a true commitment to the apostolic gospel. According to Packer, evangelicalism is:

> ...the Christianity, both convictional and behavioural, which we inherit from the New Testament via the Reformers, the Puritans, and the revival and missionary leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth

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[53] Don J. Payne, *The Theology of the Christian Life in J. I. Packer's Thought: Theological Anthropology, Theological Method, and the Doctrine of Sanctification* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 18.
[54] Packer, "Reflection and Response," 179f.
[55] "A Stunted Ecclesiology?" in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 120.

centuries.... The reason why I call myself an evangelical and mean to go on doing so is my belief that as this historic evangelicalism has never sought to be anything other than New Testament Christianity, so in essentials it has succeeded in its aim.[56]

It is suggested that using a biblical-theological method (to understand the term *evangelical*) will enable a "proto-evangelical" approach, because it appeals to protological concerns centred around the redemptive climax of the drama of God in human history. The understanding is that God has already fully and objectively revealed himself by his Word (i.e. in his Son and the Scriptures), through the Spirit. This "first gospel" is the truth that God the Father spoke forth his Son, who lived the perfect life, died on the cross, has been resurrected, and is presently exalted, reigning as Lord and Saviour. This was witnessed by the early church and verbally proclaimed as "good news," in accord with the Scriptures. Consequently, the term "proto-evangelical" would also denote a core commitment to the witness and authority of the Scriptures, which God has already spoken.

The church has always been called to faithfully pass down the "spoken Word," in congruence with the Word that was spoken by the Father in history. It is to be faithfully communicated as rational-linguistic truth, so that it may be understood and lived in relation to.[57] The possibility of persons being able to faithfully receive and respond to rational-linguistic truth starts with the presupposition that there is a personal, sovereign and transcendent God – an omniscient being to whom all are accountable, who is a possessor of absolute truth and chooses to share this with humanity. If God is able to communicate himself so that persons can come to true knowledge and understanding of him (and respond appropriately), then formation can occur. Revelation is not first and foremost rooted in a subjective experience; it begins as the objective drama of God in history, being *a priori* and independent of any human knowledge or acknowledgement of it.[58] If God has

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[56] "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ: Some Evangelical Reflections," *Churchman* 92, no. 2 (1978): 102.

[57] The importance of rational-linguistic language has been demonstrated in Vern Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language – A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

[58] See R. Albert Mohler, "'Evangelical': What's in a Name?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1996), 39. Mohler states: "If Scripture is not objectively true, independent of our acknowledgement, and if God is not objectively real, independent of our knowledge of him, then we are without hope. If Jesus Christ did not die on the cross as our substitute and if he was not

already spoken his Word in history, it does not need a human witness to be deemed true – he has already declared it to be so.

The rational-linguistic centre is two-fold. It can be understood by its content (the "material principle"), which is the substance of the gospel based upon scriptural teaching and, by its authority (the "formal principle"), appealing to Scripture to shape and define in light of the gospel.[59] In this sense, the "formal principle" has to be tested by the "material principle," they have to work together. The "material principle" can be defined as the objective historicity of Christ's coming as God's self-revelation in human flesh, culminating in his death, resurrection and exaltation. To be evangelical is to be faithful to this "good news," as it is understood to be the same gospel that was verbally announced by the eyewitnesses, and to proclaim it as the sole means of a person's salvation.[60] As the "formal principle," Scripture is understood to be authoritative, sufficient and perspicuous. It is seen to be the absolute source and final authority for both belief and conduct. It is also understood to be sufficient, in that nothing else needs to be added to it, and to be clear, in terms of its true meaning being accessible to those who read it. As revelation in history, it is understood to be wholly true and wholly complete in and of itself. Therefore, it is the only ground for an integrated and cohesive understanding of transformational theology. The *a priori* revealed truth of God in history is to be the ground of the subjective experience of individuals; with persons needing to continually grow in true knowledge of the transcendent Other in order to experience authentic formation.

In summary, at its best, evangelicalism is a renewal movement committed to the "Great Tradition," and to bringing the church back to what it understands to be

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resurrected on the third day, if we have not been justified by faith and if his righteousness has not been imputed to us, then we are dead in our sins. Christianity is predicated upon a claim to absolute truth, though we never claim that, in our fallenness our knowledge is ever absolute. To surrender this ground is to surrender the faith itself."

[59] The importance of these two areas is demonstrated in John H. Armstrong, "Two Vital Truths," ibid.

[60] See Carson, *Gagging of God*, 448. Carson affirms "...I hold that 'evangelical' and 'evangelicalism' are most useful when they are held to their etymology in the evangel, 'the gospel [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son' (Romans 1:2-3), on the assumption that such an 'evangel' is held with firmness and sincerity of heart. In this light, evangelicalism as a movement must be seen to be determined by its centre, not by its outermost boundary – and even that centre must, in the light of its own confession, constantly be held up to the examination of Scripture."

"true Christianity," by continually subjecting its beliefs and practices to the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, within which the "good news" of the gospel of Christ is the centre.[61] To be evangelical would be to speak of "guarding" and "preserving" that which has already been objectively revealed in history. Such is the aspirational task of those who seek to be faithful stewards of the gospel and the Scriptures, as they have been given, to defend and proclaim truth as God has willed, and to seek to faithfully live in light of the truth.[62]

On this understanding, where persons cease to do this, they cease to be evangelical, in both intention and practice. And any problems within so-called "evangelicalism" occur because persons are not wholly embracing the fullness of the evangel, in which true orthodox tradition rests. In seeking to develop a broad and holistic understanding of transformational theology, the need is not simply to explore a variety of Christian traditions, but more precisely, to be open to the evangel wherever it is found. In doing so, there is the possibility of persons critiquing where their own "tradition" has strayed from the gospel and the authority of Scripture. It is argued in this thesis that the only basis on which a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology can be constructed, is by being grounded in the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, in which the gospel of Christ is the centre.

1.4 Research Methodology

1.4.1 Introduction

Various different approaches could be taken in the attempt to provide an original integrated theological model of Christian formation. In this thesis, it is suggested that where there is a division between "theology" (denoting propositional doctrine and belief structure) and "spirituality" (denoting lived faith, experience and praxis) the outlined problem is not resolved. Consequently, the need is for an approach

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[61] See John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1970), 33. Stott affirms, "…if evangelical theology is biblical theology, it follows that it is not a newfangled 'ism,' a modern brand of Christianity, but an ancient form, indeed the original."

[62] See Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1996), 37-38. McGrath affirms that: "Evangelicalism is determined to 'let God be God,' and to receive, honour and conceive him as he chooses to be known, rather than as we would have him be. At its heart, evangelicalism represents a relentless and serious attempt to bring all our conceptions of God and ourselves to criticism in the light of how and what God wishes to be known."

that examines the interface between doctrine and life, an approach that involves a blend of theological and practical insight.

The initial basis for a reconstruction of transformational theology will happen as a result of engaging with two Christian thinkers. This will provide the basis for the theoretical framework developed later on in the thesis. The constructed synthesis will be doctrinal, in that it will be forged within the discipline of systematic theology, and practical, containing a theology of the Christian life.

1.4.2 Theology and the Christian Life

In order to move towards the development of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology, I will begin by examining the work of two Christian thinkers. These two "theologians of the Christian life" will be used to provide the means for exploring a broad understanding of the subject in hand. I will engage with their vision of integrating theology and spirituality in order to have a solid basis for outlining an original theological synthesis that points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation.

J. I. Packer is being put forward as an example of a figure within the contemporary church who has intentionally sought to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality. His thought is examined as an initial basis towards pursuing a "proto-evangelical" approach to Christian formation. In order to determine the breadth of his approach, Packer is brought into dialogue with Maximus Confessor. Maximus has been selected because he is a significant figure from another tradition, who has also sought to provide a "broad" and "holistic" approach, by integrating theology and lived faith. Both Packer and Maximus share the common characteristic of being pedagogical in their approach, using forms of catechesis, albeit in a different sense.[63]

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[63] See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). Smith reacts against the central need for the transfer of information/knowledge for formation, and creates a false dichotomy by separating the "renewing of the mind" from the formation of the whole person. He also overlooks the fact that rational-linguistic pedagogy was central in the discipleship method of Jesus, who (as an itinerant rabbi) used it to invoke understanding (in the first instance) that would lead to a response affecting the

The original contribution in the thesis is not in the study on Packer or Maximus. However, there will be an original re-reading of both, involving the exploration of two different ways in which theology is seen to be integrated with the Christian life. Both Packer and Maximus express their own distinct view of Christian formation, and both point towards the possibility of a broad and integral approach. The critical conversation between them will allow exploration into the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and be a means of seeking common characteristics in its nature and practice.

There are many reasons for selecting Packer. Firstly, he has had a lasting and significant influence on the modern "evangelical" scene, especially amongst more Reformed groups. Packer is known as someone who has sought to defend orthodoxy and to strive for unity. Although he spent much of his working life as a systematic theologian, he has also demonstrated a strong concern for the Christian life in his writings, and has clearly sought to do theology for the sake of the whole people of God, rather than just for the academic community.

Packer has a clear concern for historical rootedness, desiring the church to embrace the "Great Tradition" that is rooted in faithfulness to Scripture, i.e. biblical mainstream Christianity.[64] He understands that, first and foremost, the need is to be faithful to the biblical gospel rather than to defend a historical movement within the church. Therefore, he recognises that self-identified "evangelicals" must engage with (and learn from) other traditions in order to be able to continually challenge and correct their own. In doing so, they can grow in

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whole person (see Matthew 5-7; 11:1; 13:10-23; Luke 24:45; John 8:42-47; 13-17). Jesus also instructed his disciples to make disciples by teaching others to observe all that he had taught them (see Matthew 28:18). For an examination of Jesus' educational methods, see Sylvia W. Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus' Educational Methods for Today's Church* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2007).

[64] James I. Packer, "On from Orr: Cultural Crisis, Rational Realism and Incarnational Ontology," in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics & Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 155. See also Alister E. McGrath, "The Great Tradition: J. I. Packer on Engaging with the Past to Enrich the Present," in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "Retrieval and Renewal: A Model for Evangelical Spiritual Vitality," ibid.

their knowledge of the authoritative revelation of God revealed in Scripture.[65] Tradition is not seen by Packer as being an original or authoritative source like Scripture, but rather as a necessary tool required in order to lead the church towards a more accurate understanding of Scripture.[66] Though supporting ecumenical dialogue, Packer does not do so at the expense of abandoning orthodox Protestant doctrine. Being known for "collaboration without compromise," he engages outside of his tradition, but does so on his own terms.[67]

Packer is someone who has sought to move towards expressing a balanced approach to the Christian life as a result of being grounded in rational-linguistic communication. The thesis will look at the extent to which he points towards a truly holistic and broad approach to Christian formation, based upon his understanding of the relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality. Examining the integrated perspective of Maximus exposes the contemporary approach represented by Packer to a well-known patristic father. In keeping with the Eastern Christian tradition, Maximus provides a comprehensive synthesis between the concerns of theology and spirituality. He is a prime example of an early church theologian who has sought to bring together a broad array of insights into an integrated vision. This allows exposure to a comprehensive and integrated system as a testing mechanism. Maximus is known as someone who synthesised across his thought, bringing together various different ideas without presenting them as opposing. His vision will be laid out in order to provide an example theology of the Christian life that is both expansive and integral.

I will engage in a dialogue with both thinkers, looking at the extent of their ability to provide an integral system of Christian formation. Although there are many

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[65] Packer strongly affirms the proper role for tradition in the church, see James I. Packer, "The Comfort of Conservatism," in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992).

[66] See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 84, 86. Lints sees tradition as including "…the entire collected expressions of biblical interpretation (written and unwritten) to which particular past communities have committed themselves and by which they have sought to transmit their faith to subsequent generations." He continues: "…entering into a conversation with the past as well as the present communities of interpretation can help us to make a determination of what constitutes fidelity to the Scriptures."

[67] Alister E. McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Biography of James I. Packer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 288.

elements of Maximus' system that are incompatible with a rational-linguistic approach, his thought can used to explore questions around the nature of an integral model. The insights derived from the two different perspectives will become the starting point for moving forward with an original re-reading of transformational theology. This construction of a new theological synthesis will be in two parts. Broadly speaking, the first part will represent the concerns of theology, and the second part will represent the concerns of spirituality.

1.4.3 J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor: Primary Sources

The early chapters of the thesis will involve drawing on both primary and secondary material related to Packer and Maximus. Secondary material will be discussed in the literature review. This next section will specifically focus on introducing the relevant primary sources.

Packer has authored and edited almost three hundred separate pieces of writing.[68] The material most relevant to this thesis is that which aids in being able to express the main contours of his theology as a whole, and more specifically, his understanding of the Christian life. There is currently no published work of Packer that outlines in detail his systematic theology, or his theology of the Christian life. A synopsis of Packer's theology is given his book *Concise Theology*. Based on an exposition of Scripture, Packer briefly outlines some important themes in theology that he sees as historic and classic mainstream.[69] He claims that the book sets out the "…permanent essentials of Christianity, viewed as both a belief system and a way of life."[70] Packer has produced a vast array of published articles on a variety of theological topics. Many of these articles cover issues related to soteriology, the Christian life and theological method.[71] He has also written a vast number of popular works.

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[68] Payne, *Christian Life*, 3.

[69] He has also written several books and journal articles on the doctrine of Scripture and biblical authority, see James I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1996); *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996); *God Has Spoken*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005).

[70] *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*, 2nd ed. (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2011), xi.

[71] Ninety-one of his articles appear in a four volume series *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*.

Throughout his writing career Packer has sought to hold together the concerns of theology and the Christian life. His understanding of the interrelation between the two is perhaps best exemplified in his well-known work *Knowing God*. Here Packer acts as a "catechist" by expressing a biblical understanding of the nature of God, and then relating this understanding to the Christian life. His most focused work on the Christian life is *Rediscovering Holiness*. In this book, he provides biblical reflections on soteriology and Christian piety, along with practical applications. Also of importance to Packer's understanding of Christian living are *Knowing Christianity,* and *Keep in Step with the Spirit.* In the latter work, Packer examines pneumatology from a Reformed perspective, and explores a theology of the Christian life in response to other popular models of progressive sanctification. In other works he has written in appreciation of the piety found in previous generations, which he sees as being worthy to be emulated.[72]

In holding to biblical authority and orthodox doctrine, Packer's consistent aim has been to work towards unity and renewal within the Anglican Communion, and to work towards ecumenism with evangelicals of other denominations by promoting "Great Tradition" Christianity. Although Packer has supported the ecumenical movement, he has always believed that unity should not come at the expense of abandoning orthodox Protestant doctrine.[73] This passion for doctrinal unity is demonstrated in his work with Thomas Oden called *One Faith*.[74]

With regard to Maximus, there is no single work of his that provides a systematic presentation of his theology as a whole, nor any that provides a synopsis of his understanding of the Christian life.[75] Although only some of his works have been translated in part or not at all, there have been a significant number of English

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[72] For example, see James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994).

[73] Packer's understanding on ecumenism is reflected in his essay "On from Orr." As well as being involved in *Catholics and Evangelicals Together,* Packer has demonstrated an interest in Eastern Orthodoxy. In 1997 Packer taught a course on *Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* with Bradley Nassif at Regent College, Vancouver. He also wrote the foreword to a book which compared the two traditions, see James Stamoolis, ed. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

[74] Packer and Oden, *One Faith*.

[75] A full chronological list of his writings is given in Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, "A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor," in *The Oxford Handbook on Maximus Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

editions of his writings appearing in recent years. The most important of his works translated to date are: *Liber Ambiguorum* (Ambigua or Difficulties), *Quaestiones et Dubia* (Questions and Doubts), *Capita de Caritate* (Four Centuries on Love), *Capita Theologiae et Oeconomiae* (Centuries on Knowledge), *Liber Asceticus* (The Ascetic Life) and *Mystagogia*.[76] An analysis of all this material can provide insight into Maximus' overall theory and his understanding of the Christian life.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Transformation in Contemporary "Evangelicalism"

This literature review will be in two parts. It will begin with an examination of contemporary approaches to Christian formation within the "evangelical world," looking at the contribution of representative figures who have sought to express different ways of renewing perspectives on [trans-]formation in the church. I will engage with four different "evangelical" voices, which will allow for a discussion on a broad range of approaches.[77] In discussing their works, I will explore how each has sought to "revision transformation." Each of them provides works that have offered a critique of so-called "evangelical" approaches, and/or set out to provide a new way forward for understanding Christian formation. In the second part of the literature review I will assess the relevant secondary material on J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor.

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[76] The main translated works in English are as follows: Polycarp Sherwood, ed. *St Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity* (New York: The Newman Press, 1955); George C. Berthold, ed. *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985); G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1990); Andrew Louth, ed. *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996); Despina D. Prassas, ed. *St Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); Nicholas Constas, ed. *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua. 2 Vols.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[77] Alongside these four voices (and J. I. Packer), other notable "evangelical" writers on Christian formation/spirituality in the last forty years would include Robert Webber, James Houston, Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, David Benner, Alister McGrath, Donald Bloesch, Ian Randall, Evan Howard, John Coe, Robert Mullholland, Bruce Demarest, Steve Porter, Gordon Smith, Jerry Bridges, Joel Beeke, Gary Thomas, Peter Adam, James Smith, Tom Schwanda, Kyle Strobel, Kelly Kapic and Larry Crabb. There is also an evangelical journal dedicated specifically to studies in Christian formation, *The Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*. In particular, see Steve L. Porter, "Spiritual Formation in the Academy and the Church: A State of the Union," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014). Porter introduces a series of articles attempting to document the state of academic studies within this field.

Richard Lovelace

An important contemporary commentator on spiritual renewal has been the church historian Richard Lovelace.[78] Lovelace has desired to see "spiritual theology" at the centre of renewal, and for self-identified "evangelicals" to study Christian spirituality.[79] His seminal work is *Dynamics of Spiritual Life,* which he calls "...a manual of spiritual theology, a discipline combining the history and the theology of Christian experience."[80] In this text, he speaks of the absence of spiritual maturity that is seen to be present among self-identified "evangelicals," which he coins the "sanctification gap," and sets out a vision for "holistic" spiritual renewal.[81]

In exploring the nature of renewal, Lovelace believes that personal formation should not be separate from other areas of regeneration in church and society. He sets out a broad vision that offers a base for ecumenical renewal. Lovelace believes that self-identified "evangelicals" have something to offer the wider church theologically, while (at the same time) needing to listen to the evangel of Christ being preached and enacted in other Christian traditions. Lovelace firmly believes that evangelicalism must hold to biblical authority and bring theological reformation and integration, including needing to increase theological depth through biblical education. He also proposes a need to "live orthodoxy," which involves holding to propositional truth and doctrine, while understanding that a true commitment to orthodoxy is found in living it.[82]

Lovelace does not set out to root his approach within a framework of theological orthodoxy; he instead focuses on developing integrative models for renewal based upon both post-reformation history and Scripture. He presents what he calls a "unified field theory" of spirituality that seeks to reconcile different areas of

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[78] His main work is Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979). A later (and much shorter) revision of this appeared as *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985).
[79] Lovelace understands the term *spiritual theology* to denote the integration between spirituality and theology, rather than seeing it as being synonymous with spirituality.
[80] Lovelace, *Spiritual Life*, 11.
[81] This was first recorded in is his article "The Sanctification Gap."
[82] *Spiritual Life*, 271f.

Christian experience, and sets out the broad parameters for "holistic" renewal.[83] Rather than solely focusing on personal formation, Lovelace seeks to embrace various dimensions of renewal (individual, corporate and societal) with the understanding that they are all interconnected, holding together the need for a relationship with God, personal growth, community life, theology, mission, etc.[84] Lovelace does not set out to provide an exegetical basis for formation or renewal, the "biblical models" for renewal that he puts forward may perhaps more accurately be described as "biblical principles."

Lovelace's influential work has clearly set out helpful parameters for understanding an integral approach to renewal. However, he has not sought to provide a systematic model in which to understand it. Instead, what Lovelace offers is a comprehensive manual of insightful principles, rather a systematic attempt to provide a cohesive theological model for "holistic" transformation. It is questionable whether he provides the most effective integral framework for renewal, given that his approach is not rooted in a systematic theological framework. While others have looked outside of the "evangelical tradition" towards a wider variety of sources, Lovelace looks to it for "ressourcement."[85] However, he has spoken about the need for self-identified "evangelicals" to listen to other voices outside their tradition, where others have preserved biblical values that they lack, as listening to history will help to "…force us back towards biblical balance and authentic spirituality."[86] Within a "proto-evangelical" approach, the need is not to hold to "evangelical tradition," but rather to be rooted in a protological concern, and in doing so, move towards an understanding that is more acceptable outside of the "evangelical world."

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[83] Ibid., 17.

[84] There have been more comprehensive attempts at providing "holistic" approach, many of which include a shift in emphasis towards "societal transformation." For example, see Myers, *Walking with the Poor*.

[85] Some works have encouraged people to explore wider than the so-called "evangelical tradition." For example, see Foster, *Streams of Living Water*; Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: The Original Call to an Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013).

[86] Richard F. Lovelace, "Evangelical Spirituality: A Church Historian's Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 1 (1988): 35. The contribution of historical theology for Christian formation studies is explored in Greg Peters, "Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation: A Call," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014); Christopher A. Hall, "Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation: A Response," ibid.

Dallas Willard

Since the late 1970s there has been a resurgence of Protestant literature on ascetical theology.[87] Much of this material has emphasised the need to practice what have been called "spiritual disciplines." Dallas Willard has been an important voice emerging at the forefront of the resurgence. Steve Porter describes five key books that make up the "Willardian Corpus" as being "…a unified and comprehensive account of spiritual growth in Christ…."[88] Together, the principal concepts within Willard's major works suggest a well-ordered understanding of the nature and process of Christian formation.

At the core of Willard's thought is the concern for Christians to move beyond the experience of conversion towards being committed and mature disciples of Christ.[89] His writings show that he has a solid grasp of the fundamental characteristics of a transformational relationship with Christ. He clearly articulates some basic parameters of formative theology and discipleship, laying an emphasis on the need for persons to follow Christ's leading, and on human co-operation that leads to transformation into Christlikeness.

The framework for a transforming relationship is laid out in Willard's first book, *Hearing God.*[90] Here he provides a context for the ascetical theology that arises in his second book *The Spirit of the Disciplines,* where he explores the nature of human co-operation and praxis.[91] Willard focuses on the idea that engagement in discipline and "spiritual practices" enables persons to co-operate with divine resources, which changes human behaviour and leads to character modification.

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[87] The beginning of the literary resurgence is often attributed to Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978).

[88] Steve L. Porter, "The Willardian Corpus," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240.

[89] His understanding of discipleship is outlined in Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[90] *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012). Willard bases his whole system of formation upon the possibility of persons coming to a true knowledge of God. He fully outlines his epistemology in a later work *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014).

[91] *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

Willard's central theoretical model for formation is developed in a later work *Renovation of the Heart,* where he provides a "holistic" understanding of Christian formation based around his own integrated theological anthropology.[92] Willard seeks to describe the transformation to Christlikeness that occurs in different dimensions of a person (mind, heart/will/spirit, body, social, and soul), by means of them interacting with the constant movements of God's grace. He understands this transformation to be a divinely led process that allows the whole of a person's being, from the inside out, to come into harmony with the will of God.

Willard shows due concern for the lack of transformation amongst self-identified "evangelicals," recognising that "transactional salvation" is being pursued apart from discipleship and a transformed life. His concern is for persons to experience authentic transformation, rather than to rely on "cheap grace" and their conversion, without seeking a life of discipleship with Jesus. Willard's remedy for this lack of transformation is to emphasise the need for the church to recapture the essence of the message Christ taught – what he believes to be the "proto-evangelical" gospel.[93] He understands the central need as discovering what Jesus really meant in his teachings, so that the transforming life of God may be experienced now in all its fullness, across all of life.[94]

Willard does not see the need to ground transformation in doctrinal propositions. Instead, he identifies the problem of persons seeking to believe the correct doctrine without the demonstration of real change in their lives. Consequently, there is little function for doctrine in his schema. Rather than believers simply assenting to a set of doctrinal propositions, Willard sees that the central need for

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[92] *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002).

[93] Gary Black, *The Theology of Dallas Willard: Discovering Proto-Evangelical Faith* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), xv. Willard's understanding of Christ's message is expressed in two of his books, see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998); *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

[94] In his later work, *The Divine Conspiracy Continued,* there is an expression of a "broader," more "inclusive" vision of the Kingdom of God which involves a shift towards societal transformation, see Dallas Willard and Gary Black, *The Divine Conspiracy Continued: Fulfilling God's Kingdom on Earth* (London: Harper Collins, 2014).

them to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus as disciples, in order to learn his way – hearing, observing and imitating in order to take on his characteristics. Willard has acknowledged that there is a need to responsibly reconcile the practice of "spiritual disciplines" within a soteriological framework.[95] However, his overwhelming focus has been on the moral teachings of Christ, rather than what Jesus said about himself or about his death and resurrection.

Although Willard's corpus reveals that he is deeply concerned with authentic transformation in this present age, it does not demonstrate that he has allowed the centre of change to be the biblical gospel, nor does it show that he has held together the categories of "law" and "gospel" appropriately. He appears to lay a strong emphasis on the need for obedience to the imperatives of Christ as a means of formation, focusing on the moral teachings of Christ being the main driving force behind transformation. As a result, faith in the exalted Christ and identification with his death and resurrection is not always given the central function of being the catalyst for present transformation in the life of the believer.

The transformation "problem" does not primarily stem from not applying Christ's ethical teaching, but from not understanding and responding to *the* gospel of Christ (which concerns his person, life and salvific work), and leads to union with Christ, which is the only basis for obedience to God. Consequently, Willard's vision of the Christian life is not transformational enough. He defers from emphasising positional and eternal salvation in order to focus more on the need for transformation in this life, and so applies a false dichotomy between the two. Willard's concern for the process of transformation in this present age leads him to assimilate justification and sanctification, rather than allowing sanctification to be driven by justification. Given that reflecting the image of the risen Christ is the goal of the Christian life, transformation in this present age must principally be seen to occur as a result of positional union with the exalted Christ.

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[95] See Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

Despite his desire to emphasise the teachings of Christ, Willard's methodology is not always grounded in a solid exegesis of Scripture. A robust biblical theology of the soteriological drama is not seen to set the agenda for present transformation. Willard writes as a philosopher rather than a theologian, and this is evident in the framework for his understanding of anthropology and formation, which is based upon a mixture of historical and biblical sources, alongside social sciences.[96] Because of the diversity of Willard's sources stemming from a cross-disciplinary method, he does not specifically focus on developing a systematic framework for anthropology/formation in relation to all the appropriate biblical-theological concerns. Therefore, he is unable to provide the most suitable basis for an integrative understanding of Christian formation. Although a focus on positional union with Christ and propositional doctrine are (as I will point out in the thesis) integral to transformation, Willard appears to see an emphasis on these areas as creating the problem, rather than being the solution.

Willard has been critical of a systematic theological method, so it is unsurprising that he does not seek to provide a coherent transformational theology rooted in biblical-theological categories. In leaving a large divide between doctrine and life, he does not provide a way of sufficiently exploring the proper interaction

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[96] A variety of studies have drawn from the social sciences. For example, see James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995). Fowler focuses on a psychosocial stage development. See also Bruce Demarest, "Reflections on Developmental Spirituality: Journey Paradigms and Stages," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (2008); *Seasons of the Soul: Stages of Spiritual Development* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009). Demarest has noted how various contemporary approaches to Christian formation have sought to include insights from developmental psychology. Other significant studies incorporating the social sciences have been Joann W. Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996); Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005); F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010); John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Brown, Dahl, and Reuschling, *Becoming Whole*; Theresa C. Tisdale, "Psychology and Spiritual Formation: The State of the Union," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014); Joanna Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2015). David Benner has made a significant contribution, taking a "psychospiritual" approach to formation that integrates spiritual growth and psychological growth, see Phil Howard, "A Psychospiritual Model of Spiritual Formation: A Review of David Benner's Contribution," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006); David G. Benner, *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011); *Spirituality and the Awakening Self: The Sacred Journey of Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012).

between the concerns of theology and spirituality, in terms of praxis becoming more integrated within orthodox theological categories. Ultimately, his methodology does not lead him towards constructing a suitably "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology because his protological centre is the teachings of Christ, not *the* core gospel itself. The gospel of God cannot chiefly be identified with words of Christ, for it is Christ himself who is *the* Word – spoken by the Father, through the Spirit.

Simon Chan

Another notable contributor to the contemporary conversation on Christian formation is Simon Chan. Chan sees there as being a deficiency with the "evangelical spiritual tradition," and offers a vision of how it can be renewed. He focuses on what he sees as problems and omissions, and then suggests a new way forward.[97] Chan has called for a renewal of "evangelical spirituality" based upon "historical continuity," recognising the need to become more "catholic" by focusing on what it shares in common with the wider church.[98] He has focused on the need for "ressourcement" from other traditions, ultimately pointing towards a more convergent approach that places a stronger focus on liturgy and "spiritual practices," while attempting to integrate them with "evangelical doctrine."

Chan recognises there has been a resurgence on material that emphasises the practice of "spiritual disciplines."[99] He identifies (what he understands to be)

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[97] Chan, "Spiritual Practices."

[98] "New Directions," 236. Others have also attempted a more convergent approach. For example, see Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Cocksworth, *Holding Together*.

[99] Chan, "New Directions." Notable contemporary works on "spiritual disciplines" have been Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1996); Siang-Yang Tan and Douglas H. Gregg, *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit: How to Connect to the Spirit's Power and Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997); Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997); Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000); Keith Drury, *Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004); Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2005); Adele A. Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005); Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2014); David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). For an evaluation of the concept of "spiritual disciplines," see Donald A. Carson, "Spiritual Disciplines," *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (2011).

traditional "evangelical" practices and advocates the enlarging of the list.[100] In Chan's earlier work *Spiritual Theology,* he sought to examine the nature of the Christian life in relation to a "broader" theological framework.[101] He recognises that a separation has often been made between "doctrine" and "living unto God," i.e. between systematic theology and praxis, Christian doctrine and Christian living. In response, he sets out to express "…theological studies concerning the principles and practices of the Christian life."[102] While trying to hold to an "evangelical" commitment, Chan also seeks to explore a "broader" understanding by being more ecumenical in his trajectory.

Chan divides his book into two sections, the first looking at theological principles, and the second examining "spiritual practice." The disconnected explorations into "doctrine" and "praxis" demonstrate that he has not fully understood the proper connection between the two. In the first half of his book, he seeks to relate selected Christian doctrines (theology proper, harmatology, soteriology and ecclesiology) to the Christian life. Here, Chan does not provide a concise systematic presentation of the core elements of Christian belief, and in congruence with many Protestant systematic theologies, his doctrinal categories maintain distinct divisions that do not allow for full integration.

In the second half of the book, Chan focuses solely on practical issues. In doing so, the theological formulations outlined in the earlier chapters all but disappear. Although he seeks to connect these two parts, he is unable to truly bridge the gap, because experiential practice is not fully understood in strict relation to the doctrinal categories previously discussed in the first section. In like manner, Chan is unable to fully contextualise his propositional theology in terms of exploring its relevance to the experiential dimensions of everyday life.[103] He is also

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[100] Chan, "Spiritual Practices."
[101] *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998).
[102] Ibid., 16.
[103] There have been other studies that are more helpful in delineating the appropriate relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality. For example, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: DLT, 1998); Coe, "Spiritual Theology"; Greg Peters, "On Spiritual Theology: A Primer," ibid.4 (2011); Jeannine M. Graham, "Systematic Theology and Spiritual Formation: Recovering Obscured

unsuccessful in being able to integrate and position his own list of "spiritual practices" within an orthodox theological framework.

In a subsequent work *Liturgical Theology,* Chan points to the need for self-identified "evangelicals" to shift away from simply advocating a "broader" series of personal disciplines, towards the more central need for ecclesial practices and liturgical structure.[104] He believes that there is a weak ecclesiology and liturgy within evangelicalism, and sets out (what he understands to be) a "richer," more liturgical ecclesiology, that is to be embraced in all its forms. In doing so, Chan focuses on the need for transformation to occur through the integration of theology and liturgy, with an emphasis on a communal context.

Chan focuses specifically on the importance of corporate liturgy for transformation. He speaks of the effects of liturgical worship in forming persons into a "community of character," placing focus on "Word" and "sacrament" as the primary source of spiritual nourishment.[105] Chan makes a distinction between personal practices and communal liturgical practices, with the latter understood as being able to form persons in ways that individualistic practices cannot do alone.[106] He attests to the mystery of divine action in the liturgy, recognising that it forms persons, not because they have made a conscious effort to be formed by it, but because it has an inherent power to transform.[107] His belief is that "…over time this pervading 'Spirit' of the liturgy will have its unseen effect on individual members and form them into members of the body of Christ."[108] Such an understanding appears to affirm a central role for passivity, rather than placing the central focus on an active response to the preaching of the Word.

Unities," ibid.7, no. 2 (2014); Kelly M. Kapic, "Systematic Theology and Spiritual Formation: Encouraging Faithful Participation Among God's People," ibid.; Beth F. Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014); Keith L. Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

[104] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

[105] Ibid., 55.

[106] Ibid., 91.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid., 92.

Chan seeks to move the focus away from an individualistic form of spirituality. He emphasises the importance of gathered practices within an ecclesial setting as a means of participation in the redemptive story. Consequently, he does not leave room for the lived worship of the "scattered church"; all is tied in so closely with centralised liturgical acts or practices.[109] Participation in doctrine is recognised as being present in the "performance" of the centralised liturgy, the church being seen as needing to "act out," rather than solely focus on, an assent to doctrinal propositions. Chan believes that the heart of ecclesial practice is the common liturgy, and focuses on the need for participation in centralised church activities. Given that performance is centred in specific acts and a specific location, he does not wholly affirm the sacredness and importance of the everyday narrative for transformation. Though Chan brings an important area of the Christian life to the fore, he places too much focus on it as being the solution.

Chan starts with the premise that "evangelical spirituality" demonstrates a specific series of characteristics. He sees the "evangelical tradition" as being deficient because it is understood to demonstrate a form that is limited in its specific emphasis and bias. Consequently, in order to be "complete," he sees self-identified "evangelicals" as needing to converge with the "common heritage." He looks away from a rational-linguistic centre as the central means of enabling integration and formation, believing it to be insufficient. Instead, he looks towards the broader tradition and shared practices of the church. Both authority and transformation are seen to depend on the lived experience and tradition of the church, rather that the biblical gospel remaining at the very core. Ultimately, his approach points towards a grounding of theology in historic liturgies rather than taking a lead from the biblical text itself.

Chan's belief that convergence will somehow solve the transformation problem appears misguided because there is an assumed "wisdom" of collective ecclesial traditions above Scripture itself. He understands the central problem as being the

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[109] There is more emphasis on worship being seen within the "scattered church" in Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*. Rather than focusing solely on gathered liturgy, Smith makes an attempt to frame everyday life within more liturgical terms. His work heavily relies on the Eastern Orthodox tradition, being a reinterpretation of Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000).

overt focus on "evangelical doctrine," and does not see a series of propositional truths grounded in the biblical text as being sufficient to forge a transformed life amongst believers. Therefore, a "broader" approach is proposed, where the individual believer is set within the church and the wider Christian tradition, and called to participate in the "performance" of shared practices. Chan's two main works that I have mentioned attempt to integrate doctrine and praxis in different ways, but do so without moving towards a cohesive and fully integral approach. Though his ideas and suggestions promise more breadth and depth to spirituality, they remain highly fragmented. In light of the argument being put forward in this thesis, it is suggested that attempts such as this to move towards prescribed solutions to the "transformation problem" outside of a rational-linguistic centre, can only result in disillusionment and perpetual searching.

Michael Horton

In recent years, a notable contributor to the conversation from a "confessional" position has been Michael Horton. As a Reformed theologian, Horton has sought to ground the understanding and lived experience of the Christian life in a biblical and systematic theology, rather than taking his lead from ecumenical tradition or the social sciences. Horton has written extensively on the Christian life, while also keeping a focus on doctrine. Most notably, he has written an extensive volume on systematic theology, *The Christian Faith,* where he attempts to find ways of integrating doctrine and life through the interconnected categories of "drama," "dogma," "doxology," and "discipleship."[110]

Horton recognises that faith is the very centre of the Christian life, and consequently sees that a solid belief structure is a prerequisite to a transformed experience in the life of the believer. Therefore, he places an emphasis on the need for persons to be taught propositional doctrine. Horton does not see the problem as being that Christians are not living their doctrine, but rather that they *are* living their doctrine, and that it is a human-centred one. He does not see any value in approaches that focus on pragmatism, but instead focuses on the

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[110] Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

indispensability of doctrine. For Horton, doctrine is necessary to verbally communicate the nature of the redemptive drama in history, for the purpose of worship and a transformed life. Without doctrine, sustainable transformation (in any authentic sense) is not seen to be possible.

Some of Horton's writings have drawn attention to problems within the contemporary "evangelical world," particularly by highlighting the anti-theological bias that is understood to be the driving factor behind the lack of seriousness amongst self-identified "evangelicals." In his book *Christless Christianity,* Horton points out the absence of the biblical gospel within so-called "evangelicalism," showing that much of the focus is human-centred rather than Christ-centred.[111] He points out the problem with self-styled approaches to spirituality that are characterised by subjective experience. Such are understood to demonstrate pragmatism, moralism and anti-intellectualism.

In his book *In the Face of God,* Horton points away from the need for a spirituality that is rooted in personal subjectivity, in particular where the focus is on a "personal relationship" with God that is not solidly grounded in a response to the biblical gospel.[112] Horton reacts against approaches to spirituality that begin with private and subjective experiences, and/or those chiefly praxis based or rooted in humanistic moralism. He highlights the problems that arise from these approaches, especially where there is seen to be a preoccupation with some kind of inner experience, over and above faith in the objective logocentric revelation (i.e. Christ and Scripture). Horton understands these approaches to, at best, be futile human-centred attempts to be saved and transformed apart from the objective knowledge of God in the gospel. He is especially critical of persons seeking after immediate transformational experiences, through some kind of "direct" gnostic encounter.[113]

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[111] *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

[112] *In the Face of God: The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996).

[113] Some studies on the Christian life have focused more on the need for an experiential encounter with God, and/or on the importance of the affections. For example, see Bob Rognlien, *Experiential Worship: Encountering God with Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2005); Kendra G. Hotz and Matthew T. Mathews, *Shaping the Christian Life: Worship and the Religious Affections* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2006); Robert E. Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006); John J. Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL:

Horton also has a problem with the concept of subjective inner guidance, because the authority here is seen to stem from the individual, namely, their reason, will, feelings and desires, rather than originating from an authority that is outside and above them.

In response to the "transformation problem," Horton simply points persons towards the biblical gospel. Of the books he has written on the nature of the gospel, most notable is *The Gospel-Driven Life*.[114] Horton highlights the redemptive drama of God that has occurred within history, outside of subjective experience. He directs persons back to the ground of salvation and only means of ongoing sanctification – the objective historical salvific work of Christ. Transformation is not seen to be something than stems from within a person, it is seen to be possible through faith in a historic, objective and true self-revelation of God. Horton points to an affirmation of a rational-linguistic approach. He expresses that the need is for persons to come to faith in a transcendent God, to be taken out of themselves through hearing a Word from God, which is external to them – namely, the biblical gospel and the Scriptures. It is only in this encounter with externality that persons are understood to be able to experience any kind of authentic change.

Horton does not simply focus on the communication of the historical drama of God, but also on how persons are to live in the present unfolding drama from a position of union with the risen Christ. He believes that the Christian life is about living in the light of Christ's death and resurrection through personal faith in Christ, rather than persons relying on their own subjective inclinations. As well as an emphasis on the biblical gospel, Horton also focuses the proper use of the law in his work *The Law of Perfect Freedom*.[115] He recognises the proper designated roles for indicatives and imperatives, with a proper delineation between "gospel,"

IVP Academic, 2010); *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

[114] Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Driven Life: Being Good News People in a Bad News World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009). See also *Putting Amazing Back into Grace: Embracing the Heart of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994).

[115] *The Law of Perfect Freedom: Relating to God and Others Through the Ten Commandments* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1993).

as an announcement of what God has done, and the "law," in terms of what persons are to do.

In terms of the Christian life, Horton's approach is more ecclesial than individualistic, emphasising the importance of the "means of grace" for individuals within the worshipping community.[116] His focus remains on the gathered context, rather than highlighting the means of formation in a broader context.[117] In *The Gospel Commission,* Horton points to the need for the transformational message of the gospel to be received through the church, over and above the possibility of ecclesial action "transforming the world."[118] He also critiques the ecclesial focus on the possibility of "cultural transformation" in a subsequent book *Ordinary*.[119]

Horton points out the ignorance of the biblical gospel within much of the so-called "evangelical" church. He provides a necessary critique of the reliance on "spiritual disciplines" as a means of spiritual growth, and on the narcissistic "feeling-centred" experiences that have become normative across much of the contemporary church. Horton may be correct in his evaluation of the superficiality across much of the so-called "evangelical world," and in his criticism of attempts to reform spirituality based upon anything other than the biblical gospel. However, he often overlooks the proper place and value of personal "spiritual practices," of positive "charismatic" experiences and the central place of the affections.[120]

Horton has not sought to construct a broad and holistic understanding of transformational theology. His comprehensive work on systematic theology is

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[116] See *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

[117] For an approach that focuses more on formational potential within the everyday narrative, see David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997); *The Drama of Living: Becoming Wise in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014).

[118] Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

[119] *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

[120] His understanding stands in contrast to James Smith, who challenges the centrality of the rational faculties in the transformative process. Smith argues that persons are primarily driven and shaped by what they love. He suggests that formation is most able to occur when persons begin by reshaping their desires and affections, rather than their rational processes. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*; *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

orientated towards the importance of doctrine and understanding as a means of discipleship, rather than being specifically orientated towards praxis and the full scope of the Christian life. Horton has constructed a theology around the classic parameters of a Reformed theological framework, and provided shorter, more popular works that separately address issues relating to the Christian life. Because of his strong doctrinal emphasis, his approach would not be broadly embraced by the wider church. The focal point for Horton's understanding of the Christian life is not transformation, for this is not seen as being required to authenticate the truth of the gospel. Despite focusing on the biblical gospel and advocating serious Christian living, Horton appears sober regarding the actual possibility of radical transformation in this present age, and does not orientate his theology of the Christian life around this motif, instead warning against unrealistic expectations of change.

1.5.2 Secondary Sources on Packer and Maximus

The early chapters of this thesis will involve engagement with the thought of J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor. The second part of this literature review will focus on highlighting the relevant secondary studies related to these two conversation partners.

Despite Packer's huge influence and literary output there have been very few academic studies done on his thought. The most significant publication at present is *The Theology of the Christian Life in J. I. Packer's Thought* by Don Payne, which is a revision of Payne's PhD thesis.[121] Payne sets out to critically engage with Packer's theology of the Christian life, in light of the theological anthropology and theological method that support it. His belief is that Packer's understanding of sanctification is sustained by a theological anthropology and a methodology that are primarily individualistic and rationalistic.

Payne provides a much needed examination of some central themes in Packer's work. His intention is not to offer an in-depth critique, or to provide any

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[121] Payne, *Christian Life*. This publication is based upon his PhD thesis, see "Theological Anthropology and the Formation of Piety: A Study in James I. Packer" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2003).

constructive proposals for engaging further with Packer's thought. Nor does he seek to engage Packer outside of his tradition. While Payne focuses his whole thesis on Packer, the current thesis will move the trajectory beyond Packer, by setting out Packer's theology of the Christian life for the purpose of moving towards a comprehensive model of transformational theology.

Apart from Payne's research, there has been little scholarship examining Packer's understanding of the Christian life. In his short book *Packer on the Christian Life,* Sam Storms sets out a concise and popular treatment, separately highlighting key themes found within Packer's work.[122] Another notable recent study on Packer is *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future,* which provides a collection of short essays from various scholars, exploring some of the major aspects of his life and work.[123] Despite many of these essays being insightful, the brief format does not allow for any in-depth analysis of Packer's thought. Finally, two biographies have been produced on Packer that provide background on his life and work, though they do not provide space for any serious engagement or critique of his thought.[124]

The focus in this thesis is to discuss Christian formation through the lens of Packer's theological schema. As yet there have been no serious academic studies exploring Packer's theology of the Christian life for the renewal in the church. This thesis explores the significance of his work for the church, his thought being used as a starting point towards the possibility of a "proto-evangelical" framework for Christian formation.

The secondary figure engaged with in this thesis is Maximus Confessor. The thesis is not seeking to provide an in-depth critical engagement with Maximus, but rather looking to explore some of the central elements of his thought, through use of translated works and relevant secondary studies that have appeared. In contrast to Packer, there have been a significant amount of secondary studies focusing

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[122] Sam Storms, *Packer on the Christian Life: Knowing God in Christ, Walking by the Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

[123] Timothy George, ed. *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

[124] See McGrath, *Know and Serve God*; Leland Ryken, *J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

exclusively on elements of Maximus' thought, including a number of PhD theses on a variety of different areas.[125] Many studies done on Maximus have sought to explore the possibility of there being a central focus in his overall theological system, and various studies have been done that explore his understanding of deification.[126]

Three of the big names in Maximian studies have been Polycarp Sherwood, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Lars Thunberg. In his book *St. Maximus the Confessor,* Sherwood provides a thorough introduction to Maximus, exploring his Christology, his cosmology and his theology of the Christian life.[127] Sherwood has been known for his research on Maximus' refutation of Origenism, his description of Maximus' dogma provides a typically Catholic interpretation. In *Cosmic Liturgy,* Balthasar provides a broad introduction to the understanding and implications of Maximus' thought.[128] He portrays Maximus as being a synthesiser, with all ultimately pointing towards the synthesis in Christ.

In *Microcosm and Mediator,* Thunberg provides an extensive study that places particular emphasis on Maximus' anthropology.[129] This work represents the most comprehensive introduction to Maximus' theology in English. Thunberg focuses on the position and function of humanity within the divine economy, with human creatures being seen as a microcosm of the entire universe and as mediators between God and the created world. Thunberg's later work, *Man and Cosmos,* is

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[125] Recent research on Maximus has been documented in Aiden Nichols, *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); Andrew Louth, "Recent Research on St Maximus the Confessor: A Survey," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998); Joshua Lollar, "Reception of Maximian Thought in the Modern Era," in *The Oxford Handbook on Maximus Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[126] For example, see Elena Vishnevskaya, "Divinization and Spiritual Progress in Maximus the Confessor," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006); "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus Confessor," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); Jean-Claude Larchet, "The Mode of Deification," in *The Oxford Handbook on Maximus Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[127] Sherwood, *Maximus the Confessor*.

[128] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003).

[129] Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995).

a shorter study providing a broad introduction and brief summary of Maximus' entire cosmic vision.[130] Here, he holds to the essence of his earlier work while making general themes of Maximus' work more accessible to a wider audience.

There have also been some excellent more recent studies done.[131] In *The Christocentric Cosmology of Maximus Confessor,* Torstein Tollefsen examines Maximus' thought from a philosophical point of view.[132] He focuses on Maximus' doctrine of creation, placing Christ at the centre in the integration of the created world, with view to communion and reconciliation between created and uncreated. In *Union and Distinction in the Thought of Maximus Confessor,* Melchisedec Törönen sets out to prove that the principle of simultaneous union and distinction, or "union without confusion," represents the centre of Maximus' thought, and explores this concept through every major area of his theology.[133] Unlike Balthasar and Thunberg, Törönen believes that the Chalcedonian Definition should not be seen as a starting point for the theology of Maximus.

1.5.3 Summation

There has been an ongoing concern amongst self-identified "evangelicals" over the need for evidential transformation as a mark of an authentic Christian life. The literature discussed has included a variety of different perspectives regarding the renewal of Christian formation, and drawn out various different methodologies. The examination of representative contemporary literature reveals that there is no distinct research that has attempted to provide a broad theological framework on Christian formation from a "proto-evangelical" perspective. Though there have been many attempts to explore a proper understanding of Christian formation, there is still the need to comprehensively outline a common, coherent, broad, integrated and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology.

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[130] *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).
[131] A series of short essays on Maximus appear in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[132] Torstein T. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[133] Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

In this thesis, it is argued that the only way to move towards this is through an approach that is grounded in rational-linguistic communication. It is also proposed that in order to have a fully integrated understanding of Christian formation, it is necessary to develop a model that is rooted in the central imperatives of orthodox theology. This thesis seeks to do this through a discussion stemming from two "theologians of the Christian life." This will be seen to enable movement towards the possibility of constructing an effectual "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology.

1.6 Conclusion

1.6.1 Brief Synopsis

It has been stated that, within the contemporary church, usage of the term *transformation* is often misguided. Although the divine call is for the whole church to be continually formed more into the image of Christ, the ecclesial focus often shifts towards human-centred goals. This results in a plurified ecclesial landscape, characterised by fragmentation, relativism and confusion. This thesis sets out to demonstrate the need to move towards expressing and living out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation.

The "evangelical" landscape reflects the problem rather than solving it. In recent years self-identified "evangelicals" have continued to explore the possibility of authentic change, and there is now a proliferation of perspectives related to the nature and process of Christian formation. Although evangelicalism is seen by some as a restorationist movement that seeks to draw the church back towards a prototypal faith, self-identified "evangelicals" clearly exhibit plurality in their beliefs and practices. Both the absence of a common, coherent and integrated vision, and the lack of transformation itself, are often simply accepted. The perceived "crisis" over the nature of so-called "evangelical" identity poses the question as to whether it is possible to envision an integrated "proto-evangelical" approach to the Christian life. This thesis seeks to explore the possibility of such an approach.

It is argued that the only way to move towards the possibility of a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology is through an approach that is grounded in rational-linguistic truth. Such a method is typified by J. I. Packer. In order to determine the breadth of his approach, Packer will be brought into dialogue with Maximus Confessor. The critical conversation between two "theologians of the Christian life" allows exploration into the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and the seeking of common characteristics in its nature and practice. This all provides a solid basis upon which to outline an original synthesis that points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation.

The literature review has shown that there are representative commentators who have sought a renewal of Christian formation. None of the approaches examined are comparable to the approach being taken in this thesis. There is a clear need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to be put forward. The problem with the current trend towards so-called "holistic" approaches to transformation is that they have not been centred in biblical-theological categories. As a result, they blur the lines between a formation that is distinctly Christian and human development that is common to all. The method that is deemed the most suitable to exploring an integral understanding of Christian formation is one that is solely theological in nature, rather than relying on other disciplines.

1.6.2 Delineation of Chapters

In the next three chapters I will examine the thought of two distinctly different "theologians of the Christian life." This will all be done for the purpose of determining the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, alongside the ascertaining of common characteristics. This will be seen to provide the basis for the development of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology.

Chapter Two will involve an examination of J. I. Packer's thought. His approach is put forward as being one that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. I will

examine the way in which Packer seeks to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality as means of exploring an integrated and holistic understanding of Christian formation.

In Chapter Three, the focus will move to an examination of the thought of Maximus Confessor. This will involve exploring an alternative theology of the Christian life that is built around a different logocentric method from that of Packer. I will examine the way in which Maximus integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality, leading to transformation. Maximus' thought will be presented as a means of exposure to a broad and integrated vision of Christian formation in order to challenge Packer's approach.

Chapter Four will involve further analysis and dialogue based on the aforementioned approaches of Packer and Maximus in previous chapters. This chapter will seek to determine what is suitable for a holistic re-reading of transformation theology, while defending a perspective grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. I will explore the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and ascertain the common elements and characteristics in its nature and practice. This will be seen to provide a solid basis upon which to outline an original "proto-evangelical" synthesis.

In chapters five and six, I will outline a "proto-evangelical" model that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. This will be done in reference to the discussion and conclusions expressed in Chapter Four. Together these two chapters will seek to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality, and in doing so, point towards the possibility a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology.

In Chapter Five, I will develop an original theological framework within which an understanding of the Christian life will be located. I will lay out an integrated propositional framework of transformational theology, providing a cohesive, broad, holistic and overarching outline that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. This will be seen to provide a proper context within which to integrate the

broad scope and diversity of Christian formation, while describing common characteristics and underlying principles of transformational theology.

In Chapter Six, I will construct the second part of a "proto-evangelical" model. This will involve describing how fundamental areas of the Christian life can be held together in a cohesive way within the context of the integrated propositional framework provided in Chapter Five. I will demonstrate how a propositional understanding of transformational theory relates to lived experience and practice, removing any false dichotomy between the concerns of theology and spirituality. As a result of demonstrating the means towards fully living in the conceptual dynamics, it will express the broad diversity and common characteristics of a "proto-evangelical" approach to Christian formation.

In the conclusion, I will summarise the argument presented and outline the original contribution that has been made. I will also look at some implications that result from the model that is described in chapters five and six.

CHAPTER TWO: THE "SYSTEMATIC SPIRITUALITY" OF J. I. PACKER

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, there will be an examination of the thought of J. I. Packer. Packer has been put forward as someone whose theology is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. The primary task of this current chapter is to look at some of the contours of Packer's thought, in recognition that he is able to provide a starting point towards constructing an integrated, comprehensive, cohesive, broad and balanced theology of the Christian life from an "proto-evangelical" perspective. I will examine the way in which he seeks to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality as means of exploring an integrated and holistic understanding of Christian formation.

Packer is regarded as one of the most significant and influential English-speaking "evangelical" thinkers of the twentieth century. Alister McGrath affirms that Packer has "…made landmark contributions to the evangelical discussion of the theology of Scripture and the theological basis of evangelicalism...perhaps most importantly, he has demonstrated the inextricable link between theology and spirituality."[134] Undoubtedly, Packer has shown a consistent commitment to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality, and this chapter will be an attempt to explore how he has done so, in order to show how he understands transformation as occurring. After spending years teaching on historical and systematic theology Packer conceded:

> I should have known all along I was writing spirituality, for the Puritan passion for application got into my blood quite early; I have always conceived theology, ethics, and apologetics as truth for people, and have never felt free to leave unapplied any truth that I taught, whether orally or on paper, and to speak of the application of truth to life is to

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[134] Alister E. McGrath, "The Importance of Tradition for Modern Evangelicalism," in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and Donald Lewis (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 1996), 159. Although Packer uses the term *spirituality,* he prefers the term *spiritual theology* as it denotes the application of systematic theology rather than being seen as a separate discipline that is different from theology, see *Know and Serve God*, 257.

look at life as itself a relationship with God; and when one does that, one is talking spirituality.[135]

Packer refers to the union between systematic theology and spiritual theology (or between theology and spirituality) as "systematic spirituality."[136] While theology is seen to involve that which is thought and understood about God, spirituality is understood to consist of the experience of acquired knowledge – in terms of a lived relationship with God, and the actual application of biblical truth.[137] His understanding is that both theology and spirituality are interdependent.[138] Taking his lead from the Puritans, Packer's belief is that spirituality has its origins in the application of theology; consequently "bad theology" is simply understood to lead to "bad spirituality."[139] On the basis that true spirituality is understood to involve the application of truth to life, Packer highlights the problems of any form of spirituality that is not grounded in Scripture, and criticises the lack of a theological framework in many forms of spirituality:

> Spirituality books are written that contain no application of Scripture, just as theological tomes are written that contain no application of truth to life. As I want to see theological study done as an aspect and means of our relating to God, so I want to see spirituality studied within an evaluative theological frame….[140]

As well as following the scholasticism of Princetonian Calvinism, Packer has also been strongly influenced by the English Puritans, who, he says, helped him to see that "…all theology is also spirituality."[141] He has sought to recover the Puritan

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[135] James I. Packer, *Serving the People of God*, vol. 2, The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 306.

[136] Ibid., 314.

[137] An example of how he does this is laid out in *Knowing God,* where he demonstrates the relation between having correct ideas about God, and having a personal knowledge of God that is lived and applied. Such an approach removes the artificial division between the concerns of theology and spirituality.

[138] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 314.

[139] McGrath, *Know and Serve God*, 56. See also ibid., 287. McGrath observes: "Packer's vision is strongly integrative, in that he sees theology as offering both a foundation and coherence to Christian thinking and living. As those who have immersed themselves in Packer's writing will know, he considers that the Puritan vision of the Christian life offers exactly such an integrative vision."

[140] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 314.

[141] *Quest for Godliness*, 15. See also McGrath, *Know and Serve God*, 56. McGrath notes that "…his [Packer's] vision of the interrelatedness and interdependence of theological orthodoxy, liturgy, personal conversion and spiritual nurture, congregational structures and social witness...had its origins in the Puritan vision."

vision, which places a focus on the affections as well as the intellect.[142] Packer would affirm that a response to God involves the whole person, revolving around cognitive, affective, volitional and embodied domains of human experience. In the midst of the fragmentation present across the so-called "evangelical world," Packer has sought to express that which is common – in terms of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy – to bring unity in the understanding of both doctrine and lived faith. In doing so, he has sought to balance any excesses, such as dealing with the extremes of rationalism and experientialism. His approach of being rigorously academic, while remaining highly pragmatic, may explain some of his popularity and impact.

Packer is known for a defence of (what he understands to be) "doctrinal orthodoxy" within the stream of the "Great Tradition." Although he stands firmly within the "Evangelical Anglican" tradition, his enemy is clearly not ecumenism; but rather that which he sees as diluting and weakening the faith – namely heterodoxy and liberalism. One of the ways in which Packer has sought to bring ecclesial unity is through the affirmation and defence of doctrinal belief. Packer describes himself as a "catechist" seeking to "transmit truth" that will lead to persons maturing in Christ. Consequently, his approach does not merely involve the affirmation of beliefs that he understands to express biblical orthodoxy, but also involves presenting truths that will lead to persons being able to live a transformed life.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt an in-depth analysis of Packer's thought. The task of analysing Packer's vast output is made more difficult by the fact that he has not published any comprehensive academic works. However, his collective output does leave a good understanding of the main contours of his theological system. Packer has produced an enormous amount of scholarly and popular material. Though a wide range of primary sources are used in this chapter, the material most relevant to the thesis is that which aids in understanding the contours of Packer's theology, and his understanding of the Christian life.

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[142] *Know and Serve God*, 57.

In particular, I am making use of the works which express the closest synopsis of his thought, which are *Concise Theology* and *18 Words,* along with the various academic articles Packer has written which have been published in his four volume *Collected Shorter Works* – specifically the articles related to soteriology, the Christian life and theological method. In order to explore Packer's understanding of the Christian life, the main popular works that I am consulting in this chapter are *Knowing God, Rediscovering Holiness* and *Knowing Christianity.* With regard to secondary literature, I am particularly making use of Don Payne's work, which is the most relevant academic study on Packer for this thesis.[143]

In the first section of this chapter I will briefly set out Packer's prolegomena, demonstrating how his thought is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. In the second part of the chapter I will offer a synopsis of certain areas of Packer's theology, these will be seen to provide the groundwork for his understanding of the Christian life. This will involve marking out important elements his dogmatic thought relating to the doctrine of God, anthropology, Christology and soteriology. These dogmatic descriptions will act as a backdrop, in preparation for the final extended section at the end of the chapter that focuses on the implications of Packer's theological system on the Christian life. Collectively, the chapter will demonstrate an understanding of his transformational theology.

2.2 Prolegomena

Packer gives primary importance to the communication of rational-linguistic truth, and understands the biblical gospel as *the* central truth to be communicated. His theologising is wholly dependent upon the certainty of God having already revealed himself in Scripture. Packer sees rational-linguistic truths derived from Scripture as being the only means through which a constructive theology of the Christian life can be grounded, and the central means by which guidance and growth in the Christian life is realised. Being a prominent "catechist," he believes that Christian formation begins with the need for rational instruction.[144] Packer's method involves the attempt to set out a theological synthesis, based upon the

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[143] See Payne, *Christian Life*.
[144] This is demonstrated in James I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010).

understanding that there is an inherent unity in what the whole of Scripture teaches. His desire to lay out propositional truths is clearly demonstrated in *Concise Theology,* where he expresses what he sees as being the permanent essentials of Christianity, both in terms of a belief system and a way of living.[145] Another place where he sets out a clear catechetical approach that includes laying out both indicatives and imperatives is *Growing in Christ*.

In Packer's well-known book *Knowing God,* his intention is to help his readers to experience God in a deeper way. For him, this means beginning with teaching truths about the character and nature of God as revealed in Scripture. Packer's belief is that having a rational understanding about God, by means of the inerrant Scriptures, is a prerequisite to a personal knowledge of God. He draws a distinction between "knowledge by description" in terms of knowledge about something, and "knowledge by acquaintance" in terms of "direct" contact with that reality.[146] In reference to the latter, Packer affirms that "…Christians know – that is are consciously and cognitively related to – the personal mind and power that is behind everything; and this knowledge is itself a personal relationship, knowledge-in-union and knowledge-in-fellowship, a precious reality of experience for which 'eternal life' is the proper name."[147] Elsewhere, he states: "While God's linguistic mind-to-mind self-disclosure in and through biblical testimony is meant to be grasped intellectually, his revelatory action is not complete until he comes to be personally known in a responsive relationship…."[148]

Packer places foremost attention on God's rational-linguistic communication, as a means by which persons are able to come to true knowledge about God. He believes that, by necessity, God communicates to persons through human language in propositional form:

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[145] Packer, *Concise Theology*, xiii.
[146] *Knowing Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), 15.
[147] Ibid., 12.
[148] "Revelation," in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin J. McGrath (Leicester, UK: IVP Academic, 2006), 621. See also *Concise Theology*, 20. Packer describes the dimensions of the knowledge of God as "…intellectual (knowing the truth about God; Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalms 100:3); volitional (trusting, obeying and worshipping God in terms of that truth); and moral (practicing justice and love: Jeremiah 22:16; 1 John 4:7-8)."

He discloses himself by telling us about himself. His revelation is personal just because it is propositional; for it is precisely by making true statements about himself to us that God makes himself known to us, and if he did not speak in this way we could never know him at all. To affirm, as some do, that man can discover and know God without God speaking to him is really to deny that God is personal. Persons cannot be known unless in some way they speak to reveal themselves.[149]

Packer fully recognises the theological difficulties of speaking about an ineffable God who is beyond human grasp. However, he firmly believes that human language can be used to speak intelligibly of God, because God has spoken intelligibly of himself through it.[150] Packer also points out that Scripture itself speaks of God in a variety of human ways. Although he clearly recognises the limitations in the human capacity to understand God and contain God's fullness, his acknowledgement of God as "mystery" does not mean he sees a sense of uncertainty in persons being able to come to true knowledge of God through rational propositions.[151]

Packer's approach maintains both God's immanence in revealing himself both objectively and rationally, and God's transcendence in that he exceeds the grasp of created intelligence and maintains divine infinitude; he affirms "…our Creator is bound to surpass our comprehension. Though our knowledge of him may be true as far as it goes, it will necessarily be incomplete."[152] Packer speaks of "…a unique kind of knowledge which, though real, is not full; it is knowledge of what is discernible within a circle of light against the background of a larger darkness,

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[149] *18 Words: The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know*, 2nd ed. (Tain, UK: Christian Focus, 2007), 20.

[150] See *Honouring the Written Word of God*, vol. 3, The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 39. Packer affirms, "…the fact that God's self-disclosure is couched linguistically in the same personal terms in which we talk about ourselves and is therefore intelligible to us does not mean that God must have misrepresented himself in what he said. What it means, rather, is that in our personhood and in our capacity to give and receive verbal communication, we are less unlike God than we perhaps thought."

[151] "God the Image-Maker," in *Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 31.

[152] *Meeting God*, 2nd ed. (Bletchley, UK: Scripture Union, 2006), 7.

it is, in short, knowledge of a mystery, the mystery of the living God at work."[153]
Elsewhere, he affirms a similar line of thought:

> As creatures, we are unable fully to comprehend either the being or
> the actions of the Creator. As it would be wrong, however, to suppose
> ourselves to know everything about God (and so in effect to imprison
> him in the box of our own limited notion of him), so it would be wrong
> to doubt whether our concept constitutes real knowledge of him. Part
> of the significance of our creation in God's image is that we are able
> both to know about him and to know him relationally in a true if
> limited sense of 'know'; and what God tells us in Scripture about
> himself is true as far as it goes.[154]

Packer sees rational-linguistic truth, derived from Scripture, as being both
necessary and sufficient as a means of being able to know God. When laying out
propositions, he rejects the need for dialectical language involving affirmation
and negation.[155] Packer's understanding is that "…by trying to hold these two self-
contradictory positions together, modern theology has condemned itself to an
endless sequence of arbitrary oscillations between affirming and denying the
trustworthiness of human speculations and biblical assertions respectively."[156]

Packer describes his theological system as "historic and classic mainstream."[157]
He has always sought to integrate historic evangelical convictions with classic
orthodoxy; he says "…I theologise out of what I see as the authentic biblical and
creedal mainstream of Christian identity, the 'confessional' and liturgical 'Great
Tradition' that the church on earth has characteristically maintained from the
start."[158] In *One Faith,* Packer sets out to outline an "evangelical consensus" that
claims continuity with what has always been believed by faithful Christians
through history.[159] Evangelicalism is not understood as simply being a return to
the doctrinal declarations of the Reformation. Rather, it is seen as being a renewal

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[153] *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, vol. 1, The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer
(Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 88.
[154] *Concise Theology*, 45.
[155] Packer recognises this as being different from the dialectic between hidden and revealed
knowledge, which is congruent with the dialectic between divine transcendence and immanence.
[156] Packer, *Honouring Written Word*, 79-80.
[157] *Concise Theology*, xiii.
[158] "On from Orr," 155.
[159] Packer and Oden, *One Faith*, 165.

movement within Christian orthodoxy that seeks unity around unchanging biblical truths and the historic ecumenical creeds of the church.[160]

Packer has sought means of defending the unchanging truth given to the church, to uphold the beliefs of the historical Christian faith. His belief is that the historical mainstream view of the Christian church is first and foremost grounded in scriptural authority. Packer understands that in order to be able to think true thoughts, persons are reliant upon God revealing truth to them through his Word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Any other understanding is seen as a rejection of the idea of self-authenticating divine disclosure in Scripture, replacing it with rationalism, subjective experience, pluralism and relativism. The upholding of biblical authority is, for Packer, essential to the possibility of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy:

> I see biblical authority as methodologically the most basic of theological issues. And I have fought for it, not just for the sake of 'confessional' orthodoxy or theological certainty or evangelical integrity or epistemological sanity or to counter dehumanising irrationalisms, though all those concerns have entered into what I have done. But my affirmation and defence of Holy Scripture has been first and foremost for the sake of pastoral and evangelistic ministry, genuine godliness, the maturing of the church, and spiritual revival. By these things the glory of God and the good of human beings are most truly advanced, and they simply are not found where the Bible does not have its proper place in Christians' lives.[161]

Given that Packer understands Scripture as being primary among all sources of religious authority, he demonstrates a concern to uphold and defend the authority of Scripture across his writings. Packer understands Scripture as being infallible and inerrant, totally true and entirely trustworthy, representing God's self-authenticating witness of himself.[162] He affirms: "Scripture expresses and mediates

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[160] Ibid., 164. See also Packer, "On from Orr." In this essay Packer attempts to provide a model for convergent orthodoxy based on the work of James Orr.

[161] *Truth & Power*, 76. See also Payne, *Christian Life*, 244. Payne observes that the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is fundamental to Packer's understanding of piety, and that the importance of Scripture in the Christian life for Packer cannot be overstated.

[162] Different perspectives on inerrancy can be found in James Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). In his attempt to uphold the authority of Scripture, Packer has adopted (what he understands to be) the orthodox position of the historic church, namely, that the Bible is wholly true and trustworthy in all it affirms because God is the author. It can be argued that all generations have sought to defend the

the authority of God, which means, formally, his right to be believed when he speaks and obeyed when he commands…."[163] This strong emphasis on biblical authority is the absolute basis for Packer's propositional theologising:

> The first fact to be reckoned with, so I maintain, is the reality of the self-revealed, self-revealing God who in and through the Scriptures has spoken and still speaks to make himself known, and all accounts of the content and method of systematic theology that fail to do justice to this fact are to be rejected.[164]

Although Packer's theologising is clearly rooted in the absolute authority of Scripture, he recognises the fundamental importance of tradition in being able to challenge private interpretation.[165] Alister McGrath believes that Packer has sought to engage properly (both positively and critically) with tradition, in a manner that "…opens the way to proper interpretation and theological reflection."[166] Packer maintains the view that though it is necessary to learn from past interpretations, all must be challenged by a continual return to Scripture. He also holds to the primary assumption that, by definition, authoritative revelation, if true, must authenticate itself apart from any human witness. Given that Packer sees Scripture to be the final authority, all else is by necessity required to be subordinate. Ultimately, Packer's appeal to church and tradition is solely for the

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truthfulness, reliability and faultless harmony of all of Scripture against their cultural challenges, and done so using different methodologies and language. In this regard, see the essays appearing in Donald A. Carson, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). Packer holds to (what he understands to be) an "original" form of inerrancy, rather than its modern, literalistic counterpart, which deserves to be critiqued. Though he recognises the problems associated with the term, he maintains its present usefulness in light of modern attacks on the truthfulness of all Scripture. In regard to Packer's understanding of inerrancy, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Response to R. Albert Mohler Jr," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. James Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 75. Vanhoozer points out Packer's attempt to distinguish between original inerrancy that focuses on the authorial intent and "…mistaken uses and applications of rationalist inerrancy…" which, he says, appear to be more about the interpreter's presuppositions than about hearing what God is saying in the text.

[163] James I. Packer, "Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester, UK: IVP Academic, 1988), 627-628.

[164] *Serving People of God*, 311. See also *Concise Theology*, 16. Packer states: "The Christian principle of biblical authority means, on the one hand, that God purposes to direct the belief and behaviour of his people through the revealed truth set forth in Holy Scripture; on the other hand it means that all our ideas about God should be measured, tested, and where necessary corrected and enlarged, by reference to biblical teaching."

[165] Alister E. McGrath and Donald Lewis, eds., *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 1996), 163. See also McGrath, "Great Tradition."

[166] "Great Tradition," 26.

purpose of safeguarding and correctly receiving the written revelation of God.[167] Anything other than submission to objective divine revelation is seen as a movement towards "liberalism" – the subverting of divine authority.

2.3 The Nature of God

I will begin a brief outline of Packer's thought by looking at his understanding of the nature of God. Packer recognises that the starting point for a proper understanding of both anthropology and the Christian life is with a suitable understanding of the nature of God. Given that human ontology is seen to rest wholly upon divine ontology, the divine image is seen as the beginning and end of Packer's understanding of both the *imago Dei* and the Christian life.[168] His understanding of the nature of God invariably influences the rest of his thought, e.g. his emphasis on God's holiness, and recognition of subordination within the triune life, with particular reference to the "obedience of the Son."

Packer's understanding is that God reveals himself so that humanity may know him. He affirms: "It is true that revelation is essentially self-disclosure on God's part and that its goal is to make men 'know the Lord,' in personal fellowship with a personal God."[169] The absolute connection that he sees between divine self-revelation and human formation means there is an innate possibility of persons gradually coming to reveal the divine likeness. Humanity is seen as being able to both know and reveal divine knowledge, so demonstrating the moral characteristics of its Maker. For Packer, the possibility of Christian formation occurs by means of human beings responding positively to "special revelation," which has been communicated in rational-linguistic form.

In congruence with a Reformed approach, Packer does not hesitate to use propositional language when speaking about the nature of God, seeking to speak about God in the way that Scripture itself speaks about God. He recognises that the "incommunicable attributes," unique to God's self, denote his distinctiveness

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[167] See Packer, "Comfort of Conservatism."
[168] Packer appeals for a Trinitarian understanding of the Christian life, see *Serving People of God*, 259-261.
[169] *18 Words*, 19.

over and above creation in absolute freedom and independence, i.e. self-sufficiency, self-existence, omnipotence, etc., in contrast to God's "communicable attributes," which are "…the aspects of his moral character which are manifested in his words and deeds – his holiness, his love and mercy, his truthfulness, his faithfulness, his goodness, his patience, his justice."[170] In being created in the image of God, humanity is seen as being required to reflect these moral attributes.

In terms of the divine nature, Packer points towards *holiness* as being the core dimension of God's character. He affirms: "Every facet of God's nature and every aspect of his character may properly be spoken of as holy, just because it is his."[171] The summons is then for humanity to practice holiness that matches God's own.[172] Another attribute of God that Packer highlights is *love*.[173] He states: "God is love. That is, giving out of goodwill, for the recipient's benefit, is the abiding quality both of ongoing relationships within the Godhead and of God's primary outgoings in creation and to his creatures."[174] This mutual love is understood to provide the shape for Trinitarian ontology.[175] Packer recognises that the members of the Trinity "…interpenetrate, relate in mutual love, and co-operate in all divine actions."[176] He believes that God's purpose is "…an enlarging of this circle of eternal love and joy."[177]

Packer sees this mutual love as having implications for human experience. He states: "Our love relationship to the persons of the Godhead is thus to be modelled on a love relationship within the Godhead itself," and affirms that the nature of human relations are to correspond with the fellowship of mutual honour

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[170] *Knowing God*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), 19.
[171] *Concise Theology*, 38.
[172] Ibid., 39.
[173] *Knowing God*, 132ff.; *Concise Theology*, 40-41.
[174] "God the Image-Maker," 35.
[175] *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God*, 2nd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009), 45.
[176] "God," 275. See also "God the Image-Maker," 33. Packer states: "The three persons of the Godhead are individuated in relation to each other without ever being separated from each other; they are consciously three while yet ontologically as well as co-operatively one."
[177] *Celebrating Saving Work*, 15.

and love within the Trinity.[178] In speaking of the "…endless life of the Triune God as one of mutual affection and honour," Packer affirms that the need is for humanity to participate and glorify God by "…sharing the joyful give-and-take of this divine life according to their own creaturely mode."[179]

Despite affirming the importance of some form of social Trinitarianism, in terms of divine patterns of giving-receiving, Packer does not fully develop a social understanding of the Trinity, nor make it central to his theological system. Instead, he focuses more on the distinct roles of Father, Son and Spirit as revealed in Scripture, with the understanding that all three persons are working together, in everything.[180] In doing so, Packer speaks of the subordinate roles in the Trinity, he states that "…John records our Lord's disclosure of the mystery of the Trinity: three persons, and one God, the Son doing the will of the Father and the Spirit doing the will of the Father and the Son."[181] Packer draws out the subordinate and functional roles in the Trinity, in terms of the relation of the Son and Spirit towards the Father.

For Packer, divine sovereignty and revelation is clearly of utmost importance, forming the foundation of his worldview. He understands that God sovereignly works out all things according to his eternal will and purpose, and places divine election and predestination at the forefront of his soteriology. Packer views God's purposes as being accomplished through his self-revelation, represented by speech-act. He affirms: "Revelation means the whole work of God making himself known...all the words and deeds of God in which biblical writers recognise as his self-disclosure…."[182] Packer understands revelation as being the unveiling of God in the world, of "…God showing us things which were previously hidden from us...God causing and enabling us to see what hitherto we could not see."[183] God's

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[178] *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 228.
[179] *Concise Theology*, 40. See also *Serving People of God*, 260. Packer affirms, "…the essence of the Christian life is involvement in the relational life of the Triune Godhead...." It is unfortunate that Packer occasionally uses language of "give-and-take" in relation to the triune life and ecclesiology. Such language appears "transactional," as well as being inaccurate. The preferred relational language used within this thesis is "giving-receiving."
[180] "Reflection and Response," 179-180.
[181] *Knowing God*, 75.
[182] *God Has Spoken*, 30.
[183] *18 Words*, 19.

work outwards in creation is simply seen as being the demonstration of his personhood. He states: "God was revealing himself. He was showing his 'eternal power and deity' (Romans 1:20) as Maker and Master, and with that his character and his ways with men...so that he might be acknowledged and worshipped for all that he is and does and gives."[184]

2.4 God in Creation

Packer affirms that the divine speech-act forms the universe, which in turn reveals God's existence, power and glory. He sees knowledge of God revealed in creation as being "general revelation" that points human beings towards a relationship with their Creator.[185] Packer says that this "…form of revelation is given everywhere, to all men, through the ordinary experience of being alive in God's world."[186] He also recognises that God is continually upholding the world in his providence. God's involvement in all creation is seen as being distinct from the "special revelation" of God's saving grace in Christ.[187]

Most notably, Packer understands divine self-revelation as bringing forth creatures in God's own image, for the purpose of revealing his glory.[188] The implication is that the self-revealing God forms humanity in congruence with his own *ad intra* revelation. Being created in the image of God would mean that the structural nature of human beings can only be understood in relation to the actual nature of the divine being. Packer affirms that an understanding of the image of God in humanity begins and ends with a correct understanding of the nature of God's communicable attributes.[189] By being created in the image of God, humanity is challenged to reflect God's holiness, love, rationality, and creativity, imitating that which is revealed by God himself.[190] Packer believes that "…as humans, we may reflect and reproduce at our own creaturely level the holy ways of God, and thus

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[184] Ibid., 22.
[185] *Freedom & Authority*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 37.
[186] *18 Words*, 24.
[187] "Revelation," 622.
[188] *God's Plans for You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 26f.
[189] This is seen in his essay "God the Image-Maker."
[190] See Payne, *Christian Life*, 83. Payne observes that Packer "…uses God's communicable attributes as the logical connection between holiness and the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* is essentially these attributes expressed in the context of relationship with God and other people."

act as his direct representatives on earth. This is what humans are made to do and in one sense we are human only to the extent that we are doing it."[191]

Don Payne believes that Packer's anthropological focus rests upon the themes of "rationality," "righteousness" and "relationship."[192] Packer affirms that "…we bear his image, of which rationality, relationality and the capacity for that righteousness which consists of receiving and responding to God's revelation are the basic formal elements. We are able to know God, because as thinking, feeling, relating, loving beings we are to that extent like him."[193] His understanding here of the human person can be seen to have direct impact on his view of the Christian life.

The starting point for Packer's anthropology is the understanding that human beings are created with the capacity to know God rationally. According to Payne, Packer's primary understanding of the *imago Dei* is that it is closely related to rationality, which in turn influences his whole understanding of the Christian life.[194] Packer appears to set up a hierarchy, where outer physicality remains in subjection to rationality without a reciprocal relationship. He also affirms the dichotomy of persons consisting of soul (or spirit) and body, of a "…material body animated by an immaterial personal self."[195] The body is not seen as being part of the *imago Dei* but it is seen as being necessary to fulfilling it materially. He states: "The embodiment of the soul is integral to God's design for mankind. Through the body…we are to experience our environment, enjoy and control things around us, and relate to other people."[196] Because Packer's concern is to reflect how humanity relates to the communicable attributes of the divine nature, he does not describe an "incarnational" understanding of the human person. He sees the

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[191] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 61.
[192] Payne, *Christian Life*, 200.
[193] Packer, "God the Image-Maker," 49.
[194] Payne, *Christian Life*, 186. Given that the human form is created to image God, it is problematic if any specific human faculties (e.g. rationality) are too closely associated with the image of God itself. The language that Scripture employs to describe human physicality suggests a complexity of inner-outer faculties that (though distinct) interact as a whole, and (as Packer argues) are all animated in some way by the immaterial soul. For Packer, central to the human person are the inner faculties, specifically the rational faculties, which he believes are to be leading.
[195] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 74.
[196] Ibid., 63-64.

incarnation as being implicit in creation, and only explicit by the coming of Christ "…as the true image of God in his humanity as well as in his divinity."[197]

Given that a particular anthropological focus for Packer is rationality, all else appears to be subordinate and secondary. The God whose image human beings bear is understood to be rational, so God is seen to be seeking to communicate to humanity in an intelligible way through rational-linguistic truth. Packer understands the transmission of divine knowledge to be possible because of the rational nature that human beings share with God.[198] He says: "Man could not know, love or serve God without this endowment of reason with which to apprehend him."[199] In being created in God's image, humans are understood to be given the rational faculties necessary to be able to comprehend and respond to God's inerrant law in order that they may come to demonstrate this image of God more.[200] Packer believes that human beings "...proceed on the basis that both a sense of God and a language in which to converse with him were given to men as ingredients in, or perhaps preconditions of, the divine image from the start."[201]

The rational nature of the *imago Dei* that Packer describes is understood to form the basis for a person's ability to walk in holiness. Humanity is recognised to be inherently subject to God's rational self-communication, and under the authority of God's law. In reference to Packer's view, Don Payne states: "All human responsibility to law is but an outgrowth of the innate accountability to God's law that is embedded in the *imago Dei*."[202] In being created in righteousness, Packer understands human beings as being created to do God's revealed will, and to express his moral image.[203]

Packer recognises the universal awareness of God, not only through creation, but also "…by the spontaneous self-judgments of conscience."[204] The mind is

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[197] Ibid., 62.
[198] *Honouring Written Word*, 27.
[199] *For Man's Sake* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1978), 13.
[200] *Honouring Written Word*, 27, 39.
[201] Ibid., 38.
[202] Payne, *Christian Life*, 89.
[203] Packer, *Man's Sake*, 15; *Knowing God*, 127-128.
[204] "Revelation," 622.

understood as the foundation for conscience; it is a pivotal instrument providing moral discernment. Packer affirms that "…revelation is mediated through the voice of conscience, which speaks as God's monitor, telling every man something, at least, of the demands of his law…."[205] His understanding is that the conscience speaks as a detached independent voice, not our own, and recognises it as the writing of God's laws on every human heart.[206]

Humanity is seen as being required to respond appropriately to God's self-revelation in the created world and in the law of conscience. The right response to God is that which is able to lead creatures towards reflecting the glory and image of the Creator. He states: "We can only achieve full humanness in and through worship of the God whose image we bear."[207] Worship is described as the "…due response of rational creatures to the self-revelation of their Creator. It is an honouring and glorifying of God by gratefully offering back to him all the good gifts, and all the knowledge of his greatness and graciousness, that he has given…."[208] This response is understood to lead towards transformation.

Packer understands rationality as the prerequisite for relational knowledge. He states that God has "…made each human individual in his own image so that he might communicate cognitively with us, mind-to-mind in order that it might be heart-to-heart, for everlasting communion in joy and love…."[209] The ground of this image is relational, there being an inherent relationship with God in whom persons are created to live, so they may worship and obey: "To this end he makes himself known to us. He enters into communication with a view to communion."[210] Packer also affirms the fundamental relational nature of humanity. He states: "Life is relationships and we can only live fully human lives in fellowship with other people…."[211] Despite Packer's attempts to qualify himself, Payne believes that he primarily defines the *imago Dei* individualistically,

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[205] *18 Words*, 25.
[206] *Concise Theology*, 82-83.
[207] James I. Packer and Thomas Howard, *Christianity: The True Humanism* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1999), 148.
[208] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 84.
[209] "God the Image-Maker," 50.
[210] *Freedom*, 37.
[211] *Man's Sake*, 19.

as the role of community is restricted.[212] Though Packer's understanding of the *imago Dei* is essentially integrated, Payne believes that relationality is seen to take a secondary place to rationality and righteousness.

The alternative response to that of obedience is identified as being the rejection of divine authority, where persons seek freedom from the absolute truth of divine self-revelation.[213] Packer states: "Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence."[214] In rejecting divine self-revelation, creatures are seen as seeking to "play god" by being self-sufficient and autonomous beings.[215]

Packer believes that the awareness of God's reality "...is inescapable and universal, and comes through to everyone, although everywhere it gets falsified, to a greater or lesser degree, through the way it is processed in all minds and hearts."[216] His understanding is that knowledge of God is clearly evident in his creation, albeit being suppressed and distorted through idolatry and immorality. Given that Packer highlights rationality in the *imago Dei*, he focuses on the effect that sin has on the faculties of reason, in impairing the ability of persons to be able to come to a deeper understanding of the mind of God, which leads to an inability to obey the law of God. Packer also speaks of the conditioning and searing the conscience, and of a person's inability to apprehend "general revelation," so that there is confusion over moral decisions.[217]

Packer affirms: "All our life at every point is being lived unnaturally if God is not at the centre, and if his praise and glory...is not the supreme concern throughout."[218] He asserts that when persons decline to worship God, they seek

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[212] Payne, *Christian Life*, 202.
[213] Packer, *Freedom*, 18f.
[214] *Concise Theology*, 70.
[215] "The Christian and God's World," in *Transforming Our World: A Call to Action*, ed. James M. Boice (Portland, OR: Multnomah Pub., 1988), 91; Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 26.
[216] James I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 53.
[217] Packer, *18 Words*, 26; *Concise Theology*, 83.
[218] *Man's Sake*, 21.

after false gods. Rather than humbly becoming subject to God's self-revelation, something else takes its place. Packer affirms that "...it is impossible to worship nothing; as humans we are worshipping creatures, and if we do not worship the God who made us, we shall inevitably worship someone or something else."[219] He sees the rejection of God as having an absolute effect on human personhood by marring God's image.[220]

Given the inherent connection between God's self-revelation and the human image, a person's denial of divine knowledge is seen as being a denial of their own humanity. In *Christianity: The New Humanism*, Packer makes it clear that any attempts to express our humanity outside of God are unnatural. Although created in God's image, the worship of something else obscures God's glory so that persons are "...living lives that are qualitatively subhuman."[221] Packer holds to the belief that God's image cannot be lost in humanity, only distorted and perverted. However, his ongoing focus on the prevalence of indwelling sin underlines his belief in the total depravity of human nature stemming from original sin, and the ever-present possibility of "deformation."

2.5 God in Christ

Packer understands the Christian life as being wholly defined by God's redemptive self-disclosure in Christ. Given that "general revelation" is recognised as being insufficient, humanity is understood to require "special revelation" in order to be able to enter into relationship with God, know his character and obey his law. Packer states that human beings "...have received 'special revelation.' This is the supernatural saving revelation from God, that is set forth in Scripture and was embodied in Christ and is now proclaimed as the gospel of God."[222] Packer understands the incarnation in a linguistic manner, Jesus being seen as the supreme expression of God's verbal revelation.[223]

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[219] Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 146.
[220] Packer, *18 Words*, 73.
[221] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 26.
[222] Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 54.
[223] Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 46, 61.

Packer positions the incarnation and Trinity together, recognising Christ as the begotten Son of the Father, being revealed as a perfect expression of the divine image.[224] He states: "He revealed the Father, not only by what he said, but by what he was, and what he did; for he, as the image of the Father, and all the many-sided fullness of the character of the invisible God was made visible in his incarnate life…."[225] Packer affirms the Chalcedonian view of Christ.[226] In speaking of the interrelation between divinity and humanity in the person of Christ he states:

> Our Lord Jesus is both God for man and man for God; he is God's incarnate Son, fully divine and fully human. We know him as both the mediator of divine grace and the model of human godliness. And what is human godliness, the godliness that is true holiness, as seen in Jesus? It is simply human life lived as the Creator intended – in other words, it is perfect and ideal humanness, an existence in which the elements of the human person are completely united in a totally God-honouring and nature-fulfilling way.[227]

Packer recognises that God's self-revelation in Christ expresses the fullness of what it means to be human – fulfilling the *imago Dei*. Christ is seen to demonstrate the pattern of life that persons are to follow, in order to adopt a truly human way of living.[228] He states: "Christ's life displayed human dignity to the full, for he worshipped and served God the Father to the full."[229] Christ is understood to be fulfilling the moral dimension of the *imago Dei* by conforming to God's law in perfect obedience and submission, seeking to do the will of the Father.[230] Packer affirms: "Jesus was the law incarnate, he was also love incarnate, and following his way of self-giving is holiness in its purest and most perfect expression."[231] Christ's absolute obedience to the Father is understood to demonstrate the proper response of all human beings to God.

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[224] *Growing in Christ*, 43-44; *18 Words*, 109; *Concise Theology*, 90.
[225] *18 Words*, 21.
[226] *Growing in Christ*, 44-45; *Concise Theology*, 91.
[227] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 25.
[228] *Man's Sake*, 24; Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 41.
[229] *Christianity*, 155.
[230] Packer, *Freedom*, 25-26.
[231] *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 94.

Rather than focusing on the person or work of Christ, Packer gives central attention to Christ's rational-linguistic communication and example of obedience. Although he recognises the importance of imitating Christ's example in the scheme of discipleship, Christ's primary method of discipleship is understood to be his rational-linguistic teaching. Packer observes that Christ declared the words of God as rational form, based upon the authority of the Father:[232] "The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the ministry of a prophet, inasmuch as he spoke those words, and those only, which the Father had given him to speak (John 7:6; 8:28; 12:49f.; Hebrews 2:3f.)."[233] Christ's teachings are understood to be the means through which persons are able to walk in holiness.

Although Packer recognises that the incarnation provides the exemplar model for human personhood, in terms of Christ's example of obedience, it does not assume a primary epistemological function in his thought. The incarnation is seen as being redemptive, in the sense that Christ's obedience to the will of the Father demonstrates his sinlessness in fulfilling the law, to the point of death on the cross. In being both fully God and fully man, Christ is recognised by Packer as being the mediator between God and humanity, with his atonement being the necessary substitutionary work that enables reconciliation with God and eternal salvation.

Central to Packer's soteriology is the notion of "penal substitution," where forensic justice is understood as being at the centre of an orthodox interpretation of the atonement. Packer recognises Christ's atoning act of obedience to the Father on behalf of humanity, as being the climax of a perfect life lived. He clearly highlights the legal aspects of the atonement, the act of propitiation being seen to be at the very heart of the gospel.[234] Packer's understanding is that legal guilt for sin under the law demands atonement. Given that human beings are seen to be unable in their own efforts to mirror God's holiness, substitutionary sacrifice is seen to be required from one who is sinless under the law. He states: "He was the substitution for us, paying the penalty incurred by our moral failure and

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[232] *Freedom*, 32.
[233] *18 Words*, 21.
[234] *Knowing God*, 201ff.

disobedience."[235] Elsewhere, he affirms: "Atonement means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship."[236] Packer's penal emphasis means that his understanding of the atonement points to Christ's sacrifice as, first and foremost, an intra-triune act of self-revelation done on behalf of humanity, an act which would allow human beings to be able to more fully participate in the divine life.

Although Packer sees Christ's earthly example as providing a model for humanity to follow, it is the path of Christ's death and resurrection that is understood as being the destiny for the elect. The fulfilment of God's self-revelation in Christ is seen as occurring in his self-giving death, and in his resurrection, where the eschatological image for the elect is revealed. For Packer, the death-resurrection dialectic becomes the formational paradigm that the elect participate in.[237] However, across his work as a whole, he does not appear to give the resurrection the same attention that he gives to the atonement. In congruence with this, Packer also appears to give far more attention to "mortification" than to "vivification."

Packer highlights the need for Christ to be the centre of a theological system. He affirms: "The Christian consensus has always been that, as Scripture is the proper source from which theology should be derived, so Christology – that is our knowledge of the person, place and work of Christ – is the true hub around which the wheel of theology must revolve...."[238] Though Christ is clearly central in Packer's thought, Don Payne believes that Packer places Scripture before Christ in his theological schema.[239] Christ appears to be seen as having a secondary epistemological function, whereas Scripture appears to be given a primary one, the means of knowledge being placed before the object of knowledge.[240] Payne points to Packer's emphasis on the propositional character of God's revelation in

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[235] *Knowing Christianity*, 77.
[236] *Concise Theology*, 118.
[237] *Keep in Step*, 136.
[238] *Celebrating Saving Work*, 46.
[239] Payne, *Christian Life*, 223.
[240] Ibid.

Scripture over the incarnation.[241] Packer does speak of Scripture in "incarnational" language, in terms of it demonstrating the same divine and human natures as Christ.[242] It could be argued that he does not sufficiently demonstrate how Christology and bibliology integrate within the process of formation itself. It may also be construed that he misunderstands the priority of logocentric revelation in placing rational-linguistic communication above other forms. However, Packer's focus here stems from the priority of a personal relationship with God through union with Christ, so the priority of rational-linguistic communication is not seen to be an end in itself. Rather, it is there in order that union with the risen Christ would become *the* present Christological focus (as a result of response to the propositional gospel), and *the* proper ground from which Scripture (through the illumination of the Spirit) can be properly appropriated.

Packer's focus on present union with Christ leads him to place the incarnation in the background. His understanding of how the elect relate to the incarnation is in terms of Christ being seen as the model of God's image for imitation, as opposed to expressing the need for a more experiential and ontological participation. The people of God are primarily seen as being called to follow Christ's obedience to the Father by adhering to his rational-linguistic commands in Scripture, for the purpose of coming to gradually express the image of Christ more.

2.6 Union with Christ

An appropriate overarching motif through which to explore Packer's understanding of salvation is *union with Christ*. Packer sees the risen and exalted Christ as being the mediator of the new covenant, and forerunner of a new humanity. God's people are seen as needing to be continually identified with Christ, in his death and resurrection, in order to be more conformed to Christ's image.[243] Although the Christian life is understood by Packer to be synergistic, salvation as a legal act is recognised as being determined by a more passive (rather than active) response. Definitive salvific positioning is seen to be wholly dependent on a trust and reliance upon Christ's substitutionary work, while

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[241] Ibid., 222.
[242] Packer, *Honouring Written Word*, 169; *Serving People of God*, 187.
[243] *Keep in Step*, 89.

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"works" are only seen to be a product of this identification. Packer believes that saving faith becomes "…a moral dynamic of unparalleled power in the believer's life. The proof that a man's faith is real is precisely this – that it makes him work."[244] As a result of the initial response to the gospel, persons are seen as united to Christ in his death and resurrection – leading to a change in their standing with the Father. In this regard, Packer highlights three soteriological categories: *justification*, *regeneration* and *adoption*.

Of primary importance to Packer is the understanding that identification with Christ's death and resurrection leads to a standing in Christ of being justified before God. He describes justification as involving "…pardon and acceptance by God," with persons being declared righteous.[245] As a judicial act, the atonement is seen to be the means by which the righteousness of God may be imputed to persons, in accord with Christ's own righteousness. Packer sees the justification of the elect through faith as being a once and for all act of eschatological judgement brought into the present.[246]

Packer does not simply see reconciliation with God in terms of the legal standing of being justified. Union with the risen Christ is understood to mean sharing in Christ's sonship, and entering into a loving relationship with the Father. Packer highlights the importance of regeneration. This is understood to be the initial work of the Spirit occurring as a result of a person's identification with Christ's death and resurrection. He links the concept of regeneration with adoption, the basis for growth in sonship being a result of the regenerative work of the Spirit.[247] Packer believes that adoption into God's family is the climatic identity of persons who have been restored into relationship with God.[248] Adoption is understood to occur as a result of judicial change in the standing of the elect, who are brought into reconciled relationship with the Father, having been regenerated and justified in Christ.

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[244] *18 Words*, 131.
[245] *Knowing Christianity*, 84; *18 Words*, 135.
[246] *Celebrating Saving Work*, 138.
[247] "Justification," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 644; *Concise Theology*, 136, 146.
[248] *Concise Theology*, 145.

According to Packer, having an understanding of positional union with Christ is fundamental for a person's walk of holiness. The absolute basis and ground of the Christian life is related back to the regenerative work of the Spirit, and a person's righteous standing before God, based upon the work of Christ.[249] The outworking of the redemptive work of Christ is understood to be a present reality in the life of the believer who continues to respond to Christ in repentance and faith. There is not only to be an imitation of Christ's earthly life, but also a present sharing in his risen life:[250]

> …God unites the individual to the risen Lord in such a way that the dispositional drives of Christ's perfect human character – the inner urgings, that is, to honour, adore, love, obey, serve and please God, and to benefit others for both their sake and his sake – are now reproduced at the motivational centre of that individual's being. And they are reproduced, in face of the contrary egocentric cravings of fallen nature, in a dominant way, so that the Christian, though still troubled and tormented by the urgings of indwelling sin, is no longer ruled by those urgings in the way that was true before.[251]

In terms of a person's present relation to Christ, Packer's central concern is the outworking of identification with Christ's death and resurrection, while the incarnation is specifically seen as being the perfect model rather than a participatory mode. A person's present relation to God is always related back to the definitive predestined standing of the elect in Christ, as the ground of the life of holiness. He states: "The context of sanctification is justification by faith through Christ...The basis of sanctification is union with Christ in his death and resurrection."[252] The act of justification is understood as being an act of sanctification, of setting a person apart to God for the life of holiness. He affirms: "The root meaning of the word [sanctification] is relational, or as some say, positional: To sanctify, or consecrate, is to set something or someone apart for God, either in general and inclusive terms or for some specific purpose, and to have it, or him, or her, accepted by God for the end in view."[253] Packer recognises

[249] *Serving People of God*, 284-285.
[250] Ibid., 264-266.
[251] Ibid., 259.
[252] *God's Plans*, 133-134.
[253] Ibid., 127.

that sanctification is a lifelong transformational process, leading to persons being more conformed to the likeness of the Son.[254]

Packer makes a connection between love and holiness, understanding holiness as being grounded in a love relationship.[255] He points to love for God and humanity as being the fulfilment of the law. Packer states: "The heart of holiness is the spirit of love."[256] In grounding holiness in regeneration and adoption, he goes on to use the sonship motif to express the basic relationship between God and the elect.[257] Packer recognises that the requirement here is for persons to mature as children of God, growing in obedience to the Father by growing in a relationship of love. Such a relationship is grounded in the giving and receiving of the triune life, which according to Packer is "…the structural shape of the Christian's fellowship with God; this in essence is the Christian life."[258] Packer says:

> Of the relationship of giving and taking that exists between Christians and the first two persons of the Trinity, we can only speak briefly here. Suffice it to say that it is a two-sided relationship, in which both the divine and human participants are active. God's fellowship with men covers all that the Father and the Son have done, and do, and will do, in order to share their glory with us sinners. Our fellowship with God covers all the giving to him and taking from him that we do in order to express our faith and repentance.[259]

Packer makes a clear distinction between the modes of "past," "present" and "future" salvation, and places an emphasis upon the latter two being subordinate to the initial position of *being* saved.[260] There is a tension in Packer, between his affirmation of both the present and future dimensions of transformation. As well as the present state of lived consecration to God being seen in relation to positional union, it is also to be seen in relation to a future union with Christ, with the emphasis in this present age being on the need for perseverance.[261] The destiny of the elect is understood to involve the consummation of a person's identification

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[254] Ibid., 128. *Knowing Christianity*, 90.
[255] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 162-164.
[256] Ibid., 87.
[257] *Knowing God*, 225ff.
[258] *18 Words*, 186.
[259] Ibid.
[260] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 43-44.
[261] *Concise Theology*, 205-206.

with the death and resurrection of Christ, i.e. physical death followed by the resurrection of the body – one that is created in the image of the risen Christ.[262] The future revelation of Christ's coming is recognised as being the catalyst for these events.[263]

Packer understands the future transformational process to involve "glorification." He affirms: "Glorification (so-called because it is a manifesting of God in our lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18) is the scriptural nature for God's completion of what he began when he regenerated us, namely, our moral and spiritual reconstruction so as to be perfectly and permanently conformed to Christ."[264] This is the eschatological consummation of the sanctification process.[265] Like justification, it is understood by Packer to depend entirely on the work of God, apart from any active co-operation.

2.7 Living in Christ

2.7.1 Divine Initiation

Packer recognises that the process of transformation towards Christlikeness is dependent on the co-operative human response to the divine initiative. The process of sanctification is first and foremost seen to occur by means of the supernatural work of God in a person's life. He states: "Sanctification is not natural morality but supernatural conformity to the moral and spiritual likeness of Jesus Christ."[266] Packer understands God's redemptive activity as being grounded in the person and work of Christ. The possibility of present transformation is specifically understood as being dependent upon a person's response to rational-linguistic truth in Scripture (of which the gospel of Christ is the centre), and on the work of the Spirit mediating the power of the risen Christ and illuminating Scripture.

In the incarnation, Christ is seen to reveal the Father and provide a model of obedience for humanity. However, in terms of experiential piety, Packer's focus

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[262] Ibid., 109-110, 214-216.
[263] *18 Words*, 27.
[264] *Concise Theology*, 215.
[265] Ibid., 148.
[266] *God's Plans*, 134.

shifts towards God being revealed in rational-linguistic manner in Scripture, alongside the work of the Spirit, as opposed to giving a central epistemological role to Christ. Union with Christ, through his death and resurrection, is seen as the ground of holiness, which is to be presently demonstrated through "mortification" and "vivification." Despite this emphasis, Don Payne believes that Packer does not define the exact way in which the work of Christ is outworked in the process of sanctification.[267]

Packer's understanding of divine initiation in the sanctification process starts with recognition that God has already revealed himself to humanity in Christ and Scripture, so that persons know what it is to live in obedience. God is seen as being able to presently guide and direct persons to his will through the witness of his Word and Spirit. Packer affirms, "…God is ready and willing to make his will known."[268] Moreover, he believes that God has acted to make known his mind and will, and that such revelation has authority in a person's life.[269] Packer's understanding is that God has always sought to communicate directly to his people through authoritative verbal revelation, most notably through the historical record of Scripture – which he sees as being a disclosure of God's mind and will.[270] Packer's emphasis on divine authority, in particular on biblical authority, is evident in the way he expresses his theology of the Christian life. His clear belief is that persons were created to be under God's authority and that "…the only way we come under that authority and stay under it is by submitting in faith and obedience to what is in the Bible."[271]

Packer believes that the possibility of ongoing formation into the image of Christ is wholly dependent upon God's revelatory speech in history, i.e. as a result of God having communicated himself through Christ and the Scriptures. Precise knowledge of God's will, and subsequent obedience to it, is only understood as being possible on the assumption of inerrant Scriptures that can accurately communicate his will to the rational faculties. The reason the Bible is seen to

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[267] Payne, *Christian Life*, 162.
[268] Packer, *Knowing God*, 263.
[269] *Knowing Christianity*, 24.
[270] *18 Words*, 33-34.
[271] *Freedom*, 49.

have potential for formation in human life is because it is believed to be inerrant and authoritative revelation from God. The possibility of holiness is seen as being dependent upon the absolute authority of God's rational-linguistic truth in Scripture, and upon a person's ability to understand and adhere to this. This would suggest that if Scripture were not authoritative and true in *all* its parts (and consequently not trustworthy), then there are plain implications in the life of the believer, for Scripture would not be a wholly reliable ground for faith and obedience. Conceivably, error that is communicated can only beget error, rather than enabling a truth-filled (and transformed) life that Christians are called to express.[272]

Packer sees Scripture as providing divine instruction in rational-linguistic form. In particular, he understands that in giving his inerrant law, God expresses his nature and the standard that human beings are to imitate.[273] Through this communication, God is seen to invite persons into a relationship, so that they may respond in obedience. Packer affirms: "The Scriptures are God showing us himself: God communicating to us who he is and what he has done so that in the response of faith we may truly know him and live our lives in fellowship with him."[274] Elsewhere, he states that "...God sends his word to us in the character of both information and invitation. It comes to woo us as well as to instruct us; it not merely puts us in the picture of what God has done and is doing, but also calls us into personal communion with the loving Lord himself."[275] Packer recognises that the purpose of Scripture is to bring persons closer to Christ. He affirms: "Only when your reading of the written Word feeds into your relationship with the living Word (Jesus) does the Bible operate as the channel of light and life that God means it to be."[276]

Packer does not see divine guidance as primarily occurring through the present "revelation" of the Spirit. Instead, he affirms the importance of the Spirit's role in conjunction with what has already been objectively revealed in Scripture. In the

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[272] For a discussion on the various views of inerrancy, see Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views*.
[273] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 78-79.
[274] *Knowing Christianity*, 22.
[275] *Knowing God*, 123.
[276] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 41.

scheme of salvation, Packer understands the use of Scripture as being wholly bound up with the work of Spirit. He states: "The Scripture brings no life save as the Spirit uses it, and the Spirit brings no life save as he applies the Word of God, the truth of the gospel, the testimony of Jesus to our hearts."[277] The possibility of persons being able to perceive, and apply, God's rational-linguistic truth, is seen as being dependent upon the Spirit enabling knowledge of God by illuminating truth in Scripture to the mind. He affirms that the "…continuing reality of revelation through each believer's life occurs under the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit, who interprets to us the contents of Scripture, however these are met."[278] Because the human mind is recognised as being fallen, the possibility of objective truth being made known and understood to the mind through the process of rationalistic exegesis is seen to depend on the illumination of the Spirit.[279] The role of the Spirit is seen as being to mediate rational knowledge through the biblical text, rather than revealing the will of God apart from a witness to Christ and Scripture.[280]

In the context of a co-operative relationship with God, the elect are seen to be provided with grace, through the Spirit, to walk in God's revealed will. Packer acknowledges the work of the Spirit in mediating the life of God to persons as a result of Christ's atonement. The power of the Spirit poured out on the elect is understood to be the primary agent of transformation, bringing the fruit of Christlikeness.[281] The "Spirit of Christ" is understood to indwell believers, in order to work in their lives. He states: "Christ and his Spirit empower them to put sinful habits to death and bring forth in them new behavioural patterns that constitute the Spirit's 'fruit' (Romans 8:9-13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-26)."[282] Consequently, he recognises that there is a need for persons to depend on the Holy Spirit. Packer affirms that it is the Holy Spirit who "…transforms their

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[277] *Serving People of God*, 182.
[278] "Scripture," 629.
[279] Payne, *Christian Life*, 213-214; Packer, *18 Words*, 26.
[280] *Keep in Step*, 57; *Concise Theology*, 135. See also Payne, *Christian Life*, 259. Payne believes that Packer understands the Spirit's primary purpose as being to illuminate the text for application, while interpretation is seen as being more reliant on the rational faculties.
[281] Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 193, 206-209.
[282] Ibid., 51.

characters progressively into Christ's moral and spiritual likeness by instilling new desires for God and godliness that issues in new patterns of behaviour."[283]

2.7.2 Human Response

Packer differentiates between the definitive work of regeneration, which he understands as being *monergistic* (in terms of being entirely on the basis of a faith response to grace) and sanctification, which is understood to be *synergistic* (in terms of involving both divine action and human effort).[284] In regard to present transformation, he affirms: "God is labouring in and with us to make us into the most glorious of all his works, namely, worshippers in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ."[285] Sanctification is clearly understood by Packer as being an ongoing co-operative process, where God initiates and persons are in turn seen to respond. He says that it is "…a gift (that is one side: God working in us to renew and transform us) and a task (the task of obedience, righteousness and pleasing God). And we must never so stress either of the two sides that we lose sight of the other."[286] Elsewhere, he states: "God's method of sanctification is neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but God-dependent effort…."[287]

This is not to say that Packer is advocating that the process of sanctification is partly dependent upon grace and partly dependent upon works, but rather that it is wholly dependent upon both.[288] Packer's understanding of the relation between God and humanity in the process of sanctification is not only characterised by subordination, but also by reciprocation, in terms of the expression of a proper

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[283] "Holy Spirit," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson and David H. Field (Leicester, UK: IVP Academic, 1995), 446.

[284] *Concise Theology*, 170-171. There have been differing interpretations of how regeneration occurs. Packer's understanding here aligns firmly with a Reformed perspective where regeneration is seen as a monergistic work, i.e. occurring in persons through the work of God alone, rather than involving any of their own work. This could lead some to the conclusion that a person's rejection of God stems from the absence of divine activity.

[285] Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 155.

[286] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 320.

[287] *Concise Theology*, 148.

[288] See *Rediscovering Holiness*, 88. Packer identifies two main errors (i.e. "legalism" and "antinomianism") that challenge the imperative of obeying the will of God, through the power of God. For a more detailed discussion, see Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord: God's Alternative to Legalism and Moralism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Mark Jones, *Antinomianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism and Gospel Assurance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

tension between faith and works in the process of ongoing sanctification, persons needing to co-operate with what God has first initiated.

Packer has held to the belief that the experience of growing in holiness is one of conflict.[289] Human responsibility is understood as involving the need for constant "mortification," i.e. persons putting sin to death in themselves.[290] He does not believe that fighting against sin should simply occur through a passive reliance on the Spirit, but rather should require continual effort, discipline and perseverance. Therefore, he rejects more "introspective" approaches to sanctification that do not take human responsibility seriously, in favour of an approach that takes a lead from Puritanism. He states: "The form that sanctification takes is the conflict with the indwelling sin that constantly assaults us. The conflict, which is lifelong, involves both resistance to sin's assaults and the counterattack of 'mortification,' whereby we seek to drain the life out of this troublesome enemy."[291] Such understanding means that he places a strong focus on human effort in terms of a person responding to God's work within them: "It is true that we could not mortify sin by our own unaided efforts; but it is no less true that the Spirit will not mortify sin in us without our co-operation."[292] In a broader sense, this understanding may infer that the process of forming right thoughts (or beliefs), right feelings and right actions would not occur in persons without them co-operating in some way, i.e. nothing is "forced" upon them. Clearly, Packer's affirmation of synergism here stands in direct tension with his belief in monergistic regeneration.

In respect to ongoing transformation, Packer underlines the importance of persons responding in repentance and faith to what is revealed in Scripture. Knowledge of God in Scripture is seen to lead to self-examination; revealing personal sin, and showing the path that persons need to take.[293] Packer expresses the fundamental need for continual *repentance*, as a response to the "God knowledge" and "self

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[289] Packer, *Keep in Step*, 91-92.
[290] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 98.
[291] *God's Plans*, 134.
[292] *18 Words*, 179.
[293] *God's Plans*, 139-140; Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 120ff.

knowledge" that comes through Scripture.[294] He believes that repentance "…means changing one's mind so that one's view, values, goals, and ways are changed and one's whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly; mind and judgement, will and affections, behaviour and lifestyle, motives and purposes, are all involved."[295]

The other fundamentally appropriate response to God's authoritative revelation in Scripture is understood to be *faith*. Packer's belief is that faith in God involves having the right belief about God. He states: "The word faith in ordinary speech covers both credence of propositions ('beliefs') and confidence in persons or things."[296] It is seen to be based upon trust in a person who has revealed themselves, and rests upon divine testimony. Packer believes that "…faith weans us from all self-sufficiency, self-reliance and self-absorption."[297] Faith is understood to rest upon the certainty of divine self-revelation as truth, of trusting in God and what he has said.[298]

In particular, Packer focuses on the importance of a person's response to God speaking in Scripture, and on the need for persons to co-operate with the work of the Spirit, in order to apply what Scripture says. The Christian life is understood by Packer as being primarily about a life of holiness, and obedience to the law of God, by following the example of Christ's obedience to the will of the Father. In imitating Christ, the elect are understood to enter into Christ's subordinate relation to the Father, needing to respond in ongoing obedience to the Father in order to fulfil the *imago Dei*.

Given that Packer believes God has already spoken and revealed himself personally through his written Word, how persons respond to Scripture is seen as being central to the formation process.[299] Packer focuses on the importance of the Scriptures being received, read, heard, meditated on and obeyed in private life

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[294] Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 123-124.
[295] *Concise Theology*, 141.
[296] "Faith," 432.
[297] *God's Plans*, 146.
[298] *18 Words*, 126-128.
[299] *Under God's Word* (London: Lakeland, 1980), 95; *Honouring Written Word*, 151-152.

and public worship. He states: "Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God's Word."[300] All praxis for Packer is rooted in the response to scriptural instruction – it simply involves the application of Scripture to life by being obedient to what God says. Packer states:

> Man's responsibility to his Maker is, indeed, the fundamental fact of his life, and it can never be taken too seriously. God made us as responsible moral agents, and he will not treat us as anything less. His Word addresses each of us individually, and each of us is responsible for the way in which he responds – for his attention or inattention, his belief or unbelief, his obedience or disobedience. We cannot evade responsibility for our reaction to God's revelation. We live under his law. We must answer to him for our lives.[301]

For Packer, the possibility of faith and obedience is related to rationality. He believes that the starting point of the human response to God is applying the mind to appropriate the correct interpretation and understanding of Scripture.[302] Given that Scripture is understood to mediate the will of God to the mind, Packer always starts with the need for rational interpretation and understanding. In regard to Packer's view, Don Payne observes: "The mind emerges as the 'gatekeeper' for the other faculties, without which holiness, the heart of the *imago Dei*, cannot be realised."[303] A person's ability to be able to understand and respond to God's inerrant rational communication is seen to be grounded upon a specific understanding of the *imago Dei*. Obedience to the rational communication of God's law in Scripture is understood by Packer to be the means of enabling the restoration of God's image in humanity. This begins with the need for understanding truths through means of reception to rational-linguistic communication, followed by applying them to life.

In terms of the process of responding to Scripture, Packer sets up clear divisions between interpretation, understanding and application. Here, the possibility of a transformational reading of the text is understood to remain subject to the rational

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[300] *Knowing God*, 18.
[301] *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 33.
[302] *Under God's Word*, 19ff.
[303] Payne, *Christian Life*, 214.

faculties, which are seen as being the "gatekeeper." For Packer, all is understood to rely on, and begin with, proper reception and comprehension of the truth; the mind being the gateway that enables persons to come to know God through acquaintance. He believes that there is a primary need for all to be subordinate to the rational faculties, which receive God's truth through Scripture. Initially Packer places cognitive understanding before the affections, which may suggest that the way in which persons are to approach the text is divided, i.e. being wholly rational, rather than the whole self being involved.

Because the possibility of coming to objective knowledge of God is understood to begin with rational-linguistic communication being rightly interpreted by the mind, Packer's approach rests on persons being able to receive truth through the Scriptures. Although Packer speaks in absolute terms about the importance of coming to existential knowledge of God through acquaintance, he also appears suspicious of personal subjective experience. Given that the intellect is seen as the sole means of being able to receive mind-to-mind instruction from God through Scripture, it is understood by Packer to be more trustworthy than the emotions. In taking this line, Packer could be accused of isolating the operation of the rational faculties, so that Spirit-illuminated reason alone is a sufficiently reliable way of being able to discern the will of God. Because the rational faculties have direct access to Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit, they are seen as being the best safeguard of orthodoxy and objectivity. In the first instance, Packer focuses on God addressing the rational faculties. Such leads to a determined view of how formation occurs, which (he believes) cannot be bypassed. It may be construed that the need for rational-linguistic truth to be communicated to the mind (for the purpose of an accurate understanding) occurs at the expense of the whole person. However, what Packer is suggesting is that God is only able to address the whole self (and invoke a holistic response) via the prerequisite gateway of the rational faculties.

Given that Packer understands the means of formation as involving Scripture alongside the work of the Spirit, he does not appear to allow for a subjective experience of communion with God through any form of contemplation or

interior receptivity to become a central catalyst of Christian formation. This may infer a false dichotomy between the need for discursive rational acts, and interior affective acts of love and faith. Instead, formation is understood to occur through a response to rational-linguistic communication, making the formation process depend on the rational faculties and personal obedience.

Packer focuses on the importance of persons applying themselves to Scripture, to diligently read it, learn it, reflect upon it and grow in their understanding of the truth it communicates.[304] Rational understanding becomes pre-eminent and necessary in the first instance, before discursive meditation. Packer speaks of the need for persons to rightly appropriate Scripture, in order to know the truth of what God is saying. He believes that finding the essential objective meaning of the text through grammatical-historical exegesis is essential to piety. Therefore, in the first instance he focuses on the need for persons to fully apply their rational faculties when reading Scripture.

Given that Scripture is both divine and human in nature, a proper interpretation is understood to involve both the work of the interpreter, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Packer does not see the process of understanding the text as being a solely intellectual exercise, but as requiring the illumination of the Spirit.[305] However, he appears to focus primarily on the work of the Spirit in the process of application rather than interpretation. Packer believes that persons need to seek the correct interpretation of Scripture in terms of finding its original meaning, so that they can understand and discern what a text means, and reapplying the truth to their own lives.[306] He says: "The interpreter's task is to draw from Scripture and apply to thought and life today that body of universal truths about God, humanity, and their mutual relations that the texts yield."[307] Elsewhere, Packer states:

> ...knowing God involves, first, listening to God's Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets, in application to oneself; second, noting God's nature and character, as his Word and works reveal it; third, accepting his invitations, and doing what he commands; fourth,

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[304] Packer, *Under God's Word*, 98.
[305] Ibid., 29f.
[306] *Celebrating Saving Work*, 95.
[307] "Scripture," 630.

recognising, and rejoicing in, the love that he has shown in thus approaching you and drawing you into this divine fellowship.[308]

Don Payne suggests that Packer's approach to the Scriptures is primarily individualistic, as well as being rationalistic.[309] In terms of the process of biblical interpretation, the individual-social dialectic does not clearly appear in Packer's work as being equal and reciprocal. Despite Packer strongly advocating the need to draw upon ecclesial tradition as a necessary tool of self-critique, the proper usage of a grammatical-historical method of interpretation may ultimately be understood to rely upon the expertise of individual interpreters with the requisite skills. Packer always speaks of revelation in the context of a "personal relationship" with God, the ground of such a relationship (in the first instance) being distinctly mind-to-mind between God and the individual.

Packer does not separate a person's understanding of God through Scripture, from their knowledge of God through prayer, or from knowledge of God applied.[310] Experiential knowledge of God is only seen to occur when there is an appropriate response to the initial rational knowledge that has been acquired by understanding.[311] Although, at times, Packer appears to take an overly rational approach to Christian living, he always underlines the danger of persons having a rational knowledge about God without knowing God personally.[312] Alister McGrath believes that Packer's concern is that "knowing true notions about God" and "knowing the true God himself" go together.[313] In speaking of how the Puritans sought to counter arid intellectualism, Packer affirms "…conceptual knowledge kills if one does not move on from knowing notions to knowing the realities to which they refer – in this case, from knowing about God to relational acquaintance with God."[314] In *Knowing God,* he states:

> Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God himself better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the

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[308] *Knowing God*, 39.
[309] Payne, *Christian Life*, 233-234.
[310] Packer, *Knowing God*, 20-22, 39.
[311] Ibid., 42.
[312] Ibid., 25-27.
[313] McGrath, *Know and Serve God*, 259-260.
[314] Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 32.

doctrine of God's attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are. As he is the subject of our study, and our helper in it, so he must himself be the end of it. We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God. It was for this purpose that revelation was given, and it is to this use that we must put it.[315]

Though Packer fully recognises an absolute need for persons to move beyond knowing about God to a deep acquaintance with God, his approach to getting there may appear to be rather rigid and mechanical. The method that Packer proposes for moving from "head knowledge" to "heart knowledge" involves discursive meditation on rational-linguistic truth in Scripture. He states: "How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? The rule for doing this is demanding, but simple. It is that we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into a matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God."[316] Rather than seeing a progression towards a more contemplative awareness of God, discursive biblical meditation is seen as the only true imperative.[317] The use of meditation, in terms of rumination and listening to God, is seen as a means of preparation to conversation with God and the contemplating of God's greatness:[318] "In meditation the whole man is involved in deep and prayerful thought on the true meaning and bearing of a particular Bible passage, on its revelation of God and his ways with men, and on its application to our own life."[319]

In a passing reference to *Lectio Divina*, Packer affirms the stage of *contemplatio* – referring to it as being "peaceful rest" and "waiting in silence with hopeful expectation."[320] However, he does not place primary importance on the need for a form of "direct" meditation on God himself. Consequently, acts of contemplation are not encouraged or seen as being central or necessary means of fostering Christian formation.[321] The primary discursive activity that leads to formation is understood to occur through Scripture mediating the knowledge of

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[315] *Knowing God*, 21-22.
[316] Ibid., 22.
[317] *Quest for Godliness*, 13.
[318] *Knowing Christianity*, 103-104; Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 68ff.
[319] Packer, *Under God's Word*, 100-101.
[320] Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 90-91.
[321] Ibid., 65, 73-74.

God to the mind. Therefore, Packer places primary focus on advocating thoughts about God, rather than promoting a non-conceptual meditation upon God himself.[322] He states:

> Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart.[323]

Packer points to the fundamental importance of seeking regular fellowship with God as a "means of grace."[324] He sees the possibility of communion with God as being dependent upon an individual's response to rational knowledge of God in Scripture.[325] Rather than focusing on "direct" contemplation as a response to God, Packer points towards the need for a more active verbal response to God by means of a response to Scripture. He states: "God's Word comes to us so that we may speak our word to him."[326] Consistently he offers a view of prayer that is a personal and dynamic divine-human encounter, which primarily involves verbal communication.[327] Packer implies that the same way God created human beings in his image to communicate with them through language, he also created them to respond back to him verbally – through praise, confession, petition, intercession and thanksgiving.[328]

Packer affirms the centrality of inner dispositions of faith and affection towards God, and the core (heart) of a person needing to be involved. However, in his central scheme of thought, he does not give attention to the need for a sustained inner "act" as a central means of deepening personal knowledge of God. He appears to avoid any discussion of existential communion with God, and rejects

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[322] Ibid., 65.
[323] Packer, *Knowing God*, 22.
[324] *Knowing Christianity*, 94.
[325] *Under God's Word*, 97; Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 37.
[326] Packer, *Under God's Word*, 96.
[327] *Concise Theology*, 162-164.
[328] "J. I. Packer," in *My Path of Prayer: Personal Experiences of God*, ed. David Hanes (Worthing, UK: Walter, 1981), 57; *Knowing Christianity*, 98; *Honouring Written Word*, 44.

more mystical forms of prayer because of their apparent passive nature and the danger of "quietism."[329] Because of his concern to place objective rational truth at the beginning of his system, subjective experience of God through the Spirit becomes a secondary concern, and within the central process of formation he does not give any "gatekeeper" function to the a-rational faculties.

Packer remains reluctant to understand "direct" forms of "religious experience," or "experiences of the Spirit," as being central to spiritual growth. The position he takes may in part be because of what he sees as the anti-rational nature of experientialism in the church.[330] Given that Packer sees rational knowledge through Scripture as being more verifiable than "knowledge-through-love," he moves away from speaking about his own personal communion with God in subjective language.[331] For example, in speaking about knowing God's love, Packer prefers to speak of the loving acts of God recorded in Scripture rather than a subjective personal experience of his love. His understanding of divine guidance also focuses more on a rational understanding tied to propositional instruction in Scripture, so that inner inclinations (desires, affections, emotions) and the possibility of inner promptings of the Spirit, are ultimately subservient to the rational faculties.

Rather than recognising the central need for persons to experience some kind of mystical or contemplative awareness of God, in terms of a "knowledge-through-love," Packer's primary practical concern in epistemological terms is for a deepened knowledge of God through the experience of obeying biblical imperatives in daily life. Foremost attention is given to rational-linguistic knowledge and the need for obedience, while experiential knowledge through love becomes wholly subordinate to this.

2.7.3 Growth in Community

Packer's understanding of the Trinity influences his understanding of human personhood. He appears to emphasise a subordinate and individualistic

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[329] "Path of Prayer," 58-59.
[330] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 155.
[331] "Path of Prayer," 56.

anthropology, which would lessen the function that reciprocation in community has. Given the anthropological emphasis, Don Payne believes that Packer offers an approach to the Christian life that is primarily individualistic.[332] Within the scheme of "positional salvation," Packer certainly gives priority to individuality over community. He does not see the church as the context of personal salvation, and may at times appear to place an emphasis on autonomous growth through the nurturing of personal discipline and obedience.

Although personal/individual salvation is wholly central in Packer's understanding of justification, on numerous occasions he does point towards the importance of community within the process of sanctification.[333] He clearly acknowledges that holiness does not come through a state of isolation and solitude; it is seen to involve relationships and love.[334] Packer also warns against individualism.[335] Although he recognises the centrality of ecclesial life, the underlying dynamic that he expresses between individual and social dimensions appears to weaken the latter. Despite his qualifying statements about the importance of church life in sanctification, it remains secondary within the process of formation. Though it does not assume a primary place in Packer's writings, he clearly still places importance on ecclesial membership, and the life of the church for spiritual growth – the gathered community being seen as an essential resource for personal holiness.

For Packer, the ground of Christian fellowship is "special revelation." He points to Scripture as providing the Christian community with its distinctiveness, recognising that it must be the basis for gathered fellowship. Packer is keen to demonstrate the absolute distinctiveness of Christian fellowship.[336] His belief is that the fellowship that individuals have with God "...is the source from which fellowship among Christians springs: and fellowship with God is the end to which

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[332] Payne, *Christian Life*, 2, 202.
[333] Packer, *God's Plans*, 134, 148.
[334] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 27-28.
[335] James I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *God's Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 140-142.
[336] Packer, *18 Words*, 183-184.

Christian fellowship is a means."[337] As well as emphasising how personal union with God brings about proper relations with others, Packer also sees ecclesial relations as being a catalyst for persons to be brought into deeper relationship with God.[338] His understanding is that the purpose of fellowship is to lead persons to God, and to be a "means of grace" through which they can receive from God.[339] Packer believes that "…God has made us in such a way that our fellowship with himself is fed by our fellowship with fellow Christians, and requires to be so fed constantly for its own deepening and enrichment."[340]

Packer's emphasis on community relates more to the need for Christians to express and reflect their relation to God through their fellowship with one another. Primarily, he points to fellowship as being for the purpose of revealing God and coming to greater knowledge of him.[341] Given that persons respond to God's will and express his holiness in the context of relationships, love is seen as an expression of individual righteousness stemming from a "personal relationship" with God.[342] The mutual expression of Christian love is understood as being a sign of the Christian life and an act of obedience to God.[343] His focus on subordination in the Trinity also affects his understanding of transformation within the life of the church. The obedience of the Son to the Father is seen as the central model for the elect to follow, meaning that the substance of relationships is rooted in personal obedience to the law of God in Scripture. Subordinate rationalism is then demonstrated in how the church and world fit into his theological scheme of the Christian life, with personal holiness being achieved through obedience to the law in loving God and neighbour.[344]

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[337] Ibid., 185.
[338] Ibid., 191. See also Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 14. They affirm: "Christianity teaches us to view God as our ultimate environment; to know him in and through the persons, things and values that surround us.…"
[339] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 15.
[340] *18 Words*, 185.
[341] See *Rediscovering Holiness*, 89. Rather than emphasising the place of relationships in the process that leads to holiness, Packer points out the interrelation between the love towards God and love towards one another. He states that "…the outward life of loving one's neighbour and the inner life of loving one's God belong together, in such a sense that failure in either inescapably weakens the other."
[342] See Payne, *Christian Life*, 202.
[343] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 156-157.
[344] *Rediscovering Holiness*, 162-163.

Although Packer does not draw a social Trinitarian theology out in any way as a central concept for the life of the church, he believes that the ecclesial understanding of fellowship is comparable to the give-and-take within the triune life.[345] Packer affirms how the "social Trinity" plays out in the church in terms of give-and-take, albeit through focusing on the gift of rational communication. He believes that earthly relations correspond with the fellowship of mutual honour and love in the Trinity.[346] He states: "Christian fellowship is a family activity of God's sons. Like fellowship with the Father and the Son, it is a two-way traffic which involves giving and taking on both sides...."[347] Elsewhere, he affirms: "God has called them [believers] into a relation of mutual love and service, of mutual listening and response, of asking, giving, taking and sharing on both sides."[348]

Giving and receiving is understood as being the essence of fellowship; where persons give what they have received from God, and receive God's gifts through other persons.[349] Packer says that "...fellowship means common participation in something either by giving what you have to the other person or receiving what he or she has. Give-and-take is the essence of fellowship, and give-and-take must be the way of fellowship in the common life of the body of Christ."[350] Giving and receiving here may be seen to amount to persons expressing the gifts of God towards one another for the purpose of drawing closer to God. He recognises the need for "every member ministry," involving gift-giving of all kinds, and the importance of imitation of others.[351] Packer defines fellowship as:

> ...seeking to share in what God has made known of himself to others, as a means to finding strength, refreshment and instruction for one's own soul. In fellowship, one seeks to gain, as well as to give.... Thus, Christian fellowship is an expression of both love and humility. It springs from a desire to bring benefit to others, coupled with a sense of personal weakness and need. It is has a double motive – the wish to help, and to be helped; to edify, and to be edified. It has a double aim – to do, and to receive, good. It is a corporate seeking by Christian

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[345] *Serving People of God*, 14.
[346] *Celebrating Saving Work*, 15.
[347] *18 Words*, 186.
[348] *Growing in Christ*, 228.
[349] *Knowing Christianity*, 120-124; *18 Words*, 184-185.
[350] *Serving People of God*, 13.
[351] *Keep in Step*, 69-72, 153; Packer and Nystrom, *God's Will*, 163f.

people to know God better through sharing with each other what, individually, they have learned of him already.[352]

Given that Packer is primarily interested in growth occurring through means of rational speech and comprehension, formation in community is also seen to be a result of rational-linguistic communication. Consequently, he does not focus on fully expressing how God is being revealed within the life of the church in an integral sense. In congruence with his whole theological scheme, Packer focuses on the importance of the mutual sharing of rational-linguistic truth, and a person's response to this. Given that Packer places focus upon the communication of a rational message, proper receptivity and understanding become primary for formation to be able to occur. The knowledge of God being expressed within the church, through presence and act, is given less significance within the process of sanctification. The revealing of the knowledge of God towards one another is seen primarily as an expression of Christian duty and witness, rather than as a formational means for both giver and receiver.

In terms of the "gathered worship" of the community, the rational and linguistic emphasis is further demonstrated in a more formalised way, being seen in the importance that Packer gives to preaching. He notes the New Testament emphasis on this particular "sacrament," and believes that use of Scripture should assume a central place in the life of the church, as in a person's daily devotions.[353] Packer states: "The purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered."[354] Any other elements of worship in corporate settings such as praise, prayer and the ritual of communion are understood to occur as a response to God's self-revelation in Scripture.

Within a "gathered church" context, Packer sees an important place for the sacrament of communion. However, it is not assumed to have the same central place given to the "sacrament" of Scripture. Primary formational value is given to the spoken Word rather than to participation in the transforming presence of

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[352] Packer, *18 Words*, 187.
[353] *Under God's Word*, 64-71.
[354] *Honouring Written Word*, 253.

Christ through the act of communion. Because of Packer's focus on rational communication, he does not equally emphasise the qualities of speech, presence and act in revealing knowledge of God, though all have a specific function. He fully understands the irreplaceable function of rational-linguistic communication, but could be more explicit in highlighting the function of immanent reflections of the divine presence in the life of the church through presence and act, rather than just focusing on a rational communication of Scripture.

As a "catechist," Packer emphasises the importance of all forms of biblical instruction in an ecclesial setting. His interest is in the systematic instruction of truth about God and his dealings with the world, so that persons might be able to receive truth that will form their mind and heart. He seeks to communicate instruction that that engages the whole person, the "…head, heart and hands; doctrine, experience and practice."[355] Packer fully understands that there is the need for holistic development, in terms of intellectual learning, worship, prayer, active obedience and loving service.[356] Revealing the knowledge of God and expressing his image in community involves more than rational-linguistic communication. On occasion, Packer does point to a broader understanding of Christian fellowship, recognising the whole Christian duty being towards self-gift in relationship. He states:

> The corporate aspect of Christian spirituality can be defined as practising mutual love and care in God's family on the basis that this is the life to which we are called and for which Christ equips us: each believer must be ready to lay down his or her life for Christ in others, and must be duly grateful when others lay down their lives and bear burdens for Christ in his or her own self.[357]

However, in terms of the transmission of divine revelation in community, Packer's emphasis remains rationalistic and linguistic, in line with his understanding that this has primary place in the scheme of formation. He believes that "…Christian fellowship is seeking to share what God has made known to us, while letting

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[355] Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 30, 187-189.
[356] Ibid., 117ff.
[357] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 267.

others share with us what they know of him."[358] Elsewhere, he affirms that fellowship involves "...first a sharing with our fellow believers the things that God has made known to us about himself, in hope that we may thus help them to know him better and so enrich their fellowship with him."[359] Packer understands Christian fellowship as being unique, in terms of revelation being demonstrated in rational and verbal communication, as opposed to being through presence and act. Sharing knowledge of God with others in rational-linguistic form is understood to have primary and central function in the church. Therefore, the primary emphasis in ecclesial life is for persons to grow in their understanding of Scripture through rational meditation and reflection, and to respond in verbal expression and active obedience.

Packer understands that the church is to be a distinct community of holiness that is different from the world, but not separate.[360] The church is seen as being sent into the world to witness to Christ and his kingdom, and to serve others. Packer states: "The universal church, and therefore every local congregation and every Christian in it, is sent into the world to fulfil a definite, defined task."[361] He believes that Christians are called to be fully engaging with society, not primarily for the cause of socio-political transformation, but as witnesses to the knowledge of God in Christ, inviting persons to respond in repentance and faith. He describes the two-fold task of mission within the categories of "proclamation" and "presence-act," but with a primary focus on the former:

> First and fundamentally, it is the work of worldwide witness, disciple-making and church-planting (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47-48). Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed everywhere as God incarnate, Lord, and Saviour; and God's authoritative invitation to find life through turning to Christ in repentance and faith (Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:16-24) is to be delivered to all mankind...[and secondly that we are]...called to practice deeds of mercy and compassion, a thoroughgoing neighbour-love that responds unstintingly to all forms of human need as the present themselves (Luke 10:25-27; Romans 12:20-21).[362]

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[358] *Knowing Christianity*, 121.
[359] *18 Words*, 186-187.
[360] *Concise Theology*, 198-200.
[361] Ibid., 189.
[362] Ibid., 189-190.

In terms of Christian witness, Packer focuses on the transmission of the Word through verbal sharing.[363] His primary focus in mission is on sharing the knowledge of Christ with others, in order to invoke a transformative response. The church is not only seen to be a community that witnesses to the knowledge of Christ through proclamation, but also to demonstrate knowledge of Christ through presence, and acts of love. However, this kind of witness to those outside of the community of faith is not seen by Packer as having the same direct epistemological or redemptive value as rational-linguistic communication. He believes that there is the necessity of the propositional gospel, and an understanding of the message, before there can be any transformational response. The missional witness of the church and means of transformation in the world is seen to occur through the proclamation of the Word directed at the mind, rather than through an "integral witness" that also emphasises presence and act.

As well as there being a call for Christians to witness to Christ in terms of the above, Packer also recognises they are called to carry out a variety of vocational roles in society. He states that "...Christians are called to fulfil the 'cultural mandate' that God gave to mankind at creation (Genesis 1:28-30; Psalm 8:6-8). Man was made to manage God's world, and this stewardship is part of the human vocation in Christ."[364] Packer believes that Christians become a "transforming cultural force" as they fulfil their vocation in the world through all kinds of activities.[365] He affirms the "cultural mandate" of positive involvement in the world as the vocation of the Christian, and recognises the need to fully engage in society in its fallen state, albeit in the light of the eternal.[366] However, Packer rejects any form of piety that may reduce the Christian faith to a socio-political scheme for "transforming" this present world.[367]

Although Packer understands the importance of societal work within the scheme of Christian mission, he does not emphasise it as being a context in which the process of Christian formation occurs. Packer does not focus on how formation

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[363] *Serving People of God*, 216; *Evangelism*, 34; *Concise Theology*, 199.
[364] *Concise Theology*, 199.
[365] Ibid., 199-200.
[366] *Knowing Christianity*, 143-144; Packer and Howard, *Christianity*, 177-180.
[367] Packer, *Knowing Christianity*, 141-142.

would occur in the Christian life as a result of engaging in "ordinary" activity and interaction with the world. Although he recognises that holiness is not something that can simply be worked out in solitude or detachment, he appears to make ecclesial life the broad context of Christian formation, in terms of focusing on specific activities that occur in a specific environment. Packer repeatedly speaks of formation as being nurtured through specific "means of grace." The lists he gives for this are not always the same, but he does consistently reference the central means as being "Bible," "prayer," "worship" and "[ecclesial] fellowship."[368] These are understood as things that persons engage in to allow God to work in their lives and transform them.[369] Rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive list of "spiritual disciplines" that may be beneficial for Christian growth, Packer focuses on select and limited means needed for Christian formation to occur:

> The Holy Spirit works through means – through the objective 'means of grace,' namely, biblical truth, prayer, fellowship, worship, and the Lord's Supper, and with them through the subjective 'means of grace' whereby we open ourselves to change, namely, thinking, listening, questioning oneself, examining oneself, admonishing oneself, sharing what is in one's heart with others, and weighing any response they make.[370]

Given that sanctification is understood by Packer to be wholly reliant upon a personal response to "special revelation," a Christian's vocation in the world, and relation to the world, is not seen as contributing to Christian formation. Instead, it is seen more as being an overflowing mission resulting from a person's formation within the community of faith, in order that those who are outside may be drawn in. Given that any other environment or medium outside of the church is only seen to facilitate "common grace" (as opposed to redemptive action), Packer may be seen to limit the process of growing in holiness to being something that happens through special "means of grace" in ecclesial life and personal devotions.

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[368] *Serving People of God*, 290.
[369] *Knowing Christianity*, 93.
[370] *Keep in Step*, 90.

Packer does not set out to explore how everyday experience in the lives of believers (though common to all humanity) may demonstrate a grace that contributes towards the distinct aims of Christian formation. Instead, he understands transformation as specifically stemming from a work of God within the context of the community of faith. Given that co-operation with God is seen to exist within a redemptive narrative, only specific activities are understood by Packer to have formative value, in terms of bringing "special grace," that ultimately contributes towards persons becoming more like Christ. It may be argued that an integral approach should be "inclusive," in terms of God being understood to work in a person's life through all means, while still acknowledging a special place for specific "means of grace." However, this invokes further questions around the extent to which the work of "common grace" assumes a place in the process of Christian formation.

Packer's understanding of the Christian life can be said to be "world-affirming" rather than "world-denying."[371] In recognising physicality as a gift of God, he affirms the value of God-given pleasure in the body, and insists on a proper integration of this into the life of godliness. However, this does not mean that the entirety of the human experience is seen to be a permissible starting point in the process of formation. Packer's neglect of embodiment and physicality in the scheme of formation is congruent with his anthropology, which does not allow for a reciprocating relation. Formation is only understood in relation to specific activities, because it is linked to a direct response to rational-linguistic speech and ecclesial life.

Packer appears not to want to start with any "outer" formational experience in itself, so relationships and physicality are given a contextual, subordinate and passive role rather than a proactive role that initiates personal holiness and formation. Furthermore, his emphasis on preaching and a subordinate linguistic procession, as opposed to a reciprocation occurring in equal roles, places the focus of the formation on the receiver of the revelation, rather than on the

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[371] "Christian and God's World," 93-94.

formation of both giver and receiver.[372] This same logocentric characteristic carries over into his missiology. The missional witness of the church, and means of transformation in the world, is seen to occur through the proclamation of the gospel to the mind, rather than starting with an "integral witness" that includes presence and act.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the central task has been to explore J. I. Packer's understanding of the relationship between theology and spirituality, and how this leads to transformation. I have examined how the contours of his thought can point to the possibility of an integrated, cohesive, broad, common and balanced framework of transformational theology. Rational-linguistic truth is clearly at the centre of his scheme, fulfilling a specific function. Its importance is demonstrated in the emphasis he places on the rational faculties, and in the need for persons to understand and actively respond to biblical truth through prayer and obedience. I have briefly outlined Packer's theology as a backdrop within which to understand his view of the Christian life, while maintaining a rational-linguistic emphasis throughout. The core understanding of how formation occurs in Packer's thought is dependent upon the way in which he integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality.

I have demonstrated how Packer seeks to ground his understanding of the Christian life in rational-linguistic truth, i.e. in the communication of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. Packer clearly gives a special place to rational-linguistic communication, without which there is understood to be no possibility of formation occurring. He begins with the acknowledgement of a sovereign God, who is seen to have revealed himself to persons in a way that they can understand and know him. Formation is simply seen to occur as a proper response to this knowledge. All formation is rooted in the understanding that persons have already positively responded in repentance

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[372] His teaching methodology is particularly evident in his works related to catechesis, see *Growing in Christ*; Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*.

and faith to the propositional gospel of Christ, and subsequently been justified before God, and adopted in the Son.

Bibliology is clearly at the forefront in the development of Packer's theological system. He prioritises the need for persons to understand and apply rational-linguistic communication in Scripture, believing that it provides objective truth and carries the fullness of divine authority. The possibility of persons coming to orthodoxy and orthopraxy is understood to depend upon them being able to correctly interpret knowledge of God through Scripture. Packer's immediate concern is to express rational propositional truths from Scripture, constructing a theology grounded in a grammatical-historical interpretation. He is consistent in seeking to base his beliefs upon (what he understands to be) a sincere and coherent analysis of the biblical text, and has sought to lay out distinct propositional truths. This suggests the possibility of doctrine being a framework existing independently from a transformed experience.

Packer focuses on the need for orderly instruction of rational-linguistic truth in Scripture, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. A person is seen as being able to be formed as a result of the rational faculties receiving such truths, leading towards a broad response. Packer sees there being an internally constant consensus of essentials around which Christians should all agree, and believes himself to be teaching orthodox norms.[373] He lays out truths that he claims as being consistent (and in continuity) with the biblical gospel and the stream of the "Great Tradition." Packer then seeks to catechise, focusing on what will be able to lead to right beliefs, right actions and deep communion with God – the need being to shape a person's mind with systematic instruction about prayer, moral behaviour and doctrinal beliefs.[374]

Packer integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality by holding together doctrine, communion with God and applied knowledge. He affirms the importance of uniting the three dimensions of belief, experience and practice,

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[373] Packer, *God's Plans*, 47f.
[374] Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 123.

while also appealing for balance between them.[375] The way these areas are integrated is through systematic instruction of rational-linguistic truth being understood and applied to life. Scripture is understood to reveal what God is like, and show what persons are to do as a result of understanding it, i.e. to worship God, by both communing with him and obeying him. It is this integrated process that is seen to enable transformation. Based on a response to what has been understood, persons are seen to be able to move towards knowing God, rather than knowing about him, beyond information to transformation. Packer believes that in order for formation to happen there needs to be cognitive understanding of biblical truth (i.e. an active response expressed first in rational engagement), followed by verbal forms of prayer and ongoing obedience.

Packer expresses a holistic approach to the Christian life with a degree of success. He has (in the very least) attempted to avoid dualistic tendencies in his understanding of the Christian life, and sought to provide a balanced approach that is not focused on extremes, such as anti-rational experientialism and dry intellectualism. He speaks of the dangers of imbalanced growth, where there may be a strong focus on either "rationalism," "experientialism" or "activism."[376] There are reoccurring concepts in his overall thought that contribute towards the possibility of creating an integral understanding of Christian formation. At the same time, his core thought and praxis contain various predominant characteristics, some of which I have attempted to draw out. Though he has not sought to provide a comprehensive and integrated theological framework for Christian formation, he points towards the need for this and offers some helpful directives.

Packer sets out to show the possibility of a expressing a framework that is internally cohesive, not simply in terms of a theological framework, but also in terms of the Christian life. He also points to his "proto-evangelical" understanding as being the mainstream Christian view. In regard to what faithful evangelicals claim, Packer believes that "…far from being marginal in relation to the larger

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[375] Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 57, 150ff.
[376] Ibid., 154-156.

Christian world, they are in fact at its centre, upholding mainstream Christian faith in a way that is demonstrably more biblical than any alternative."[377] He continues: "…I see evangelicalism as true mainstream Christianity, in relation to which all forms of non-evangelicalism are sub-evangelical and eccentric…."[378] At the same time, Packer urges those who are "evangelical" to "…maintain constant dialogue with non-evangelical theology…."[379] Not only does he present his view for self-identified "evangelicals," but also to the wider church, for the purpose of dialogue. He invites other traditions to examine his theological convictions, believing that what he sets out is within the mainstream orthodoxy of the early church and Reformers.[380]

In the next chapter, I will turn to a significant patristic figure. Maximus Confessor's system and theology of the Christian life will be presented as exposure to a broad and integrated vision of Christian formation, in view of determining the breadth of Packer's approach. A study of Maximus' thought will bring to light a holistic understanding of the Christian life, as expressed within another tradition, being built around a different logocentric method from that of Packer. This will lead to analysis and dialogue in Chapter Four, which will be used as the starting point for moving towards the development of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology in Chapters Five and Six.

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[377] "Maintaining Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Leicester, UK: IVP, 2000), 183.
[378] Ibid., 186.
[379] Ibid., 188.
[380] Packer and Oden, *One Faith*, 173.

CHAPTER THREE: THE "SYNTHETIC VISION" OF MAXIMUS CONFESSOR

3.1 Introduction

In order to be able to construct a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology, comparable theologies of the Christian life are being examined. In Chapter Two, J. I. Packer's rational-linguistic approach was examined. The purpose of this current chapter is to explore the comprehensive and integrated vision of Maximus Confessor, as an alternative approach that is built around a different logocentric method.

Maximus' approach to integration is vastly different from that of Packer. In this chapter, his system of thought is presented as exposure to a broad vision of Christian formation, as an alternative to a fully rational-linguistic approach. I will look at how Maximus provides a different integrated approach between theology and spirituality, which consequently leads to a different way of expressing an integral approach to Christian formation. In doing so, I will examine how the centre of his thought points towards an alternative transformational vision.

Maximus has been recognised as being a figure who synthesised different ideas into an integrated system. Hans Urs von Balthasar called him "…the most daring systematician of his time.…"[381] Crucially, Maximus sought to seamlessly combine ascetical, mystical, dogmatic and sacramental dimensions. He has expressed the importance of needing to bring things together, to integrate and remove divisions. I will attempt to demonstrate how his theological vision may be seen to point towards an integrated model of Christian formation.

Although Maximus provides some originality in his thought, his main intention was to affirm already existing orthodox views. Maximus' expressions of orthodoxy are based upon the convergence of sources and traditions, i.e. apostolic authority, the church fathers, councils, creeds, liturgy and Scripture. He attempts to develop a comprehensive orthodox theological vision, by embracing the testimony of Scripture and the "common opinion" of the church. Although Maximus'

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[381] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 29.

theological method does not involve a sophisticated exegesis, he does maintain a high view of Scripture, and Scripture is central to his articulation of orthodoxy.

Maximus assumed a mediatorial role as one of the last and most prolific minds of the Greek patristic era; he brought together various diverse ideas, fusing them into an original synthesis, bridging Christian traditions of East and West before the schism. Maximus' attempt to demonstrate an integrated and cohesive system arose from an "ecumenical" spirit, and a profound grasp of his heritage. In particular he was influenced by the ascetical teachings of Evagrius Ponticus, Chalcedonian dogma and Cappadocian thought, and his work acted as a corrective to elements of Originist thought and Dionysian spirituality.

Although none of Maximus' writings provide a systematic presentation of his thought as a whole, or a synopsis of his view of the Christian life, collectively they reflect a synthesis that is both comprehensive and coherent. In this thesis I am consulting his key translated works in order to understand his overall thought and his theology of the Christian life. The main texts of Maximus I am using are *Ambigua, Mystagogia,* and *Questions and Doubts*. Other texts consulted are *The Four Centuries on Love, Centuries on Knowledge* and *The Ascetic Life.* As well as engaging with Maximus himself, I am also using relevant secondary literature, most notably works by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Melchisedec Törönen and Torstein Tollefsen. All have sought to provide some kind of synthesis and central understanding of Maximus' theology.[382] Various studies have also been done on Maximus' understanding of deification; in particular I have consulted work by Elena Vishnevskaya, who orientates Maximus' understanding of deification towards the concept of *perichoresis*.[383]

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[382] See ibid.; Törönen, *Union and Distinction*; Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*.
[383] See Vishnevskaya, "Divinization and Spiritual Progress"; "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace." See Oliver D. Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005): 122. Crisp notes that the concept of perichoresis was first used by Gregory Nazianzus and Maximus Confessor in relation to the hypostatic union in Christ. Later on the concept was applied by John of Damascus to the nature of the triune life. The term has been used to denote interpenetration, without confusion, for the purpose of upholding both union and distinction. In contemporary theology it is most often used to describe the way the persons of the Triune God relate to each other, denoting a mutual indwelling and sharing in the lives of the other, while allowing a distinct individual identity. Apart from being used in relation to Christ and the Trinity, it

As with the chapter on Packer, I will firstly look to provide a theological framework, which provides the grounding for Maximus' understanding of the Christian life. This will begin with outlining the logocentric core of Maximus' thought. I will demonstrate how this centre can be seen as integrating his whole theological system, by exploring major themes in his thought in relation to it. Towards the end of the chapter there will be a more specific focus on examining how Maximus integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality around his theological centre. Collectively, the whole chapter will reveal an understanding of his transformational theology.

3.2 Christology and Integration

3.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I will outline the unifying centre of Maximus' theology. This centre will later be seen to provide cohesiveness and integration across his thought. It can be understood to provide the basis for the integration between the concerns of theology and spirituality, and in turn point towards a comprehensive vision of transformational theology.

Commentators have expressed differing views on the centre of Maximus' theology. Torstein Tollefsen recognises Christology as the centre of Maximus' cosmological system, but without any special reference to dialectic.[384] Melchisedec Törönen on the other hand portrays the relation between "union" and "distinction" as being the centre of Maximus' theology, though without special reference to Christology.[385] Törönen sees that the metaphysical principle of reality based upon the notion of "whole and parts," is the overriding structure of Maximus' theology, being both the "law of being" and the "law of synthesis." Polycarp Sherwood understands the centre of Maximus' thought as the uniting of all things in Christ, while Hans Urs von Balthasar sees internal unity "without

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has also be been applied more widely. See James D. Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believers Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).
[384] Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*.
[385] Törönen, *Union and Distinction*.

mixture" as being the centre of Maximus' theological system – the Chalcedonian Definition being seen as the key to unlocking the structural principal of reality.[386]

In this thesis, the proposal is that the centre of Maximus' thought is the *union and distinction in his Christology*. This centre underlies his thought; it becomes the unifying motif of his whole system, the dialectical ontology in the person of Christ infiltrating all elements of his theology.[387] Maximus goes some way towards demonstrating an integrative vision of Christian orthodoxy as a result of Chalcedonian Christology being central throughout his whole system.

Maximus is able to provide a way of integrating diverse ideas and concepts, rather than seeing them as opposing. The theological system he expresses points to the overcoming of division and coming to wholeness. Maximus understands that the basis for orthodoxy and synthesis in Christian theology involves dialectical ontology. Törönen points out that the fundamental question in both Trinitarian theology and Christology has been "…how to reconcile simultaneous unity and difference."[388] Maximus is able to give attention to the use of dialectical language in order to express union and differentiation in understanding both the Trinity and the person of Christ, in particular through the specific usage of perichoretic language in the latter. He sees union and difference as being interdependent, there being a simultaneous reality of "unity without confusion." According to Törönen, this idea pervades various aspects of Maximus' thought, and any synthesis of Maximus' work must be seen in the light of this.[389]

Although Maximus sees dialectical language as finding its source in the Trinity, he more specifically relates it to the person of Christ. In doing so, it becomes an overarching theme that unites all of his thought, both in terms of theology and practice, the incarnation of the Logos being the paradigm within a wider vision of

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[386] See Sherwood, *Maximus the Confessor*; Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*.
[387] The term *dialectic* can be understood as involving the interaction between juxtaposed elements (or truths) that seemingly appear to contradict and be in conflict. Each pole can be held together in paradoxical tension, being seen to affirm rather than oppose the other. This "both/and" position maintains union without confusion, and so provides a way of overcoming dualism and false dichotomies.
[388] Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 47.
[389] Ibid., 1, 28f.

reality. Maximus' whole system is dependent on his Christology, his method of synthesis being built around a Christological paradigm. The synthesis in the person of Christ (the hypostatic union) is understood as being the key element in the metaphysical structure of reality; the central point from which all of creation draws its meaning and significance. The incarnation is not only seen as a historic event, it is understood to continue to unveil the absolute significance of Christ's being in the structure and principles of the universe.

Maximus portrays God as wanting to integrate the fractures in the broken world, to reconcile everything together and heal all divisions through the incarnation. Integration in Christ can be seen as being the goal of Maximus' theology. In simple terms, he understands this as being accomplished through the divine and human union in Christ's person. Thunberg notes, that the term *theandric* is Maximus' "…preferred expression of the divine-human reciprocity in action."[390] Maximus presents every distinct part of life as demonstrating a theandric dimension, and unites everything together within a theandrical system.

Part of the originality of Maximus' vision is the way he brings the Chalcedonian faith into the development of a "natural theology," being an elaboration of a cosmological vision centred on the incarnation. The idea of "union without confusion" is demonstrated throughout his system. His intense commitment to the Chalcedonian dialectic causes him to interpret all areas of the church's teaching in relation to it. All aspects of his theology become viewed through a Christocentric lens of "Chalcedonian logic," being transferred to his soteriology, cosmology, bibliology, ecclesiology, anthropology and his understanding of the Christian life.

To summarise, the central idea found in Maximus' thought is synthesis through the usage of dialectic language of union and distinction in his Christology, i.e. all is being integrated through being related to the divine-human dialectic. For Maximus, this provides a way of developing a unified and cohesive theology of the Christian life, as opposed to outlining a dogmatic theological system that

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[390] Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

consists of different categories without a unifying centre. The use of a Christological dialectic can consequently be seen as that which enables the possibility of formation in the Christian life.

3.2.2 Christ and the Trinity

Given that Christian orthodoxy rests upon both Trinitarian and Christological ontology, it is important to recognise the relation between Maximus' understanding of the theandric and his Trinitarian thought. Maximus adopts an understanding of the divine triad that appears to incorporate Chalcedonian Christology into Trinitarian theology, as articulated by the Cappadocians. It can be assumed that the perichoretic dynamics (understood to be within the person of Christ) are, first and foremost, demonstrated in the Trinity, as per a Cappadocian definition. Although his concern is not to speak directly of *perichoresis* in the triune life, it is there by implication, given that the incarnation is seen to be grounded in the intra-triune life.

In terms of his expressions of the Trinity, Maximus speaks of a dialectic of "monad and triad" to denote the union and difference between the divine persons. He describes the Trinity as "…one God, one nature and three persons, unity of essence in three persons and consubstantial Trinity, of persons; Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity…"[391] He understands the relation between the divine persons as involving a "union without confusion," maintaining distinction without separation or division.[392] For Maximus both oneness and threeness are a simultaneous reality. He demonstrates that neither pole has "ontological priority" over the other, as they are aspects of a single reality in balance with the other, what unites is seen to differentiate and what differentiates is seen to unite.[393]

Although Maximus does not fully develop his Trinitarian thought, it clearly remains there behind his Christology. His neglect of a broader discussion or development of Trinitarian theology may be because of his focus on the

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[391] Maximus the Confessor, "The Church's Mystagogy," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 205.
[392] Ibid.
[393] "Ambigua to John 23-71," in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 115f.

apophatic nature of the triune life, in recognising that God is beyond every human contemplation. For Maximus, that which is true of the Trinity is, in the same way, true of Christ. He understands the incarnation as being located within the Trinitarian matrix, the incarnation being an activity of the Trinity itself. The outpouring of the Trinity in creation is seen to involve the sent Logos, as a result his understanding of the triune life is revealed through his Christology.

3.2.3 The Two Natures of Christ

Maximus is a suitable figure to examine with respect to Christology, because his overall thought is, arguably, more Christological in nature than any other patristic father. His understanding of the nature of Christ is founded in the Chalcedonian faith. Two hundred years after the Council of Chalcedon, Maximus was clearly wrestling with language to express the nature of hypostatic union. He sought to defend the Chalcedonian position that Christ was both fully divine and fully human against new heresies, and is most commonly known for his defence against Monothelitism, which stated that Christ possessed two natures but only one will.[394]

Maximus sought to speak of a dialectic in the person of Christ, in terms of union-distinction between the divine and human, as a single *hypostasis* in two natures, being both without separation and without confusion. Maximus affirms, "…he himself was the unconfused union. And this union admits no division between the two natures – of which he himself was the *hypostasis*…He was the true *hypostasis* of true natures united in an ineffable union. Acting in both of these natures in a manner suitable and consistent with each, he was shown forth as one truly preserving them unconfused…."[395] Maximus' understanding is that there is the expression of a dialectical tension that makes that it possible for there to be one *hypostasis* and two different natures in simultaneous union-distinction, yet without contradiction.

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[394] Nichols, *Byzantine Gospel*, 95f; Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 260f.
[395] Confessor, "Ambigua 1-22," 29.

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Maximus makes an important contribution to Christology by using perichoretic language to demonstrate the dialectic. He describes the two natures of Christ (in one person), as being in perichoretic relation, so maintaining the co-existent union-distinction relation between the divinity and humanity, which is without division or confusion. In respect to Maximus' usage of *perichoresis* to designate the co-inherence of the divine and human nature of the incarnate Logos, Janet Williams states:

> ...through this notion of mutual penetration, thus, Maximus works through the implications of his Chalcedonian commitment so as to express not simply the identity of Christ, but the entirety of the relation between divinity and created being, initiated by the incarnation, expressed in the pouring of divine and creation into each another with loving self-abandonment, and completed in the eschaton.[396]

The language of *perichoresis* used by Maximus denotes interpenetration between divine and human natures, while each still remain distinct. He is clear to point out that it is a "peri-choresis" not a "meta-choresis," meaning that there is no change from one nature into the other. However, what he describes still involves mutual exchange between the two, an interpenetration of essentially different natures, rather than simply a penetration of divine into human.[397] In describing a mutual penetration that involves a mutual kenosis of both natures, he goes beyond predecessors who saw it as only being one way. The nature of this divine-human relation, expressed throughout Maximus' theological system, provides the basis for the goal of deification, and the dynamic that is understood to be central to transformation.

3.2.4 Christ the Mediator

Before examining how this theandric dimension is seen within other aspects of his thought, it is first acknowledged that Maximus sees the relationship between God and the created world as being Christological. The relation between the two natures of Christ is seen as the paradigm for the relation between God and created

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[396] Janet P. Williams, "Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor," in *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 197.
[397] Confessor, "Ambigua 1-22," 55-57. See also Vishnevskaya, "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace," 132-133.

order. The Logos-Christ is understood by Maximus as the divine mediator between the Trinity and created order, being in relation to both; he becomes a reconciler of the division.[398] The incarnate Logos is seen as the means by which God is reconciled to humanity, and the means through which the whole cosmos is integrated. Maximus' theological achievement is essentially an expression of Ephesians 1:10, where, in the fullness of time, the incarnational mystery is understood to lead to the reconciliation of all things in itself.

Maximus maintains that the union-distinction filters into the relation between God and humanity. He points to a perichoretic structural union existing between God and humanity, in terms of God being intimately involved in his creation, alongside humanity penetrating into God. Elena Vishnevskaya observes that the perichoretic relation between God and humanity is seen by Maximus as being the same as the union in the person of Christ.[399] In congruence with his understanding of the interpenetration of divine and human natures in the person of Christ, Maximus maintains reciprocity in the relation between God and humanity, expressing a mutual exchange of properties. In regard to Maximus' understanding here, Vishnevskaya believes that the two natures in Christ "interpenetrate and exchange," and that similarly "…God and the human being, the infinite and the finite, join in divinising union…."[400] Maximus sees the perichoretic relation between divine and human natures in the incarnate Word as defining the relation between the noetic and the material. The ongoing interpenetrative movement between God and humanity is understood to bring forth deification.[401]

Maximus understands the purpose of Christ's mediatorial role as being to bring the fragmentation within created order into a place of unity-in-diversity. It is understood that underlying the multiplicity in the created world, is a single controlling intent of the Creator – the Logos made flesh. The Logos is seen to be hidden behind all things, being the means through which persons participate in

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[398] Confessor, "Ambigua 23-71," 103f.
[399] Vishnevskaya, "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace," 134.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Confessor, "Ambigua 1-22," 105-107, 221; "Ambigua 23-71," 109.

unity, and being revealed through all things in their own diversity.[402] For Maximus, nothing created properly exists in itself, but is instead marked by movement towards "broader" communion, all ultimately encompassed by the one divine Logos who is the source and end of creaturely existence.[403] Everything is seen to have its own Logos, and the totality of *logoi* are contained like a plurality in a unity, in the Logos, the Word of God. This unity of all that exists in the Logos means there is to be a "…providential return of the many to the One – as if to an all-powerful point of origin…."[404]

Maximus sees participation in the incarnation as enabling humanity to partake in the triune life itself, albeit as expressed in human physicality. Although the source of union-distinction is the Trinity, the medium through which this dynamic is expressed, and given to humanity, is through Christ. Maximus understands the Logos-Christ as enabling creation to manifest the union and division that is expressed within the triune life, as it participates in the union and division that is demonstrated in the person of Christ. The Logos himself is seen as being the principle and cause of all.[405] In describing Maximus' understanding here, Melchisedec Törönen affirms: "There is, therefore, a simultaneous union and distinction in the Logos himself, a simultaneous union and distinction which he communicates to the created order through the *logoi*."[406]

Maximus sees this dialectic as being present in both the structural nature and deification of humanity. The Logos procession in creation demonstrates the hypostatic union of divine and human natures, and is the mediatory means by which God unites all to himself and within itself. Through the hypostatic union, humanity is understood as being able to fully participate in the divine nature, making deification possible. This also means that, in Christ, persons are understood to become mediators between God and the cosmos, reconciling divine and human elements in themselves.[407] Maximus sees the dialectical

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[402] "Ambigua 1-22," 95f.
[403] Ibid., 101-103.
[404] Ibid., 101.
[405] Ibid., 95f.
[406] Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 135.
[407] Confessor, "Mystagogy," 196-197; "Ambigua 23-71," 103f.

principle as being central in the process of cosmological integration and transformation.

3.3 Anthropology and Deification

3.3.1 Introduction

The Christological dialectic I have described is present across Maximus' theological system. I will now move on to explore some major themes in his thought in relation to this defined centre, demonstrating a theological framework that always reflects the central goal of deification. I will begin with a focused discussion on the Christological nature of Maximus' anthropology. Given that the triune life provides the ground for his Christology, it is important to firstly acknowledge how he relates Trinitarian thought to the human person.

Maximus positions human ontology wholly in relation to God, expressing an understanding of human life in relation to both Christ and the Trinity. In being the source of all created reality, the Trinity is seen as a model for both human personhood and intra-creational realities. Thunberg observes that the dialectic of unity and differentiation characterises all that Maximus has to say about a person and their relationships, being something that filters down from his understanding of the Trinity.[408] Because they are inherently related to God, human beings are understood to reflect the unity and distinction in the likeness of the "monad and triad."[409] Therefore, the essence of Maximus' anthropology involves a clear dialectic, with God being made manifest in his creation as both union and difference. As already stated, Maximus makes it clear that it is by means of a person's relation to Christ that the Trinity is reflected in them. Maximus sees the incarnation as the means through which humanity is able to participate in the triune life, albeit within the simultaneous experience of physicality.

Maximus presents an anthropology that appears far more Christological than Trinitarian, hence his bipartite focus. He sees the theandric as the key to understanding everything in his anthropological system, the incarnation of Christ

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[408] Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 404.
[409] Confessor, "Ambigua 1-22," 321-323.

having an absolute significance for human personhood. Maximus understands an individual human being as a whole, a unity of both intelligible (soul) and sensible (body), clearly denoting their relation to both God and the physical world. He relates Christology to anthropology, in terms of demonstrating the relation between soul-body and divine-human parts. Not only does Maximus use perichoretic language in his Christology, he applies it to the relation between soul and body, and to the process of deification, the mutual penetration of divine and human becoming the dialectic that all participate in.[410]

3.3.2 The Three Modes of Personhood

Maximus positions the bipartite self in relation to the triad of "original-middle-end," three modes which are kept in a form of triune dialectic – being one, and yet three. He fully integrates the protological, soteriological, and eschatological concerns of anthropology rather than seeing them as disconnected, the unifying dimension between them being the event of the incarnation. Maximus demonstrates how the concrete historical expression of the incarnated Logos is worked out in the cosmos in relation to the modes of "being, well-being and ever-being," the work of the Word in creation, incarnation and deification, being seen to be both forming and re-forming. Maximus sees this as a positive development, rather than a restoration of the original state.

The first "anthropological mode" is protological, relating to the original structure of creation. Maximus defines created order in a theandric sense, Christ being understood as being related to creation by first principle. The principle of the Logos is understood to remain in creation, willing God's purpose, a purpose that is fully demonstrated by the historic incarnation of Christ. Given that the Logos within human personhood is seen to define the first principle and structure of human personhood, it is also seen to define both the present framework of human existence, and the end for human existence. In Maximus' system, movement is related to the idea of purpose and eschaton, for "…nothing that has come into being is its own proper end, in so far as it is not self-caused…."[411]

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[410] "Ambigua 23-71," 131.
[411] "Ambigua 1-22," 83.

Maximus describes how humanity, through being created in the image of God, reflects the tension of union and distinction that is present in the divine-human *hypostasis*. He speaks of the union between soul and body, as reflecting the perichoretic and hypostatic union in Christ, in structural terms, demonstrating God's purpose for humanity. Maximus also describes how Christ's divinity permeates the whole of his human nature without mixing; he states that persons are "…being united to God made flesh, like the soul united to the body, wholly interpenetrating it in an unconfused union…."[412] He appears to indicate that the relation between soul and body are in some way co-existent, each being mutually dependent upon the other.

Maximus also indicates that present lived expressions contradict the divine purpose for which human beings were made.[413] Though he understands human personhood as expressing unconfused union and differentiation at a structural level, he sees all relationships as being disjointed, the self being seen as "divided" and in need of wholeness.[414] There is a portrayal of a disruption of integration at all levels of human experience, i.e. in the "divine-human" relation, "intra-self" relation, and "intra-creational" relation. Such is seen to fundamentally create a dualistic separation between the noetic and the material, demonstrated in a person's unhealthy relation to either one of these, rather than holding both together in tension. In particular, Maximus speaks of the unhealthy attachment to the sensible, in which detachment is required before a healthy integration can occur.[415]

For Maximus, the two natures of Christ provide the pattern, not only for structural personhood, but also for the Christian life – the principle of the Logos in creation defining God's intention for human existence. The structural nature of humanity is seen as being able to become fully expressed in persons, through a process of deification. Maximus understands the movement of the Logos becoming flesh as

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[412] "Ambigua 23-71," 131. See also Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 37-38.
[413] Maximus the Confessor, "Ad Thalassium 61," in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 131f; "Ambigua 23-71," 113-115.
[414] "Letter 2: On Love," in *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 87.
[415] "Chapters on Love," 71.

continually causing the divine and human to come together. Therefore, the Logos is seen to create and deify in the same way. Deification becomes the actualisation of the Logos made flesh, the Logos sustaining and transforming that which is created.

For Maximus, the ground of salvation is the incarnation – an ontological event that is understood to transform human personhood. He sees deification (*theosis*) as being the integration that occurs between Creator and creature, which is foreshadowed in the incarnation. This reconciliation between God and humanity, which is fully demonstrated historically in Christ, is also understood to be demonstrated in the "intra-self" relation and "intra-creational" relation. The relation of humanity to the incarnation is seen to involve participation in the fullness of the two natures of Christ. In being more like Christ, persons are seen as needing to become both more divine and human. Maximus' understanding of deification therefore involves a subsequent humanisation alongside deification. He sees deification as involving a dialectic between the two poles, rather than one being absorbed in the other. Elena Vishnevskaya observes that the concept of *perichoresis* is seen to be demonstrated in the process of deification, the perichoretic relation between God and humanity denoting union-distinction.[416]

The whole purpose of Maximus' redemptive scheme can be seen to involve movement towards union and distinction. Maximus' scheme expresses a move towards wholeness and the integration of the self, away from a fragmentation of parts.[417] Deification allows for the proper integration of the two parts of the self, the noetic and the material. The process of deification is seen to involve the duality that separates man from God being gradually overcome as the self is integrated. The soul and body that were seen to be divided, at odds, are now being integrated into right relation, through the work of the Logos.[418]

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[416] Vishnevskaya, "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace," 133f.
[417] Confessor, "Chapters on Knowledge," 149. See also Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 183f.
[418] Maximus the Confessor, "Questions and Doubts," in *St Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 76.

Maximus understands all aspects of human reality as being simultaneously integrated through Christ. As persons participate in the Logos and divine energies, the more they are seen to reflect union and distinction in themselves, in their relation to God and in their relation with the whole cosmos. Rather than there being a divided self drawn towards either the "passions" or the "spiritual" alone, Maximus recognises the need for an integrated self in right relation to God and creation, demonstrating both union and distinction. He understands deification as a participation in the divine life, and a revealing of this life in the world, it is therefore related to both parts of the self. Deification is understood to require an interaction of the whole self with the "sensible," which is both a precondition and a result of union with God. Maximus sees the goal as being for the whole person to be transformed, as a result of movement between both dimensions of the self. The deification process is seen to involve, not only the divine will working through the Logos, but also the choices of the human will.

The incarnation of Christ is understood to be fully demonstrated in relation to the consummation that occurs in the age to come. According to Maximus, humanity is created for some form of eschatological theandrism – to be conformed to Christ's image. Although the future state is seen as being distinct from this present age, it is also understood to be fully entwined with it, rather than being a mode that is independent. For Maximus, eschatological fulfilment is not something that is entirely separate from the original creation. He sees the end as being the same as the beginning, but also being distinctly different. It is the same, in the sense that God's will for created order is there from the beginning, being given by the Logos. Therefore, the future state is understood to be a fulfilment of God's original purpose for humanity, rather than being a state that bears no correlation to God's original purpose, and no continuity with the events of this present age. However, rather than being a restoration of the original state, Maximus sees the fullest demonstration of God's will as only becoming apparent in the eschaton.

Maximus maintains the soul-body dialectic when integrating the eschaton with original and present stages. The age to come is seen to involve a transformation of the soul and resurrection of the body, while maintaining a continuity with this

present age. As with the previous two modes, the age to come is also seen to be brought about through the movement of the Logos. Together with the choices made in this present age, this is seen to determine a person's final state, which is in accord, or not, with the Creator's original purpose. Persons are understood to determine themselves towards a good existence, or towards an existence that is against nature.

3.3.3 Man and the Cosmos

Maximus' transformational vision concerns the integration of all reality and the deification of the entire cosmos. He understands mankind's original mission in the world as being to unify all divisions in themselves. The entrance of sin is not seen to detract humanity from its original mission. Through the incarnation, human beings are understood to be given the renewed ability to carry it out.[419] They are seen as being able to be restored to their function as mediators, participating in Christ's mediatorial role.[420]

Maximus sees human beings as mediators for the salvation of the whole cosmos, bringing it to God and unifying creation within itself – overcoming all divisions. It is through humanity that all creation comes to its *logoi,* to its archetypes. Together with humanity, the whole cosmos is seen to be able to move towards deification, all things "…always drawing closer to their own predetermined principles…."[421] The incarnation is understood as being the centre of the integration that takes place, leading to the reconciliation of the division between Creator and creation. Although the focus here is on the relation of humanity to the whole cosmos, it is seen to include being involved in reconciling other persons to God, to each other and within themselves.

Maximus believes that this cosmic mission is derived from persons being a microcosm – being the image of the cosmos.[422] As a microcosm, human beings are understood to be recapitulating in themselves (in their soul and body) the

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[419] "Ambigua 23-71," 51-53.
[420] Ibid., 103-105.
[421] Ibid., 149.
[422] "Mystagogy," 196-197.

elements of the entire world. The reintegration of the soul and body (the "intra-self" relation) is seen to be related to a person's own relation to God (the "divine-human" relation), to creation (the "intra-creational" relation), and to their ability to integrate both God and creation to each other. The integration occurring within the self is understood to be a reflection of the integration that persons bring between God and the cosmos, and their relation to both. There is seen to be the need for reconciliation within persons, while drawing all creation into union with God and with itself.[423] This reconciliation is only understood to occur when love is directed towards both God and creation.

3.4 Bibliology, Ecclesiology and Cosmology

Maximus links the theandric to the cosmos and Scripture, relating the incarnation to both the "natural law" (creation) and the "written law" (Scripture).[424] As a result, he is seen to describe three embodiments through which the reconciling power of God reaches out to humanity – Scripture, cosmos, and Christ.[425]

Creation and Scripture are both seen as being related to Christ, in terms of expressing knowledge characteristically both "hidden and revealed." Maximus applies a Christological dialectic to the relation between apophatic and cataphatic functions in creation and Scripture. Alongside other ancient writers, such as Evagrius Ponticus and Anthony the Great, the physical universe and Scripture are both understood by Maximus to be vehicles of the Logos. Both are seen to contain the Logos in a physical medium, the cataphatic containing the apophatic Word behind it.[426] Maximus emphasises the knowledge that is given beyond the mediation of the created world and Scripture, i.e. the unmediated knowledge of God that is acquired through contemplation (theoria).

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[423] "Ambigua 23-71," 103-105.
[424] "Ambigua 1-22," 191f.
[425] "Ambigua 23-71," 63-65.
[426] "Ambigua 1-22," 191f.

In relating Scripture to the incarnation, Maximus gives it high value within in the scheme of salvation.[427] He affirms the importance of a reading of Scripture "beyond the letter," rather than solely following a rationalistic reading of the text. Maximus draws attention to the Logos behind the surface of the text itself; the text being seen as the vehicle for the Logos to become flesh in persons. He understands Christ to be the unity and centre of the Scriptures, while Scripture is also seen to demonstrate diversity in its humanity.

The singular unifying Logos is understood to be hidden in the multiplicity of two previous "embodiments" of the Logos, i.e. in the *logoi* of creation and in the *logoi* of the Holy Scripture. There is seen to be a dialectic between God's union with the cosmos and his distinction from it. The union and distinction in between God and the cosmos is understood to be transferred to creation itself through the Logos. The Logos is seen to bring forth God's social image in creation – the *imago Trinitas*. Maximus understands God as being present in all things together and particular, the harmony and differentiation of the cosmos reflecting the Trinity.

Maximus sees all as expressing union and distinction through its relation to God, as part of God's purpose and will. Christ is seen as an archetype for union and distinction in the created world, where difference and unity condition each other as they do in the person of Christ.[428] Everything is seen to find its unity in the Logos behind them without taking away from their diversity, all expressing unity without confusion.[429] The Logos behind created order (as *logoi*) becomes the individuating principle of a human existence, as well as being that which unites all. Maximus highlights the ontological primacy of the Logos, which safeguards a diversity of natures in the person of Christ and in the whole of created order. The Chalcedonian dialectic between unity and plurality is seen to offer a paradigm for a theology of divine embodiment that simultaneously serves as Christological legitimation of "natural theology."[430]

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[427] "Chapters on Knowledge," 159-160.
[428] "Ambigua 1-22," 309-311.
[429] Ibid., 95f.
[430] Ibid.

Maximus' ontology is more focused around cosmology than it is around ecclesiology. He sees the church as expressing the image of the Triune God, of "whole and parts," both united and distinct.[431] However, the focus in his understanding of the gathered community is characteristically more Christological. Of central importance to Maximus is the presence of Christ in corporate worship. He points to the starting place for both theology and formation as being through "image," "act" and "participation." His Christocentric ecclesiology focuses on the physical place of worship (nave, sanctuary and altar), and the gathered community within, with the centre point being the Eucharist. The church building is seen by Maximus as being an image (icon) of both the Christological unity of the visible and invisible world. The building and its liturgy are understood to be an image and symbol of the human person, both in terms of its unity and divisions – of its active and passive faculties, of visible and invisible.[432] The gathering of the church within is understood as being an image of the visible-invisible world.[433] Through its relation to Christ, the gathering is also seen as being symbolic, contributing to the deification of the humanity and the cosmos.[434]

In terms of the gathered liturgy, Maximus places emphasis on "the reading of the Scriptures," "the great entrance," "the creed," "the Sanctus," "the Lord's Prayer" and "the Sancta Sanctis." Although Scripture is seen as being a significant part of "gathered worship," the centre of the service is clearly the Eucharist. Maximus' understanding of the Eucharist, like everything else, is grounded in the incarnation. He sees the liturgy as being the centre of the ecclesial gathering, within which the central goal involves the formation of the communicants into Christ.[435] Maximus understands it to be a symbol of the incarnational union, involving the movement of the cosmos and humanity towards the state of deification. There is a dynamic relation seen to occur between the symbol of communion and the symbolised, Christ being understood as the archetypal image. The deepening of the relation between divine and human is seen as being

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[431] "Mystagogy," 186-188.
[432] Ibid., 189-190.
[433] Ibid., 188-189.
[434] Ibid., 206f.
[435] Ibid.

the goal of the liturgical action, through the transforming presence of Christ. Rather than being rooted in an individualistic context, the reading of Scripture is understood by Maximus to be rooted in the communal gathering, albeit not being at the centre.

Maximus understands the ecclesial gathering to be central to ecclesiological mission. In being correlated with the incarnation, the gathering of the church is seen as being a "sacrament," pointing towards the deification, not only of humanity, but of the whole cosmos. With the ecclesial gathering being symbolic of the image of the human person, the central act of liturgy is seen to represent the sacramental presence of Christ in the world and in the lived narrative. The sacramental gathering is also seen as being related to the integration of the apophatic and cataphatic dimensions of creation, of which it also symbolises. Maximus is concerned with the integration of all reality, and the deification of the entire cosmos. Therefore, through the incarnation, persons are seen to become mediators between God and the cosmos, reconciling divine and human elements in themselves, leading to intra-creational reconciliation in congruence with the triune life.

3.5 Integrating Knowledge and Praxis

3.5.1 Introduction

The previous sections of this chapter provide the necessary grounding for this final part. The centre of Maximus' thought has been demonstrated across his theological framework. This provides the necessary foundation upon which to explore his understanding of the Christian life. In this next section, I will specifically focus on looking at how Maximus seeks to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality, and as a result, expresses a distinctive and "holistic" approach to Christian formation. This will further demonstrate how Maximus' Christological approach is seen to lead towards the possibility of an integrated understanding of Christian formation.

Maximus makes a substantial contribution to the integration of dogmatic theology with mystical and ascetical dimensions, as this final section of the chapter will

demonstrate. He points to the integration of all concerns as bearing some correlation to how the person of Christ is integrated. As well as expressing a theological framework that is Christologically centred, Maximus integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality in the same manner. Maximus' theological system does not consist of dogmatic thought separated from the Christian life; the "theological-mystical" tradition within which he stood provided a way of unifying dogma and the Christian life. He was influenced by both the ascetic and dogmatic tradition, and instinctively combined theological orthodoxy with a Byzantine theology of prayer. For Maximus, theology and the spiritual life are indivisible, there being no separation between theology and prayer.

Maximus presents his dogmatic and ascetic theology as a coherent whole. His ascetical theology is grounded in a theological background, while his dogmatic theology is filled in by his ascetic theology. Andrew Louth observes that Maximus provides an orthodox dogmatic background to his ascetical theology, while his dogmatic theology presupposes ascetical formation.[436] Maximus' earlier writings focus more on the ascetic life, drawing on Byzantine monasticism going back to the desert fathers. His later, Christologically focused works, provide a theological backdrop for his earlier more ascetic works. An example of this is seen in the theological reorientation that he gives to the Dionysian system of mystical theology. According to George Berthold, Maximus restates and reinterprets the Dionysian structure of theology and spirituality within a more orthodox framework.[437]

Maximus keeps the intellectual life integrated with the contemplative and ascetic life. In doing so, there is the suggestion of three clear theological distinctions he uses in an interrelated way. Firstly, *dogmatic thought*, in terms of expressing a doctrine within some form of a propositional system of Christian theology, a form of knowledge that is known and developed through the means of the senses and rational thought. Secondly, *mystical thought,* in terms of identifying a more contemplative knowledge of God, which is known and experienced beyond, but

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[436] Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, 43.
[437] Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, 6-7.

not necessarily apart, from rational thought. Thirdly, *praxis,* in terms of the experience of lived actions, behaviours and virtues that persons perform. Maximus finds a way of integrating all of three of these areas in his theological system, in a way that is Christocentric in nature.

3.5.2 Forms of Divine Knowledge

Through his Christology, Maximus integrates the forms of divine knowledge that relate to mystical and dogmatic dimensions. In terms of the knowledge of God, he allows a place for positive affirmations, while also holding the apophatic. The incarnation is seen as being a demonstration of divine speech, the Logos being both hidden and revealed in Christ. Maximus understands Christology as being reflected in the convergence of apophatic and cataphatic knowledge.[438] He sees God's ineffability as being revealed in Christ, who is the ground of all that persons can know and say about God, and the Logos-Christ being revealed in and through physicality. This demonstrates the Christological dialectic between two ways of doing theology, i.e. apophatic and cataphatic, hidden and revealed, speaking about God and not speaking about God.

Maximus relates the two ways of "divine knowing," namely, reason and contemplation, to human ontology – (to what he calls) the two parts of soul.[439] He recognises that the human mind is to contemplate God beyond a "natural contemplation" that sees God within physicality.[440] He sees a movement from thoughts, to the thought of God, to knowing God. However, like Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus maintains that salvation involves the dialectic between apophatic and cataphatic forms of knowledge. This is understood as being a direct participation in divine knowledge, through both contemplation and intermediaries. Such is not seen as a complete movement away from a "lower" form of knowledge, but rather as involving a dialectic between the two. In following Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus uses language of affirmation and denial. While Pseudo-Dionysius sees the need to alternate between apophatic and cataphatic modes as a logical function of theological predication, Maximus

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[438] Confessor, "Chapters on Knowledge," 156; "Ambigua 1-22," 315-316.
[439] "Mystagogy," 190f; "Ambigua 1-22," 163-165.
[440] "Chapters on Love," 47.

specifically relates them to the intrinsic logic of the incarnation. It is not purely seen to be about modes of knowledge, but about the mode of being.

Maximus believes that salvation involves the dialectic between both forms of knowledge, the need being for persons to participate in divine revelation through both hidden and revealed means. He sees the ascetic life as involving an ongoing dialectical engagement between negation and affirmation, of unknowing and knowing. Maximus points to the reality of persons coming to know God outside of God, i.e. as they are in themselves, as an "embodied soul." In seeking to integrate the two forms of divine knowledge that relate to the mystical and dogmatic dimensions, contemplation and reason, he seeks a "third way" between a person's ability to grasp God with their intellect, and a complete denial of their ability to know God. Maximus does not put the nature of God at the forefront of his system, nor speak about it in rational propositions. There is seen to be no grasping of God conceptually, instead Maximus speaks of a participatory knowledge, a participation (*methexis*) that remains intellectual in character.[441] This becomes a way of relating God to (what he understands to be) the two parts of the soul, for the purpose of transforming a person's way of knowing and being.

For Maximus, knowledge of God is not primarily understood to be arrived at through understanding, via rational-linguistic truth in Scripture. He does not see orthodoxy as just being a set of beliefs that can be outlined in a dogmatic system; but rather that which is understood to be fully lived and participated in. Maximus recognises that knowledge of God does not place ascendancy on intellectual comprehension, but instead, on experiential union through theoria. Deification is seen to necessitate experiential knowledge of God, involving "direct" encounter and communion at the deepest levels of human existence. Therefore, personal experiential knowledge of God is placed before scholastic thought, rather than being subordinate to it.

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[441] Ibid., 64.

3.5.3 Theoria and Praxis

Given that Maximus stands within the Eastern Christian tradition of seeking to fully integrate knowledge of God and practice, his expressions of divine knowledge are not seen as separate in any way from the Christian life. Instead, Maximus sees an inherent relation between theoria and praxis, the insistence of a union between them that involves a dialectical interplay between reflection and action.[442] In *Questions and Doubts* Maximus attempts to teach about the ascetical life through engaging in a dialectic between theoria and praxis. The maintaining of discipline over the passions is understood to lead towards knowledge of God, while the pursuing of a virtuous life occurs by means of knowledge of God.

Maximus bases his understanding of the Christian life on the incarnation, the Logos being the basis for both knowledge and praxis, demonstrating both divine and human elements. Christ's life is seen as a paradigm that persons need to follow, the practice of knowledge and virtue together being a demonstration of the integration occurring between the soul and body. There is seen to be the need for the engagement of the heart towards God, and the active engagement of body in asceticism and forming virtues, the process of deification consequently involving the interrelation between theoria and praxis.

Polycarp Sherwood observes that the dynamic between theoria and praxis is clearly present in Maximus' understanding of love.[443] Maximus understands there to be interpenetration between contemplative knowledge of God and the active life. In correlation with this, he highlights the centrality of the relational exchange orientated towards both God and others.[444] This is a two-fold love seen to be based upon the two-fold nature integrated in the self, i.e. love for God (soul) and love for others (body). Maximus relates love to the theandric dimension of incarnation. The lived experience of love of God and humanity is understood as being the demonstration of a continual incarnation between divine and human, with both being united within a person.

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[442] "Questions and Doubts," 111.
[443] Sherwood, *Maximus the Confessor*, 91f.
[444] Confessor, "Letter 2," 90.

Maximus understands spiritual progress as being achieved through the concurrent pursuit of theoria and praxis, through the love of God and the love of neighbour. It is only through expressing both love for God and love for others that persons are seen to be able to move towards reflecting the divine image. A person's transformation (or deification) is understood to be able to require a continual dialectic between the two, which is also a dialectic between the spiritual and physical. Such is seen to be in congruence with the ability of human beings to be mediators, reconciling God and the cosmos.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the integrative vision of Maximus Confessor, examining how his theological centre infiltrates every aspect of his thought. Maximus' vision provides an alternative theology of the Christian life from that of J. I. Packer. Rather than being grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, his broad vision of transformation is unified around the concept of *union-distinction in Christ,* the theandric dialectic being seen to hold everything together, as the integrating element of all his concerns. Based upon his method of integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality, Maximus presents an alternative vision of transformational theology, and consequently, an alternative vision of how transformation occurs.

Understanding Maximus' theological concerns has provided a necessary backdrop to understanding his view of the Christian life. Maximus does not focus on building a dogmatic framework that is grounded in the unity of biblical teaching. Instead he seeks to unify around Christological ontology, with major elements of his theology being viewed through a Christocentric lens of "Chalcedonian logic." Maximus synthesises, bringing together opposing dimensions through this Christological dialectic. In particular, he makes a substantial contribution to the integration of dogmatic theology with mystical and ascetical dimensions. His vision demonstrates how the relationship between divine and human is central to how formation occurs, by means of demonstrating integration between the concerns of theology and spirituality.

The concept of transformation is implicitly grounded in his theological vision, which expresses the need for deification through a constant reference to the theandric. The Christological dialectic that has been described expresses a specific type of relation, a relation that is seen to both integrate and transform. In putting this at the centre, Maximus keeps the goal of the Christian life, namely "deification," at the fore throughout his thought. The nature of the relation between God and humanity that he describes is understood to be what deifies. Through the spoken Logos-Christ procession, the incarnation, all is seen to be able to become deified/transformed and united, the Logos bringing a dialectic of union and distinction in every dimension.

Maximus makes it clear that it is by means of a relation to Christ that the triune life comes to be reflected in the deified human person. Through the incarnation, creation is understood to be able to participate in the triune life of union and distinction, albeit within the simultaneous experience of physicality. The Logos is understood to bring forth God's social image in created order, the *imago Trinitas*, expressing "whole and parts," union and distinction. The dialectic of unity and differentiation characterises all – the ontology of Christ and Trinity being seen to filter down through his whole system. Maximus' vision of transformation is that God is seeking to integrate the fractures in the broken world, reconciling everything together through the incarnation. This begins with the reconciliation between God and humanity, which leads to co-currently affect the relation between soul and body, and the intra-creational relation, with God being seen to be more manifest in his creation as both union and difference.

Maximus' view of transformation is grounded in an integration of the concerns of theology and spirituality. His expressions of knowledge are not seen as being separate in any way from praxis. There is an insistence of a dialectical (union-distinction) interplay between knowing and doing, the incarnate Logos being seen as the basis for the relation between the two. He holds knowledge and praxis together as a demonstration of the integration between soul and body. In congruence with this, the process of deification is seen as requiring the interrelation between the two, including a demonstration of the two-fold love in

the integrated person, i.e. a love for God/theoria (soul), and a love for others/praxis (body). It is this Christ-centred integrated approach that is understood to provide the basis for a proper understanding of how transformation occurs.

In the chapter that follows, I will look to provide further analysis of the perspectives of Packer and Maximus, and interact between their approaches. In doing so, I will explore the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and the common characteristics in its nature and practice. This will be done in order to determine the requirements of a "proto-evangelical" model, pointing towards the possibility a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology. I will also defend a perspective that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, which has been put forward as being the means through which a broad and integrated approach occurs, and as the only effectual means towards transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR: DIALOGUE AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In order to move towards developing a "proto-evangelical" model of Christian formation, the thought of two "theologians of the Christian life" has been laid out in chapters two and three. J. I. Packer's thought has been put forward as a starting point towards exploring a "proto-evangelical" view of Christian formation. His approach expresses the characteristics of a position that is rooted in a rational-linguistic centre, and points towards the possibility of an integrated and balanced model. The examination of Maximus Confessor's thought has resulted in the expression of a synthetic vision grounded upon an alternative logocentric method. Both Packer and Maximus point towards the need for a broad, integrated and effectual approach to Christian formation, and do so by seeking to integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality in a cohesive way.

The presentation of Maximus' broad vision allows for the rational-linguistic method expressed by Packer to be brought into dialogue with a significant patristic figure, who, like Packer, is concerned with defending Christian orthodoxy. Maximus expresses an understanding of transformational theology that is rooted in the concerns of his own tradition and context. He offers an alternative way of bringing together the concerns of theology and spirituality, and subsequently, a different way of expressing how transformation is seen to occur. His thought is presented to challenge the understanding that an approach centrally grounded in rational-linguistic truth provides the proper basis for an effectual, holistic and broad understanding for transformational theology. While looking to engage with insights from Maximus' "holistic" and "integrated" vision, I will express the problems with areas of his thought, and defend the need for a perspective that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre.

In this chapter, there will be further analysis of the thought outlined in the two previous chapters, as well as a critical conversation. I will not introduce any new material from Packer or Maximus, but will instead provide further discussion on

the content expressed in the previous two chapters.[445] I will further examine what each of them does in terms of being able to present an integrated understanding of transformational theology. As well as determining what principles are required for a broad, diverse and holistic reconstruction of transformation theology (to follow in chapters five and six), I will seek to establish common characteristics of an approach grounded in rational-linguistic truth. This will provide a solid basis upon which to outline an original "proto-evangelical" synthesis.

This chapter has been organised into separate theological categories in order to facilitate the best means of examining the perspectives of Packer and Maximus within the same basic framework. These categories emerge from the previous discussions on Packer and Maximus. The task in this chapter will be to separately examine the various different components that are relevant to transformational theology, with the thought of Packer and Maximus being the ground of the discussion. There will be further analysis and dialogue in order to determine what is needed to provide the basis for a broad and holistic model of transformational theology.

In the next section of this chapter I will look at the categories relating to "framing" a model of transformational theology, which will involve examining the means of properly integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality. I will then focus attention on the different logocentric methods that provide the grounds for Packer and Maximus' theologising, and defend a rational-linguistic approach. Following on from this, there will be a critical conversation on "foundational categories" – namely, the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, and the nature of Scripture. These categories are understood be at the centre of a transformational theology. Next, there will be a discussion around various "anthropological modes," where I will explore three distinct areas: *transitional modes*, in terms of stages relating to the narrative of creation and redemption, *relational modes*, which refer to a person's relationship with God, within themselves and with others, and *ecclesial modes*, referring to the context of the church both "gathered and scattered." These

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[445] Although no new material on Packer or Maximus is being introduced in this chapter, it will be necessary to repeat some citations provided in the previous two chapters.

modes are required to be grounded in relation to the aforementioned "foundational categories." The chapter will end with an examination of the dynamics between knowledge and transformation, which will look further at the suitable relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality.

4.2 Framing Transformation

4.2.1 Propositional Doctrine

In seeking to understand how to develop a suitable model of Christian formation that integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality, there are two "framing" categories that emerge out of the previous chapters: *propositional doctrine* and *lived experience*. In this first section, I will explore the thought of both Packer and Maximus as it pertains to these two categories, and demonstrate that a re-reading of transformational theology needs to appropriately integrate both of these.

Packer grounds his theologising in the premise that God has objectively revealed himself in history through the Logos, both in his Son and in the Scriptures. For Packer, Christian formation begins with the need to articulate propositional beliefs, teaching truths about God that are revealed in Scripture. He recognises that how persons live is directly related to what they truly believe, i.e. beliefs are understood to drive practices. Consequently, he begins with a need to set out the permanent essentials of the Christian faith viewed as a belief system, by deriving propositional truth from Scripture.[446] As a catechiser, the need to affirm rational-linguistic communication is at the heart of Packer's understanding of teaching, doctrine and formation. He focuses on the importance of persons having a defined set of beliefs in order to live a life of holy obedience.[447]

Maximus does not have the same starting point as Packer. Maximus' approach to catechising does not involve the need to set out a dogmatic propositional system as a prerequisite for formation. Although he recognises that the way persons approach God is intellectual in character, he does not principally seek to develop a body of a propositional doctrine outside of the experience of deification.

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[446] Packer, *Concise Theology*, xiii.
[447] For example, see "Reflection and Response," 178-181.

Maximus does not see theological orthodoxy as beginning with a system of belief, but as being rooted in lived experience characterised by the presence of Christ, in the midst of community and sacrament. While Packer stands on the shoulders of Reformed dogmaticians in seeking to outline theological truths in systematic form (i.e. developing a structured framework derived from biblical truths), Maximus' world is free from the systematic and analytical nature of post-reformation dogmatic categories grounded in scriptural truth. Although Maximus sets out propositions of a different form, a systematic doctrine is not seen as being primary.

Self-identified "evangelicals" have often appealed for unity around core beliefs, and affirmed rational-linguistic truths from Scripture as being the ground of a cohesive doctrinal system. The Reformed tradition that Packer represents has focused on the need to articulate belief systems that are derived from a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. Packer seeks to outline the fundamental tenants of a "proto-evangelical" view, and to defend (what he understands to be) the universal and unchanging beliefs central to the historic church.[448] This is based upon the understanding that Scripture is inerrant and internally consistent. Packer's view is that propositional truths derived from Scripture are to be laid out into a coherent system, and be a prerequisite to all praxis. In taking this view, he allows the possibility for doctrine to be able to exist, be transmitted and be assented to apart from the lived experience of transformation.

Without some kind of a propositional framework it is not possible to understand and explore a systematic transformational theology. If Scripture is internally consistent and coherent, as Packer affirms, then seeking to lay out rational-linguistic propositions from Scripture is necessary in order to move towards an effectual understanding that corresponds with the historic redemptive drama. Therefore, an effectual approach to transformational theology would need to involve outlining some kind of a systematic propositional framework of truth in unified form.

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[448] Ibid., 179-181.

Packer recognises the theological difficulties and human limitations of speaking about an ineffable God, fully understanding that God is beyond the limits of human language and thought. However, this is not seen as an obstacle to the possibility of verbal affirmations, or true rational knowledge, only an acknowledgement that persons will only ever know in part.[449] The central question here is whether God is willing (and able) to make himself known to his people (in a true and progressive sense) by means of human language, given its limitations. For Packer there is no sense of uncertainty in persons being able to come to true knowledge of God by means of rational propositions revealed in Scripture. He understands that all rests on divine intention – that God has chosen to reveal himself to his creatures in a way suitable for them. This would mean human beings are created to know God within the limitations of human mediums (and given the capacity to use rational-linguistic form) in order to come to a knowledge that transcends understanding. It can be argued that there is always a creaturely need to uphold both the transcendence and immanence of God, recognising that each are ultimately mutually affirming of the other (in dialectic), rather than being in conflict or obstructive.

Therefore, in speaking about the knowledge of God, Packer rejects the need for contradictory modes of affirmation and negation.[450] Instead, there is seen to be a need for an understanding of truth that consists of central propositions characterised by paradox, i.e. as in the Trinity and the person of Christ. An effectual approach to transformational theology that is characteristically rational-linguistic, would reject any need for the denial of propositional truth, and reject any approach that is purely apophatic in nature.[451] Indeed, a plain reading of Scripture bears witness to a God who speaks in rational-linguistic form (that

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[449] Packer and Oden, *One Faith*, 179-181.
[450] Packer, "God the Image-Maker," 31; *Honouring Written Word*, 39; *Meeting God*, 7.
[451] Gordon R. Lewis, "Is Propositional Revelation Essential to Evangelical Spiritual Formation?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 2 (2003): 272. It is important to make a clear distinction between *propositional truth* and *rational-linguistic communication*. Propositional truth involves assertions or proposals of true rational-linguistic statements that are understood to correspond with objective universal reality or fact, and the revealed mind of God on the subject, in accord with Scripture. It is associated with indicative statements, divine promises, doctrinal affirmations and theological systems of thought. A proposition is only *one* form of rational-linguistic expression seen in the Scriptures. There are other forms of rational-linguistic communication that are not propositional in nature, e.g. law, narrative, poetry, etc.

includes propositions), and who invites his people to believe and speak his words after him, rather than to negate, deny or suppress them.

4.2.2 Lived Experience

The construction of an effectual transformational theology does not simply involve articulating an isolated propositional framework, i.e. one that can be affirmed apart from a lived experience of it. Both Packer and Maximus clearly focus on the need for truth to be more fully known and lived, reflecting the concerns of theology and spirituality. Maximus sees lived experience and dogma as being inseparable, pointing to the understanding that orthodoxy is not to be an isolated belief system. Maximus begins from the standpoint of the need for lived participation and experience in the life of God, without the necessity of prerequisite understanding. He does not appear to see knowledge of God as primarily needing to be articulated as a result of rational understanding of Scripture. Nor does he understand doctrine as being able to exist apart from the Christian life. Instead, he sees the sole purpose of theologising as being for the purpose of deification, in the understanding that there is no possible separation between doctrinal understanding and the formation of the whole person.

Examining the perspectives of Packer and Maximus reveals that while it may be problematic to have a distinct system of propositional doctrine that can be left understood, apart from a more fully lived experience of it, it is equally problematic to speak in isolated terms about Christian experience and practice, as if it can be authenticated and sustained outside of a rational-linguistic framework that is congruent with Scripture. While there is a need for some kind of perichoretic relation between doctrinal truth and praxis/experience, on the basis of the aforementioned emphasis in Packer's theological method, he would see the latter as needing to be kept subordinate to the former.

In summary, rather than there being a disconnect between that which is truly believed and that which is lived, both praxis and experience have to be rooted in a robust propositional doctrine.[452] An effectual framework of transformational

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[452] Packer, *Honouring Written Word*, 79-80.

theology would reject the false dichotomy that is often set up between the concerns of theology and spirituality. To suitably integrate theology and praxis, orthodox doctrine needs to be present in the practice itself, being lived and participated in. Such understanding fully integrates the concerns of theology and spirituality, and in doing so, points to the means by which persons can be properly led towards ongoing transformation into the image of Christ.

4.3 Foundational Categories

4.3.1 The Triune God

In this next section I will explore the first series of theological categories arising from the content discussed in previous chapters. This first series, which will consist of four dialectical groupings, are being referred to as "foundational categories," because they are understood to be central within the process of developing a transformational theology. The four categories to be explored here are: *The Triune God*, *The Person of Christ*, *Death and Resurrection*, and *Holy Scripture*. The first two of these are understood as being core dynamics that the latter two categories are grounded in.

An examination of the core dynamics in the Christian life begins with exploring the triune life. The nature of the intra-triune life as expressed by both Packer and Maximus has an influence on their understanding of Christian life. Although each maintains a different emphasis, they both hold a view of the Trinity that is congruent with the early creeds of the church, and so affirm the centrality of the ontological paradox of the one and three. While neither Packer nor Maximus fully explore Trinitarian dynamics as a central integrating motif in their theologising, insights can be drawn from their Trinitarian thought that contributes towards an effectual transformational theology.

The need to grow in understanding the nature of God is of primary importance for Packer. He outlines an understanding of God's character based upon propositions derived from Scripture. His descriptions include the expression of moral attributes that persons are to know and imitate.[453] Packer highlights the distinct roles of

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[453] Ibid., 169.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture, affirming functions characterised by subordination, while maintaining ontological equality. He recognises how the individual persons of the Trinity play out in salvation history, and seeks to maintain a fully Trinitarian understanding of the Christian life. Packer particularly draws out the significance of the Son living in obedience to the will of the Father, and points towards holiness as being the core dimension of God's character. Such focus has ramifications for his understanding of the Christian life, in terms of there being a need for persons to live under divine authority by means of a mind-to-mind rational communication.

In contrast, Maximus holds more strongly to a sense of divine knowledge that goes beyond rational understanding. His apophatic commitment does not appear to permit him to want to fully elaborate his Trinitarian thought, or to express a developed understanding of the nature of God. Rather than placing an overt focus on speaking in rational propositions about God, Maximus appears to point more towards the need for persons to encounter God "as he is," beyond concepts. Maximus' expression of the triune life (i.e. "monad and triad") emphasises equality and union-distinction.[454] Although his Christological ontology is made primary, a perichoretic understanding of the triune life is seen to be present by implication. This ontology goes on to be central to his cosmology, allowing for there to be an individual-social dialectic at the very centre of human existence, and a dialectic between individuality and community within the scheme of salvation.

Although Packer affirms a "social Trinity" when speaking of the dynamics of giving-receiving and interpenetration, he does not focus on drawing out the individual-social dialectic. Packer does not seek to fully develop a social understanding of the Trinity, nor make it a central motif in his theological system. However, he does express the importance of the communal dynamics of mutual self-giving, the formational nature of which needs to be explored and centralised, given that self-transcendence is at the core of human transformation. Packer recognises that personal/loving knowledge is central in human relationships, and

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[454] Confessor, "Mystagogy," 205.

that this has implications for how persons are seen to relate to God and each another. However, in the Christian life, his understanding is that personal relationships are properly maintained through rational mind-to-mind communication, which is seen to have an irreplaceable function. Given that knowledge within the triune life is also grounded in the ontology of presence and love, it would be inconsistent to understand a relationship with God as involving anything less, though rational-linguistic communication would remain as having an irreplaceable function.

In summary, the Trinitarian dynamics expressed by Packer and Maximus can be seen to have various implications for the nature of the Christian life. Given that anthropology and soteriology are wholly dependent upon the nature of God, an appropriate understanding of transformational theology would require for ontological and epistemological dynamics within the triune life to be foundational to understanding the nature and process of formation. Therefore, it is important that Trinitarian dynamics are made central, e.g. a robust framework of transformational theology would need to recognise the importance of an individual-social dialectic, the concept of *perichoresis* being related to anthropology, soteriology and ecclesiology.[455] At the same time, an effectual approach would, in recognition of the distinctive and individual roles within the Trinity, acknowledge the function of role subordination.[456]

4.3.2 The Person of Christ

The second "foundational category" (and second of two core dynamics) for a transformational theology is the person of Christ. Both Packer and Maximus

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[455] The importance of *perichoresis* as a theological motif has been demonstrated in Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation*; Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015); Peter J. Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015).

[456] Varied perspectives on subordination in the Trinity have been explored in Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?: Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012). Although complex interpretations may be sought, a plain reading of Scripture points to the ontological equality of Son with Father (in substance or essence), and functional (or economic) subordination, see John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28; Philippians 2:6-11. This view is expressed in Bruce Ware, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Bruce Ware and John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

explicitly defend Chalcedonian Christology. However, unlike Maximus, Packer does not overtly focus on exploring the specific dynamics between the two natures of Christ, nor does he allow the ontology of the incarnation to become the central integrating factor across his thought, or allow it to assume a primary epistemological function.

For Maximus, the hypostatic union is understood as being the key element in the metaphysical structure of all reality. Rather than formulating his system around the unity of Scripture, the spoken Logos-Christ is seen to fulfil a specific function as the ground of his transformational vision. He uses the Christological dialectic of union-distinction as a basis for everything by allowing an ontology of mutual penetration between divine and human to infiltrate all elements of his thought. Maximus expresses a cosmological vision of Christian orthodoxy by constructing a system that is integrated around the implications of his Chalcedonian commitment. Through the Logos-Christ procession in creation there is seen to be the hypostatic union-distinction of divine and human natures. Such is understood to be both unitive and transformational.

Maximus does not develop his thought around distinct doctrinal categories, for all is seen to be held together around a clear theological centre, pointing towards the sole purpose of deification. He does not see transformation as being a linear process that involves a distinct movement from understanding to application. While Packer starts with the need to integrate theological categories that stem from the post-reformation period, Maximus emphasises the importance of the unity of Christ. Given that Maximus' starting point for everything is the inherent unity in Christ, he does not acknowledge any dichotomy.

In contrast to Maximus' theandric emphasis, Packer affirms the importance of Christ's life of obedience to God's law, recognising that Christ provides the model and example for humanity to follow. By walking in perfect obedience and holiness, Christ is seen to reflect the express image of the Father, and is consequently recognised as a perfect representation of a human being.[457] Packer

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[457] Packer, *Knowing God*, 19.

sees Christ as God's redemptive self-disclosure, enabling the elect to be reconciled to God in order to be obedient to his law in Scripture. Rather than simply focusing on Christ's person as the actual means of formation, the redemptive function of the incarnation is seen to be wholly tied to the atonement and the point of "double satisfaction," through which persons can be united with the risen and exalted Christ. In this sense, the personhood of Christ is understood to remain absolutely central to salvation, in terms of being necessary for Christ's atonement to become salvific.[458] Rather than presently seeing the incarnation as performing a central ontological or epistemological function, Packer would understand Christ's revelatory role on earth as being taken over by Scripture, alongside the illumination of the Spirit. Moreover, he relates Christ to the Christian life in terms of being a model for imitation, and the means through which persons are able to participate in the triune life through an eternal adoption into the Son. For Packer, the possibility of unification occurring in Christ is grounded in Christ's personhood, but only made possible through the atonement itself.

In congruence with his Trinitarian ontology, the central Christological dimension for Maximus is union and distinction, a dialectic between the divine and human natures. This understanding is particularly evident in his use of perichoretic language, in terms of there being a mutual exchange and mutual penetration between the two natures. There are a variety of ways Maximus applies this ontology within his thought. In doing so, union-distinction becomes the unifying centre of his whole system, with Christ being seen to overcome all divisions in his person. These Christological dynamics not only suggest an ontology that involves union and distinction between divine and human, but also an epistemology that portrays the knowledge of God as being both hidden and revealed. Maximus understands Christological ontology to be central to the Christian life, and with this comes an epistemology that goes beyond rationality. Such understanding is in contrast to Packer, who primarily sees Christ as being revealed as both personal

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[458] Packer's central focus on the (divine-human) personhood of Christ as a necessary prerequisite for the atonement may be seen as problematic. However, he has recognised that, in itself, Christ's personhood denotes the central reason he came, i.e. the Word became flesh in order to bring God's people into the intra-triune life, a life most fully expressed on earth in Christ's death and resurrection.

and propositional. Packer does not present an epistemology grounded in the incarnation, instead the present rational-linguistic function of Scripture becomes foremost.

Both Packer and Maximus understand that formation is grounded in the divine-human encounter, and that in the person of Christ this encounter is fully realised. The Christological dialectic needs to be recognised as a central motif within transformational theology, especially as a means of exploring the nature of the divine-human relation and sacramentality.[459] While a theology of the Christian life must invariably be centred on the person of Christ, it cannot be wholly based upon incarnational dynamics as Maximus assumes. In terms of ontology, a rational-linguistic perspective would not hold to an incarnational centre as the singular interpretive lens, because there are no exegetical grounds for the incarnation to be understood as something that humanity participates in. Rather, it is the resurrected and exalted Christ who has become the necessary ground of the Christian life.[460] Reconciliation with God (and participation in the divine life) is seen in Scripture as occurring on the basis of union with the risen Christ, not simply through the incarnation and a relation to the life of the earthly Christ.

Instead of being "incarnational," there is the need for imitation, following Christ's obedience to the law of God. Packer's emphasis on Christ as the obedient Son means that his understanding of the divine-human relation becomes rooted in the concept of subordination. An effectual transformational theology would need to involve a participation in the life of the risen Son, characterised by both obedience and love. The latter can be drawn out through a perichoretic understanding of the divine-human relationship.

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[459] The term *sacrament* (and its cognates) can be seen to mean something "outward" (or material) that is endued with sacred meaning and significance beyond itself. A sacrament is often understood to be an intentional word, sign, act, symbol or ritual conveying something hidden, mysterious and efficacious, in order that divine grace may be transmitted. In a broader sense, it may refer to God being known in embodied experience, in the life of the church and created order, all in some way pointing to a reality beyond the senses.

[460] It is notable that any perichoretic language between God and the believer in the New Testament (e.g. being "in Christ") centres around being adopted in the life of the Son on the basis of his salvific work. For an extensive study of union with Christ in the New Testament, see Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

Maximus suggests a way of being able to integrate a theological system in light of a Chalcedonian commitment. In so doing, it is seen as a means of eliminating all dualisms. However, in seeking to maintain a universal pattern, his approach appears too simplistic. It overlooks the difficulty of being able to accurately position an array of diverse theological categories around the person of Christ, and in doing so, also remain faithful to Scripture. Ultimately, the problem in seeking to align the Christian life with the incarnation is that there are no biblical grounds for doing so. Consequently, it cannot be the overarching salvific centre or a suitable centre for a transformational theology.

4.3.3 Death and Resurrection

The third "foundational category" to explore is the death-resurrection of Christ.[461] The contrast between the Christology of Packer and Maximus becomes even more apparent when looking at how they portray the salvific work of Christ. Because of the overarching focus that Maximus gives to the person of Christ, the work of Christ is not central in his thought. For Maximus, the ontology of Christ's person is seen to express the central core of salvation, Christ's divine-human mediation bringing reconciliation between God and man. Consequently, the atoning work of Christ does not get placed at the forefront of his theology. This is in clear contrast to Packer, who fully emphasises the centrality of the atonement, with the person of Christ in the background.

Central to Packer's thought is an emphasis on the legal dimension of the atonement, a focus that he sees as being crucial within an orthodox soteriology. Packer's emphasis on the need for humanity to come to reflect God's holiness is congruent with the legal need for Christ's substitutionary atonement that brings reconciliation with God. Such understanding would need to remain present within an effectual model. Although Packer is clear on the need for Christ to fulfil the law, he places particular emphasis on the death of Christ as being the redemptive centre. In congruence with this, a suitable transformational theology would need to emphasise the salvific work of Christ as the climax of Christology. At the same time there is a need to reaffirm the two aforementioned core

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[461] Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 25.

dynamics, in terms of understanding all in relation to Christ and the Trinity. While Maximus makes the person of Christ a more fundamental category, Packer makes the atonement pivotal, without focusing on how it is integrated with the existing ontology of Christ and the Trinity.

The fulfilment of God's self-revelation in Christ is demonstrated in his death and resurrection. Although Packer rightly focuses on the atonement as being the pinnacle of Christ's obedience to the Father, such an emphasis can allow it to become an exalted point of reference. Packer's emphasis on the atonement also appears to outweigh his attention to the resurrection. Within an effectual transformational theology, the death of Christ needs to be held wholly in relation to the resurrection, as they are both mutually dependent upon the other in a dialectical sense.

Moreover, the death-resurrection dialectic needs to be grounded in both the person of Christ and the Trinity, providing the link between them. Given Packer's emphasis on the "obedience of the Son," his focus remains on the atonement as being a revelation of God's holiness. The incarnation is seen to be part of the redemptive story, being the basis for Christ giving himself as a substitute in obedience to the Father. Packer sees God's holiness as being wholly demonstrated in the relational self-gift of death-resurrection, an intra-triune act of self-revelation that makes it possible for persons to enter into union with Christ, and participate in the transformational life of the Trinity. Christ's self-giving sacrifice is the demonstration of a mutual self-gift occurring between God and humanity. As a result, identification with Christ's death and resurrection enables persons to enter into the formational self-giving dynamics within the triune life.

Within an integrated model of transformational theology, the death-resurrection dialectic (the climatic Christo-triune expression within a wider redemptive narrative) needs to be seen as the central redemptive dynamic. It is also the necessary unifying motif, in that the integration of all things is to occur through union with Christ in his death and resurrection, not primarily through Christ's incarnation as Maximus suggests. Indeed, death-resurrection becomes the central

redemptive dynamic, because in its essence it is the intra-triune relations redeeming humanity. Packer points to the death-resurrection dialectic as being the transformational paradigm that the elect participate in across the "transitional modes" of past, present and future. The death and resurrection of Christ can be understood to bring forth the revealed eschatological image of the elect, it provides the absolute basis for union with Christ and transformation, in both the present and future age. Participation in the life of the Son occurs as a result of a response to the propositional gospel. Here persons are not simply responding to a proposition, but to a divine being behind the "first gospel" that he spoke forth in history.

As a redemptive motif, death-resurrection denotes the traits of self-transcendence, communion and mutual self-gift, all of which are core to transformation. It expresses the central formational concept, namely, the loss of self and the receiving of new life. Maximus' perichoretic language around union and distinction can be understood in relation to the dialectic between gift and receptivity, which is demonstrated in Christ's death and resurrection. Packer expresses the need for persons to imitate Christ, who is recognised as being the forerunner of the new humanity. Along with the need to focus on the imperative of following in Christ's obedience, a suitable understanding of transformational theology needs to be rooted in the indicative of union with Christ, which enables participation in Christ's death and resurrection. Given Christ's post-ascension role is as eternal mediator and exalted Lord, the position of the elect is grounded in both Christ's law-fulfilling life, and his death and resurrection, rather than being simply rooted in the incarnation as Maximus suggests.

4.3.4 Holy Scripture

The final "foundational category" to be examined relates to the nature of Holy Scripture. Both Packer and Maximus place upmost importance on the use of Scripture in the Christian life. However, there is a difference in their understanding of the nature of Scripture, which leads to differing views on the role that Scripture has.

Packer believes that historic Christian orthodoxy is rooted in the unchanging truth of God revealed in Scripture. Because Scripture is acknowledged by Packer to be authoritative, anything other than submission to it is understood as being disobedience to God. Though Maximus' exegetical method significantly differs from Packer, he still maintains a high view of Scripture itself. Maximus seeks to defend an "orthodoxy" that is rooted in the testimony of Scripture and the "common opinion" of the church. He sees divine authority as being present in the convergence of sources and traditions, with all ultimately being under the authority of the church. Such methodology is not consistent with a conviction to be faithful to Scripture alone, recognising it as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.[462]

Packer's understanding is that both right belief and right practice are wholly dependent upon knowledge derived from God's self-revelation in Scripture. He sees Scripture as being the only possible means through which a theology of the Christian life can be derived, articulated and practiced. Therefore, the cohesiveness and unity of Packer's system is based upon a strict adherence to the biblical canon. Such a commitment is characteristic of a "confessional" approach that seeks to uphold a doctrinal unity based upon rational-linguistic truths derived from a grammatical-historical interpretation.[463] Packer has recognised the need to formulate and communicate rational-linguistic truths based upon what he sees as mainstream orthodoxy and unchanging biblical canon.

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[462] See Vanhoozer, "May We Go Beyond," 750. Vanhoozer affirms that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* "…asserts the Bible's right of final say-so as concerns all matters of truth and right, faith and practice, thought and life." The principle of *sola scriptura* is grounded in the understanding that there is an external (and self-authenticating) written Word of God brought forth by the will of God in human history – being the supreme authoritative text of the living God on all matters of doctrine and practice. An appropriate response to what God has already spoken (the nature of which is dictated to by scriptural teaching) is required in order that the church may continually grow to be conformed to right thinking, right speaking and right doing. A proper appropriation of the biblical text cannot happen apart from using the "servants" of reason, tradition and experience, yet these *only* express virtue and reliability in the extent of which they are seen to submit to scriptural authority. A historical study of *sola scriptura* is seen in Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001). See also Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015); Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

[463] See Packer, "On from Orr," 156. In this essay, Packer defines his understanding of the "Great Tradition" around what he perceives to be core doctrinal beliefs.

Both Packer and Maximus recognise Scripture as being both divine and human in nature, with what may be deemed an "incarnational" perspective. Packer uses the incarnational ontology to affirm the two-fold nature of Scripture, in terms of all Scripture being both inspired by God, as well as being fully human without any possibility of error. As in Christ's person, there is seen to be a necessary paradox present rather than a false dichotomy or contradiction in terms of humanity being in conflict with divine inspiration. From this perspective, an incarnational view of Scripture would not simply be a helpful analogy, but would be the way to fully affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, and the proper relation of Scripture to Christ.[464]

Packer has rigorously sought to defend both the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. He sees biblical authority as being the essential ground of all theologising. Packer draws out the rational nature of Scripture, and in doing so, a mind-to-mind communication of Scripture is initially seen as being foremost. His affirmation of the authoritative nature of Scripture and the need for rational-linguistic propositions to be communicated have clear implications for the way in which Scripture is seen to function in enabling formation. An effectual approach to transformational theology would need to uphold the absolute authority of the biblical text, and place the same dependence upon the Scriptures as on the person of Christ.

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[464] The need to affirm "original" or "classic" inerrancy (as opposed to a modern literalistic counterpart) would be based on the understanding that all orthodox believers across the centuries have maintained a consistently high view of the nature of Scripture, and that the historic church has always recognised Scripture as the written Word of God, "wholly true, without error." See Charles E. Hill, "'The Truth Above All Demonstration': Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). See also Paul Helm, "The Idea of Inerrancy," ibid. The term *inerrancy* is bound up with convictions about Scripture's inspiration, reliability, authority, sufficiency and primacy, and ultimately convictions about the character of God. It may be argued that if the Bible (in the original autographs) is God breathed in all its parts, verbatim down to the terminology and syntax, then it is all true and trustworthy in what it affirms, because God cannot speak falsely (or err). This would mean that as a whole it is coherent and without contradiction, reliable and to be submitted to as authoritative for belief and conduct. For a comprehensive defence of biblical authority and examination of the full range of issues connected to it, see Carson, *Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. See also Gregory K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Richard B. Gaffin and Peter A. Lillback, eds., *Thy Word is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

Maximus places a far more central emphasis on the Christological nature of Scripture. Scripture, like creation, is understood to function as a symbol of Christs.[465] In relating the nature of Scripture to the incarnation, Maximus points towards its function as being to facilitate deification. He understands the incarnation as the basis for a bibliology that consists of "whole and parts." As with other areas of his thought, Maximus draws out the dialectical motif in relation to Scripture. Christ is seen as the unity and centre of the Scriptures, while Scripture is also understood to have its own multiplicity in its human form. This points towards the function of Scripture as being to bring integration, which is in essence what Maximus understands deification as being about – to integrate human life on every level, in order to eliminate duality and division.

Maximus not only explores an integral ontology of Scripture, he also seeks to express a broad epistemology in the function of Scripture. Rather than placing a foundational emphasis on the need for Scripture to bring rational-linguistic truth that is to be understood and applied, his focus is on going beyond the rational element of the text. Maximus expresses a different epistemological role of Scripture, one that assumes a Christological character by means of the hidden Logos.[466] He relates Scripture to Christ, with Scripture being seen to demonstrate a hidden-revealed dialectic, which appeals to both the immanence and transcendence of God. Maximus' approach to understanding Scripture suggests a need to approach Scripture in ways that are both rational and a-rational, moving towards a response from the rational and a-rational faculties, and pointing towards the need for acquired knowledge of God through contemplation, i.e. theoria. He gives Scripture a central function in the process of deification, while not exclusively seeing it as providing rational-linguistic truth that is to be understood and applied.

It is important that the ontology and epistemology of Scripture be understood as wholly dependent upon two core dynamics, i.e. Christ and the Trinity. It can be assumed that the only context for the formational function of Scripture is a

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[465] Confessor, "Ambigua 23-71," 63-65.
[466] "Ambigua 1-22," 191f; "Ambigua 23-71," 63-65.

"personal relationship" with the Triune God, through union with Christ. Consequently, a proper understanding of Scripture has to be understood in relation to this, being a backdrop to a person's need to respond to rational-linguistic truth. Neither Packer nor Maximus focus on a Trinitarian model of Scripture, either in terms of ontology or epistemology. Ultimately, an appropriate understanding of the nature of Scripture, and how it functions in the Christian life, needs to be within a framework that appeals to both Christ and the Trinity. Therefore, there is a need to find ways of integrating the affirmation of biblical authority with both Trinitarian and Christological dynamics, in order for a robust transformational theology to be presented.

Both Packer and Maximus give Scripture an important place in bringing about formation, but have a different understanding of how this happens. Within an effectual re-reading, Scripture needs to remain the central means of formation.[467] An effectual transformational theology needs to maintain a broad understanding of the nature of Scripture, and a robust understanding of a formational engagement with Scripture. This means understanding the nature of Scripture as "revelation" in the fullest sense of the word, while keeping a rational-linguistic understanding at the centre.

It is important to understand the nature of Scripture as being integrated with the person of Christ, not solely for the purpose of defending biblical inerrancy and upholding biblical authority, but in order for Scripture to be understood in a holistic sense. Maximus' understanding of the nature of Scripture suggests a "holistic" view, in terms of how it functions in the process of deification. Most crucially, an effectual model would need to hold a requirement for persons to live under the authority of Scripture, which is in some way congruent with the way that Christ lived in obedience to the Father, while also placing himself under the Scriptures.[468] Also, a proper relation to Scripture would require some kind of

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[467] See Adam, *Hearing God's Words*.
[468] Obedience to the Father is not contrary to obedience to the Scriptures. While living in obedience to the Father, Christ witnessed to the truth of the Scriptures, placed himself under them and fulfilled them. If the ground of Christian obedience is the "obedience of the Son," and the church is adopted in the Son, while also being called to obey the Scriptures, then there can be no contradiction.

perichoretic dynamic, in terms of there being the need for a dialogical engagement with it, alongside a recognition of the absolute authority of Scripture, so that it is seen to transform within the context of a divine-human relationship that is characterised by both subordination and *perichoresis*.

4.3.5 Summation

This section has involved exploring an understanding of the four "foundational categories" within an effectual transformational theology. All four of these categories can be seen to express a dialectic, in terms of holding a tension between two paradoxical truths. This infers that the core of Christian orthodoxy involves the presence of self-authenticating paradox beyond human understanding. Such is a necessary characteristic of objective truth that requires faith.[469] The four categories have been separated in order to explore what both Packer and Maximus understand to be an orthodox theological perspective. Within the model that will be developed, these categories need to be held together in an appropriate way.

An integrated view of transformational theology depends wholly upon the nature of the triune life and the person of Christ, as these two core categories historically represent the absolute centre of Christian orthodoxy. An effectual model of transformational theology requires a proper understanding of how humanity engages in the Christo-triune dynamics. There is a need to express a theological framework that involves the unfolding of the Triune dynamics within human life, recognising they are to be expressed and lived within.

Packer and Maximus each express their own theological centre, a centre that is informed by a particular emphasis within Triune dynamics, which in turn enfolds their Christology and becomes demonstrated across human life. Packer emphasises subordinate dynamics, which he understands as being present within

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[469] It is argued that truth must be self-authenticating, i.e. that it must objectively correspond with reality *before* human enquiry. This most fully characterises the Christian worldview where the Triune God is understood to have already objectively revealed himself as truth in human history. For discussion on the importance of paradox, see James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007).

the triune life. This ties in with his central emphasis on bibliology. He presents an understanding of orthodoxy that is rooted in the authority of Scripture, and the subsequent need for obedience. Given that the divine-human relation is understood to denote that humanity is absolutely subordinate to God, a person's participation in divine knowledge is seen to involve an act of submission, in relation to an authority both outside and above them. Packer presents an understanding that demands human categories of experience, tradition, and reason are secondary, and always in subjection to God's objective communication of himself to humanity through Scripture.

Maximus emphasises the perichoretic dynamics that he recognises as being present within the triune life. He expresses a mode of engagement that is more perichoretic in nature. In doing so, he uses dialectical language of union and differentiation to express both the nature of the Trinity and the person of Christ, in particular exploring a perichoretic Christology. An effectual approach to transformational theology needs to allow for the dynamics that express both subordination (emphasised by Packer) and *perichoresis* (emphasised by Maximus) to be fully expressed across the model, and lived within.

4.4 Anthropology and Transformation

4.4.1 Transitional Modes

The next series of categories that emerge from the previous two chapters are what may be called "anthropological modes." These are being divided into three distinct areas: *transitional modes*, meaning progressive stages that relate to the narrative of creation and redemption, *relational modes*, referring to a person's relationship with God, within themselves and with others, and *ecclesial modes*, referring to the context of the church both "gathered and scattered." Within an effectual transformational theology, all these areas are to be related to the core "foundational categories" already discussed.

The first of the three "anthropological modes" to be explored are the "transitional modes." An important question to be asked is whether Packer and Maximus express the most suitable relation between each of the transitions, or whether

there is an undue emphasis given to any. Maximus focuses on the relation that exists between the state of the original creation and the broad soteriological category of deification. Rather than seeing any "disconnect" between creation and deification in both its present and final state, Maximus' framework allows for integration between the three modes of "original-middle-end," uniting these modes around the event of the incarnation. For Packer, the mode of original creation is made distinct, with a focus on humanity being created in the image of God, rather than explicitly being related to the incarnation. He does not simply see the modes of creation and redemption as being both centred around the incarnation, but as being centred on a need for humanity to reflect the image of God through obedience to his law.

Packer understands sin as being disobedience to the law of God – resulting in idolatry and an inability to reflect God's holiness, and the subsequent need for the atoning work of Christ. Though, according to Maximus, persons express an unconfused union and differentiation at a structural level, he sees present reality as involving divisions that contradict the divine purpose in creation.[470] Maximus points to the incarnation as being the means of bringing union and distinction across the modes, Christ being the centre uniting them together with the same characteristics. He sees the two natures of Christ as providing the pattern, the movement of the Logos becoming flesh causing divine and human to come together, so creating and deifying in the same way. The "principle of the Logos" is understood by Maximus to define creation and the structure of human personhood, willing God's purpose and intention for human existence. Therefore, the structural nature of creation is understood to fully define both the present framework, and future consummation of human existence, with the goal being deification.

An approach that is grounded in the biblical narrative would need to recognise the categories of "creation," "fall," "redemption" and "consummation." In terms of his soteriological framework, Packer identifies with the modes of "past-present-future" in loose correlation with the categories of justification, sanctification and

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[470] Confessor, "Letter 2," 87.

glorification. While Maximus places the ground of transformation in creation, via the incarnation, Packer clearly gives more attention to the redemptive locus. Unlike Maximus, Packer does not suggest any unifying theological centre between creation and redemption that provides a uniform continuity between them. Instead, Packer understands salvation as being subordinate to the premise of initiation into a covenant relationship, i.e. justification by faith. He sees salvation as a definitive legal position, determined by identification with Christ the Saviour. Packer has focused on justification as being of central importance, the emphasis being on the definitive judicial positioning of salvation by faith alone, and subsequent need for conversion. It can be argued that an effectual model of transformational theology needs to hold to the importance of justification as being a central once-and-for-all divine act of final judgement brought into the present.[471]

For Packer, the present redemptive centre is the exalted Christ, who is understood to be the mediator of the new covenant and forerunner of a new humanity. Packer focuses on the understanding that identification with Christ's substitutionary work leads to imputed righteousness and a position of right standing before the Father, i.e. justification. His approach points to an emphasis on the holiness of God, and the need for humanity to reflect this holiness. Packer sees the legal act of reconciliation with the Father as leading to adoption, placing persons in relation to the familial love of the Triune God. Such a position would be seen to provide the proper context from which persons are to follow Christ's example, and live as children of God in love and holiness.

Packer recognises positional union with Christ as being foundational to the possibility of transformation in this present age. He does not affirm justification at the neglect of sanctification, but rather sees it as the necessary ground through which ongoing formation can occur. Because of their identification with Christ, God's people are understood to be sanctified and set apart for the life of holiness in this present age. Consequently, Packer sees the absolute basis and possibility of

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[471] This understanding is put forward in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 153ff.

a transformed life to be related back to the substitutionary work of Christ and the definitive legal standing of reconciliation with the Triune God.

For Maximus, the salvific centre is the incarnation – an ontological event that is seen to transform human personhood. A person's relation to the incarnation is understood to involve their participation in the fullness of the two natures of Christ, involving a humanisation alongside a deification – there being a dialectic between the two poles. Given that Maximus focuses on deification being centred in the incarnation, he does not recognise the legal position of justification as being the ground of personal salvation. The problem here is that the central focus is put on the person of Christ apart from the redemptive triune actions present in Christ's death and resurrection. In the truest sense, the centre of redemption is intra-triune activity. Such comes to fruition in the death-resurrection of Christ (i.e. Christ giving his life to the Father, and in turn the Father giving him life through the Spirit), rather than being chiefly seen in the phenomenon of the incarnation.

There is the need to understand the proper relation between creation and redemption. Packer does not present the incarnation as being an appropriate unifying centre. In terms of a person's present relation to Christ, the incarnation is seen to be a model for imitation (in following Christ's obedience to the law of God), rather than something that is to be participated in. In the Christian life, the precursor is a need to focus on the reality of present union with Christ through his death and resurrection, which enables persons to come into reconciled relationship with the living God, and to live in obedience to him.

Packer sees positional union with the risen Christ as being the redemptive ground leading to eschatological fulfilment. Such understanding is based upon the recognition that persons are seen to be pre-initiated into God's covenant community through identification with Christ. He sees future transformation as including glorification, in respect to involving the consummation of what began when persons were regenerated. In recognising future consummation as being part of the ongoing process of deification, Maximus understands it to be in congruence with the fullness of the incarnation of Christ, and points to there

being some form of union and distinction between this present age and the one to come. He sees the future state of humanity as being a fulfilment of God's will from the beginning, being in correlation with God's original purpose, and in continuity with this present age.

It would be problematic if there was too much separation between any of the aforementioned modes, or if there was any unsuitable positioning between them. In order to support the construction of an integrated transformational theology, there is a need to suitably hold together these modes rather than to see them as being disconnected. This would be done by relating them to aforementioned "foundational categories." Maximus infers that these modes may be held together in terms of a union and distinction between all, applying the same consistent principles for continuity between "original-middle-end." He gives an example of a unified approach that is consistent and integrated, and places an emphasis on the mode of original creation.

However, an effectual approach cannot centre solely on the incarnation, nor make justification or conversion the pivotal centre, but rather fully utilise the motif of union with Christ, which as *the* redemptive locus, can encapsulate everything.[472] For Packer, an imitation of Christ's life is needed, in that persons are called to obey the law of Christ revealed in Scripture. However, such obedience is possible only by means of persons living out of their definitive union with Christ, the Christian life being understood in relation to the salvific work of Christ and a present sharing in his risen life.

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[472] The phrase *union with Christ* refers to the believer's sharing in the life of Christ, in both his history and his eternity. Through faith, persons are identified with the objective death and resurrection of Christ in history, in order that they may be united with the exalted Christ in eternity and adopted into the life of the Triune God. The nature of the relationship is both subordinate and perichoretic, and has implications in transforming the life of the believer that are legal, experiential and final. The fundamental importance of union with Christ as redemptive motif has been demonstrated in a number of studies. See Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011); Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation*; Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*; Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marcus P. Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

4.4.2 Relational Modes

The second set of "anthropological modes" to be examined are being referred to as "relational modes." These would be seen to occur within the context of "transitional modes" expressed above. There are three distinct "relational modes." Firstly, between God and humanity (the *divine-human* relation), secondly, within the human person (the *intra-self* relation), and lastly, with other persons (the *intra-human* relation). In this section, I will focus on exploring how Packer and Maximus express the aforementioned relationships.

The first "relational mode" is the *divine-human* relationship. Packer speaks of humanity being created for relationship with God, in order to worship and glorify him. In recognising the essential relation of God to humanity, he sees the summons being for persons to imitate God and reveal moral characteristics that match his own. Unlike Maximus, Packer does not set up a divine-human relation as being strictly Christological/incarnational in nature. Packer appeals to the relational life of the Trinity as a paradigm for the Christian life.[473] He believes that the relationships of love in the triune life, characterised by giving and receiving, provide the structural shape of the believer's fellowship with God.[474] Packer also emphasises the sonship motif, which expresses the basic relationship between God and the elect. Given that the redeemed are seen to become children of God, the Christian life is understood to be about following in Christ's obedience to the Father out of a familial relationship that is grounded in love.

For Maximus, the relationship between the two natures of Christ is seen as the paradigm for the relation between God and creation. His understanding is that the incarnation enables the reconciliation of God and humanity; Christ being the eternal mediator based upon his own two-fold nature. A dialectic between union and distinction is seen as being expressed in the relation between God and humanity. This is understood as involving a structural perichoretic relation, characterised by a mutual exchange of properties between God and humanity of

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[473] Packer, *Honouring Written Word*, 169.
[474] *18 Words*, 186.

equal reciprocity, in congruence with the mutual penetration between the two natures of Christ's person.

Maximus not only sees the incarnate Logos as being the means by which God is related to humanity structurally, but also as the means through which the relationship is fully realised in the process of deification. For Maximus, the dialectical relation between God and humanity is understood to occur in congruence with the two natures of Christ, in union and distinction. This continual interpenetrative movement and exchange between God and human beings is seen as being what brings deification and a removal of all divisions. Although a Christological relation between God and creation may be implicit in protological terms, it is intrinsic in redemptive terms.

An effectual transformational theology needs to express a proper relation between divine and human activity. A concern is that forms of praxis can become "works" that are superfluous to the salvific work of Christ. Though Packer affirms that a definitive "positional salvation" is based upon a faith response to the propositional gospel (which corresponds with the salvific act of Christ), he does not apply the same principle to the ongoing process by which salvation becomes evidenced. In terms of the Christian life, the divine-human dialectic is not simply seen as involving a passive response to God.

Although Packer sees the definitive act of salvation as being monergistic in terms of involving divine action and passive response alone, he understands present transformation as being synergistic, involving a co-operative and active response of both faith and human effort. Packer seeks to sets up a suitable divine-human tension in the process of sanctification. He does not see it as simply involving a passive reliance on the Holy Spirit. Packer sees the process of sanctification as concerning a person's active response to Scripture and the Holy Spirit – "works" that are grounded in the prerequisite union with Christ's own salvific work.

For Maximus, the relation between divine and human activity is understood in correspondence with the incarnation. The self-giving action in the incarnation is

seen to express divine grace, in terms of the divine will working through the movement of the Logos in the created world. Human co-operation with this activity involves the response of a person's will. Maximus understands the "two wills" to co-operate in the same way that the two wills of Christ co-operate, in order that persons may participate in the divine being and progress towards deification. He suggests this is a perichoretic relation, in terms of dialectical reciprocity being a way of exploring the dynamic between God and humanity in the process of deification. However, Packer would affirm that persons are in a subordinate relationship that involves obedience for the purpose of expressing holiness. Therefore, in terms of the divine-human relation, there is a need for an understanding that maintains perichoretic reciprocity, while also remaining wholly subordinate in nature.

The second "relational mode" concerns the *intra-self*. The nature of the divine-human relation must in some way determine the nature of all dimensions of human reality, including the relation between the inner and outer faculties. Both Packer and Maximus express an understanding of humanity that is bipartite. With regard to the inner faculties, Packer focuses on the rational part, the faculties of the mind being placed over and above the a-rational faculties. This is what defines the mode of engagement that persons have with divine self-revelation, i.e. the rational faculties being the means by which persons know God and respond to him in the first instance.

Such understanding makes way for his primary emphasis on mind-to-mind communication from God, as opposed to simply seeking an objective knowledge of God through love. For Packer, the possibility of knowing God, and reflecting his image, is seen as the result of persons sharing in God's rational nature, so that they may know, comprehend and respond to rational-linguistic communication. His understanding is that there is a priority of sharing in the rational nature of the communication within the triune life, above sharing in loving knowledge.[475]

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[475] Although Packer sees a specific function and priority for rational knowledge (in the first instance), he would not see other means as less important, just having a different function.

Consequently, he does not emphasise the possibility of persons being able to come to true knowledge of God through a-rational means.

Although knowledge of the Triune God is present to the elect through their union with Christ, such knowledge is understood by Packer to be wholly subject to the rational mediating function of Scripture. The problem is that the rational and the a-rational cannot be so clearly separated. In contrast, Maximus' understanding is that the soul includes both of these equally together without discrimination, an approach that would appear more "holistic" and less hierarchical. Maximus appears to give greater ascendancy to the activity of the a-rational faculties directed towards God, rather than seeing them as having a more secondary function. He would see persons as needing to know with both the rational and a-rational faculties together, without placing the one above the other in simple subordination.

Packer's understanding of the Trinity influences both his anthropology and his soteriology. He sees humanity as needing to reflect the moral characteristics of God by following Christ's example of obedience to the Father through submission to his law in Scripture. Consequently, Packer does not affirm a specifically "incarnational" understanding of the human person in terms of delineating the relation between soul and body in this way, nor does he see the incarnation as being a model for the Christian life. Instead, a person's present relation to the incarnation is seen to be there by means of Christ being the example (the *imago Christi*) that persons are to imitate in order to fulfil the *imago Dei*. Packer's understanding is that human beings are subject to God's rational-linguistic self-communication, and that they have been given the capacity to know God rationally through Scripture. This is seen to lead to the possibility of holiness through obedience to the divine command.

Despite recognition of the protological "embodiment" of the soul, Packer only sees the incarnation as being implicit in creation. Packer's understanding of the inner-outer relation is principally hierarchical, in terms of outer physicality being in subjection to rational faculties without the further addition of reciprocity.

Because his primary anthropological concern is the *imago Dei* and God's moral nature, outer physicality is not given as much attention. Given that rationality is primary in his anthropology, it also becomes central in his understanding of the Christian life. For Packer, there is an ascendancy of the rational faculties, and absolute dependency on them in the sanctification process. This is further evidenced by his neglect of outer physicality within the scheme of transformation itself. The Christian life is not seen so much as being about a transforming embodied experience, but more about obedience to rational-linguistic truth, where outer physicality simply provides the wider context where it occurs.

An effectual model of transformational theology needs to provide an appropriate understanding of how the self is related together, rather than neglecting or overemphasising the intellect, a-rational faculties or outer physicality. Maximus' anthropology is Christological, the theandric being seen as the key to understanding all in his anthropological system. In being created in God's image, persons are understood to reflect the tension of union and distinction in the divine-human *hypostasis*, in terms of being intelligible (soul) and sensible (body), expressing an integration that reflects God's incarnational pattern for humanity. In the same way, Christ's divinity is understood to permeate his human nature without mixing – the soul being seen as both united and distinct from the body – involving a perichoretic interpenetration and exchange. This means soul and body are seen to be mutually dependent upon the other, as opposed to simply being in hierarchical relation.

Although Maximus understands this as being present at a structural level, the starting position of human experience is understood to be a fragmentation of parts and division. Deification is then seen to involve the outworking of the mutual penetration that is present between soul and body, through participation in a perichoretic divine-human relationship that is fully demonstrated in Christ.

Maximus understands the process of deification as involving the appropriate movement and integration between the two parts of the self, by means of a proper relation of the self to God and the sensible. If it is recognised that the dialectic

between both inner (privatised worlds) and outer (everyday, shared, public worlds) is what shapes human life, then a broad re-reading of transformational theology would need to provide a framework that counters the dualistic separation between the two. The process by which a person is formed must be seen to occur in an integrated way, the self interacting "perichoretically" in mutually and reciprocity, with inner-outer means acting together in dialectic. Such would prevent a solely hierarchical model of the human person.

The final "relational mode" to be examined concerns the *intra-human* relation. The perceived rational individualism in Packer's anthropology and piety, at times, appears to undermine the role that community has in the formation of the individual. Packer does not bring out the individual-social dimension of the Trinity in his thought. He takes his lead from the relation between Father and Son, in terms of an emphasis on individual obedience and holiness. Packer does not make the social understanding of the person central, instead the *imago Dei* is defined individualistically in terms of the central emphasis being on a person's own relation to God. The emphasis on subordination and individualism in Packer's anthropology appears to weaken the need for equal reciprocation in community. Resulting from the emphasis in his anthropology, his understanding of sanctification frequently comes across as being individualistic, in terms of personal obedience to God being central. Packer often appears to see communal dynamics as being subordinate to individuality, rather than stressing an individual-social dialectic.

Though Packer emphasises the importance of ecclesial life, his primary focus is on the mind-to-mind communion between God and the individual, which is understood as the means by which persons are able to reflect God's image to others. Ecclesial relations are then seen as the context for expressing holiness. Although there is a clear interconnection between the two, relationality appears to be made secondary to rationality and righteousness in Packer's thought, the demonstration of love being the mark of individual righteousness and personal obedience to God. Although Packer sees the church as the context for Christian formation, he clearly wants to safeguard personal salvation and growth through

individual obedience to God, rather than the church being seen to provide any means of salvation. The dynamics of community in the process of formation need to be fully affirmed. However, it is important to recognise that they are subordinate to an individual's personal relationship to God, as emphasised by Packer.

For there to be an effectual re-reading of transformational theology, there is a need for a robust and balanced understanding of the individual-social dialectic. Maximus' framework of union and distinction in creation may be seen to provide an appropriate context for holding together the need for the individual-social dialectic in the process of formation. He recognises that God's social image, the *imago Trinitas,* is reflected in creation through the Logos. This means that creation is understood to reflect the dialectic between "whole and parts," union and distinction being seen as mutually affirming. Created order is understood by Maximus to express the triune image because of the singular unifying Logos in creation opening it to multiplicity. In this sense, he affirms an individual-social dialectic at a structural level.

Maximus understands deification as being all about unifying divisions through the incarnation. It is not seen to simply be about the formation of the individual, but about persons coming to reflect the triune life within the context of physicality, so maintaining absolute individuality as well as full communion with others. Maximus portrays the Logos being made flesh as demonstrating the union and distinction in creation, which is derived from the nature of the triune life.[476] Persons are then seen to be able to express their individuality through the fullness of their humanity, while being united together through the Logos.

Packer's view of subordination in the Trinity also filters into his view of how formation occurs in community. His primary understanding is that Christian fellowship and love are rooted in personal obedience to God. Though he does not draw out the "social Trinity" as a central motif for the church, intra-triune giving and receiving is understood by Packer as being the essence of Christian

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[476] Confessor, "Ambigua 1-22," 95f, 309-311.

fellowship.[477] An effectual re-reading of transformational theology would need to bring out the full nature of giving and receiving in relationships, while recognising the central function that rational-linguistic communication has to assume. Packer sees ecclesial giving and receiving as involving the expression of knowledge that each person has individually received from God, and in turn receiving the same from others so that all may draw closer to God. Packer understands personal knowledge of God as needing to be reflected in ecclesial relations, while ecclesial relations are seen to be a catalyst for enabling persons to come to greater knowledge of God.

In congruence with Packer's emphasis on the need for subordination to the spoken Word of God, the ecclesial focus is on the transformation in the receiver of the rational mind-to-mind communication. The divine gifts needing to be expressed in the church to facilitate formation are primarily seen to be rational and verbal. Packer does not place the same primary focus on the formational qualities of presence and act, in comparison to that which is rational-linguistic. His emphasis remains on the importance of mind-to-mind communication as the catalyst for transformation. For an effectual re-reading, a holistic understanding of the Trinity needs to be seen within ecclesial life, in terms of there being a broad epistemology for formation, which involves both love and rationality. Perichoretic dynamics also need to be present in some form, being in dialectical relation to dynamics of subordination. Furthermore, there is a need for a robust view of ecclesial giving and receiving, one that expresses the Trinitarian dynamics as a means of formation, recognising the importance of self-transcendence.

4.4.3 Ecclesial Modes

The last of the "anthropological modes" to be examined relates to ecclesiology. This section will involve exploring the nature of formation occurring within the two ecclesial contexts, namely, as the church both "gathered and scattered." The context of the "gathered church" refers to an intentional time and place for a corporate worship, which allows for specific "means of grace" to operate. The context of the "scattered church" refers to the narrative of God's people in daily

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[477] Packer, *Celebrating Saving Work*, 15; *18 Words*, 186.

life within societal roles, where there is a call to a broader worship response. Packer sees the gathered community as needing to be grounded in scriptural teaching. There is a need for Scripture to be central in the "gathered church" context, as it would be within a private devotional setting.

Packer believes that growth begins with the rational-linguistic communication of Scripture and the comprehension in the receiver. The mutual sharing of rational-linguistic truth is seen to become the central means of formation in a gathered setting. Acts of "gathered worship," such as praise, prayer and the ritual of communion are then understood as being a proper response to God's self-revelation in Scripture. Packer understands God as being made known in ecclesial relations through the sharing of rational-linguistic truth from Scripture.[478] This focus is congruent with his Christology, not just in terms of the focus upon Christ's obedience to the will of the Father, but also because of his emphasis on the teachings of Christ, rather than on his person or acts.

An effectual approach would need to see formation occurring through rational-linguistic instruction in the church, by way of preaching and teaching. In the same way it would depend upon persons receiving rational-linguistic instruction from Scripture through their own personal reading. Packer would affirm that formation is seen to be possible through engaging with the spoken word of another, primarily through those in ecclesial teaching offices. The emphasis that he gives to preaching is congruent with the emphasis he gives to subordination and scriptural authority, with persons needing to be subject to divine authority through the spoken Word.

This corresponds with Packer's view that it is the recipient who is being formed as a result of submissive response to verbal revelation, beginning with their receptivity and rational comprehension. By itself, this would denote an absence of reciprocity, in terms of both giver and receiver not entering a mutual process of formation. Packer has described himself as a "catechist" seeking to defend and transmit truth for the purpose of formation. His concern has been for the

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[478] *18 Words*, 186.

systematic presentation of biblical truth for the purpose of engaging the whole person in intellectual formation, worship towards God and active service.[479] Packer's rational-linguistic model of catechesis demonstrates a wholly different approach to formation from that of Maximus.

Though Maximus includes the reading of Scripture as part of the communal gathering, he does not point to rational-linguistic speech as being central. Instead, the incarnation and presence of Christ are seen to be at the centre of the gathered community. In congruence with the incarnation, the church gathering is understood as being symbolic of Christ's presence, pointing towards to the deification of the whole cosmos. Maximus sees the Trinitarian ontology as the ground of created order, while Christological ontology is related to the "gathered church." His ecclesiology is mainly centred around Christological reflections on the building and the gathering within, which are seen as a symbolic image of the Christological union, the distinction in the faculties of the human person and in the visible-invisible cosmos.[480] The centre of the ecclesial gathering is understood to be the Eucharist, where Christ's presence is symbolised. It is participation in the enactment of the liturgy and the presence of Christ, which is seen to deepen the relation between God and humanity, bringing forth deification.

Given that Packer understands formation as primarily occurring through a response to rational-linguistic truth, the understanding that knowledge of God is being expressed and revealed within the church through presence and act is seen to be secondary. Packer understands the "sacrament" of the gathered community as primarily focusing on the sharing of the rational word. Therefore, the means of formation in a gathered sense is seen to rely heavily on rational speech.[481] Although Packer recognises the absolute importance of the sacrament of communion, the transforming presence of Christ through participating in communion is not given a central place in the gathered community.

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[479] Ibid., 187.
[480] Confessor, "Mystagogy," 186f.
[481] Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 117ff.

The apparent neglect of presence and act may suggest that Packer's sacramental theology is insufficient. Given that revealing the knowledge of God in community consists of more than rational speech, a re-reading would need to be explicit in acknowledging the centrality of the presence of Christ within the gathered community, in terms of the place and position of presence and act alongside speech, while still recognising the irreplaceable function of the latter. This would help to more fully convey how God is seen within the life of the church, in order to show that lives are being formed through holistic means, albeit with rational-linguistic form being the central catalyst.

The other ecclesial dimension is the "scattered church," which concerns the lived experience of God's people outside of the setting of "gathered worship." This context could be portrayed as "missional," rather than being the place in which the people of God are being transformed. For Packer, this is true to an extent. Within a scattered context, he sees the central mission of the church as involving the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, which offers the opportunity for salvation and consequent transformation. Given that Christian formation can only occur through relationship with Christ, the centre of mission is seen to be the transmission of the biblical gospel through verbal sharing, and for persons to positively respond.

As well as emphasising verbal witness, self-identified "evangelicals" often focus on the need to demonstrate the knowledge of Christ to the world through acts of loving service. Although Packer recognises the need to practice deeds of neighbour-love to those outside of the covenant community, a missional witness through presence and act is not understood as having the same direct epistemological or redemptive value as rational-linguistic communication, simply because receptivity to the propositional gospel is seen to be required in order for persons to be able to experience the journey of transformation in Christ. Within a scattered context the focus can move away from individuals-in-community being formed, towards the understanding that the church is seeking to "transform the world" through presence and action. The problem here is that the focus on the "scattered church" being formed for the purpose of reflecting God's glory to

others becomes replaced by the attempt to "redeem" societal structures, occurring outside of any salvific and ecclesial context, with no continuity with the age to come.

Packer's missional focus rests on the communication of the propositional gospel and the need for a subordinate response. Although revealing the knowledge of God as both presence and act is also understood as being a witness, there is no focus on the redemptive qualities of everyday "common activity" and societal work. Packer does not speak about how being a witness to Christ, in terms of presence-act, has a transformative effect on the subject. He does affirm the need for Christians to be fully engaged in society, performing various roles, in order to have a positive influence. At the same time, he offers a necessary corrective to those who would seek to "transform" society through a focus on social action and cultural activities.

Packer does not draw out how everyday cultural roles and activities can become transformational for the subjects themselves. Rather than understanding how persons are to be formed as a result of their lived witness, the central focus in this context is seen to be upon the need for the conversion of others through their subordination to the rational-linguistic gospel.[482] The understanding amongst self-identified "evangelicals" is often that the purpose of the "scattered church" is outward focused transformation, while the concept of gathering is seen to focus on worship and specific "means of grace" enabling spiritual growth. Such understanding sets up a false dualism. In this sense, witness is seen to be about the rational knowledge of God being revealed beyond the church, in order that persons may be drawn into relationship with God and the life of the gathered community. In terms of the relation of the church to society, rational-linguistic communication has a distinct and irreplaceable function.

Maximus' understanding of mission points to human beings as mediators who are called to reconcile the created order to God, and reconcile divisions in

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[482] Packer, *Knowing Christianity*, 121.

creation.[483] He roots this "mediating" position of humanity in relation to the person of Christ, rather than within Christ's post-ascension role. An alternative understanding is to speak of the church being in relation to Christ (*the* mediator), in terms of persons being in union with him through his death-resurrection.[484] This provides the proper ground from which mission and reconciliation takes place.

Maximus sees mission as being primarily about reconciling the entire cosmos to God, leading to the unification of the divisions that exist within the created world, in congruence with the nature of the triune life and the incarnation. He sees each person as being a microcosm recapitulating in themselves the elements of the cosmos.[485] The Logos procession in creation is understood to express the hypostatic union, and is the means by which God unites all to himself and within itself. Because of the incarnation, humanity is seen as being able to participate in Christ's mediatorial role, fulfilling man's original purpose of mediating between God and the cosmos. Reintegration is to occur within the individual in congruence with their relation to God and their ability to integrate the divisions in the cosmos. Maximus sees the gathered community as being a lived witness to Christ. The incarnational focus of the sacramental gathering is understood to become central for the integration of the cosmos, mission being more about "presence" and "enactment." The understanding of mission that Maximus expresses, focuses more on *being* the church, and inviting participation within the place of transformation – the gathered ecclesial setting.

Maximus seeks to provide a way of making the ecclesial gathering symbolic of the integration in both the human person and the unification of the cosmos.[486] He expresses the need to emphasise a "richer," more sacramental gathering, which is filled with meaning about the nature of humanity and the cosmos. In doing so, there is no separation made between "gathered and scattered," as one is contained in the other. Packer does not appear to set up a framework for transformation that fully overcomes the sacred-secular divide. For Packer, the

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[483] Confessor, "Mystagogy," 196-197; "Ambigua 23-71," 103f.
[484] The importance of the union with Christ motif is demonstrated in Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*.
[485] Confessor, "Mystagogy," 196-197.
[486] Ibid., 196-197, 204f.

possibility of formation is seen as primarily revolving around a specific religious context where there is a specific liturgy, "spiritual disciplines," gathered fellowship and anything else that may be designated as being a "means of grace."

Packer and Maximus both place a strong emphasis on the formation that occurs in the gathered setting. Rather than restricting the trajectory of transformation, a holistic re-reading would need to open to the understanding that persons are being formed in everything, albeit in different ways. It is certainly important to explore what is formational within the ecclesial gathering as a special "means of grace," yet this has to be seen in appropriate relation to the formation that occurs within the everyday lived narrative.

Maximus points to the gathered liturgy being tied together with anthropology and cosmology. In doing so, he portrays the liturgy as being what enacts the deification process. He points to there being a dialectic between the "gathered and scattered" forms of liturgy, the gathered setting being symbolic of what is to occur within a lived narrative. Such an understanding would allow for both contexts to be a place of formation and witness, albeit in different ways. A re-reading of transformational theology would need to set up both contexts in dialectical relation, in terms of the gathered context symbolising what is to occur in the scattered context. There would be a need to see a dialectic and reciprocity between the dynamics within gathered-scattered modes, albeit the latter being subordinate in some way to the former. Both these modes hold a specific function, and need to be properly related to the theological categories already expressed.

4.5 Knowledge and Transformation

4.5.1 Introduction

The final group of categories to be discussed relate to the knowledge of God. To provide an effectual framework for transformational theology it is necessary to have an integrated understanding of divine knowledge (and subsequent human response), while recognising the specific function of rational-linguistic communication. To understand the relation between knowledge and

transformation, there will be an examination of three categories that have arisen out of previous chapters, these are: *rational knowledge*, *knowledge-in-union* and *applied knowledge*. In contrasting the thought of Packer and Maximus within these areas, further insights will be derived towards a proper understanding between theology and spirituality.

Packer and Maximus both explore how an intentional engagement with the revealed knowledge of God brings the possibility of transformation, though they each convey a different emphasis and use different language to describe how it occurs. Before looking at the three aforementioned categories, it is important to first mention the nature of true divine knowledge. For transformation to occur there needs to be a true knowledge of God communicated and known. Packer believes that human beings are able to have a certain and true knowledge of God received, albeit only in part. He would affirm that the removal of objective knowledge of God would simply be the removal of the need for persons to submit to divine authority, and consequently the removal of the possibility of transformation itself. If human beings are understood to be grounded in relation to the existing objectivity present within the intra-triune life itself, then God is, by necessity, also able to communicate himself objectively to creatures so that they are able to grow incrementally in the knowledge of him, and as a result be able to increasingly reflect divine knowledge to others.

Packer sees objective knowledge of God as being linked to a specific form of revelation, i.e. rational-linguistic truth. For Packer, objective knowledge is only possible through Scripture and the witness of the Spirit, but not through the Spirit and the witness of Scripture. The inference is that objective knowledge is primarily known through rational communication to the intellect, rather than through an a-rational communication to the a-rational faculties.[487] Such understanding may appear to be rooted in a false dichotomy between forms of knowledge and ways of appropriating knowledge, characterising them as presenting either subjective human experience or objective communication from

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[487] Although the Holy Spirit illuminates rational-linguistic communication to the mind, God is also to be known through his Spirit in a way that goes beyond human understanding.

God. All true experience of God must involve an objective element, in that God is in some way being seen to reveal true knowledge of himself in order to enable formation.

In the next section I will demonstrate how the three categories that relate to knowledge and transformation (rational knowledge, knowledge-in-union and applied knowledge) are arranged differently by Packer and Maximus. Packer speaks about achieving the right balance in the Christian life between "doctrine," "communion with God," and "practice," and strives to integrate them.[488] In doing so, he demonstrates a specific way of bringing together the concerns of theology and spirituality, which leads to a specific understanding of how formation occurs. The way in which Packer integrates these is by beginning with the need for systematic instruction of rational-linguistic truth, which is to be understood and lived so that formation can occur. For Packer, formation is only seen to be able to occur as persons actively respond to rational-linguistic truth, beginning with cognitive understanding of Scripture, leading to a response of communion with God in prayer and active obedience. Such a progression is seen to express the movement from knowing about God to knowing God, which is understood to be necessary in order for formation to occur.

For Maximus, the Christian life can be broadly understood within the same three categories as Packer. He seeks to integrate dogmatic theology with mystical and ascetical dimensions, holding the intellectual, contemplative and ascetic life together without divisions. Maximus appears to combine all these concerns in some kind of congruence with a Christological dialectic, pointing towards an integrated approach. The Christological dialectic is understood to be a means of integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality, and the means of how formation occurs. Maximus' approach to formation is not simply based upon some kind of hierarchical procession from doctrinal truth leading to communion with God and praxis. Rather, he seeks to hold these three categories together in a way that involves more reciprocity.

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[488] Packer, *Serving People of God*, 216; *Evangelism*, 34; *Rediscovering Holiness*, 57; *Concise Theology*, 199.

4.5.2 Rational Knowledge

The first category to be explored is rational knowledge. Packer understands formation as being grounded in an appropriate human response to rational-linguistic communication. He does not appear to portray the Triune God as initially addressing the whole person through his speech, presence and act. In terms of divine revelation, God is seen as having made himself known through his spoken Word. Packer's focus is on rational and verbal communication through Scripture, rather than on the appropriation of divine knowledge through an a-rational means such as presence or act. Rational-linguistic truth is seen as being necessary in order that persons may be able to rightly respond, so that orthodox beliefs can be formed, leading to the formation of the whole person. Given that Packer's primary focus is upon rational-linguistic truth, there is less of an emphasis on God being present and active in non-verbal ways.

Packer's central understanding of revelation does not appear to allow for an integral view of the knowledge of God, in that a central function is rational mind-to-mind communication based upon his understanding of the *imago Dei*, in terms of humanity being given the ability to understand and respond to God's rational-linguistic truth. In contrast, Maximus focuses more on the action of the Logos as an activity not seen as being distinct from speech or presence. Although God is known in speech, presence and act, each of these has a specific function and place. A re-reading of transformational theology needs to recognise a fully integrated understanding of revelation, while keeping rational-linguistic truth at the centre.

Packer's understanding that divine knowledge has primarily been made known in rational form through the Scriptures has ramifications for how persons are to respond. He emphasises the need for the rational faculties to assume foremost place in the formation process. The initial need is seen as being for the rational faculties to correctly appropriate what the Scriptures are communicating.[489] Given Packer's focus on the rational part of the self, he would appear to want to isolate the operation of the cognitive faculties from affections and emotions, which are to

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[489] Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 123.

be made wholly subordinate. Consequently, a person's response to divine self-revelation is seen to begin with the need for rational discursive acts towards Scripture.

Packer and Maximus have a fundamentally different approach to biblical interpretation. Packer's approach involves a grammatical-historical method, the need being for persons to fully apply the rational faculties to Scripture in order to determine the original objective meaning, and then to reapply the universal truths to their own life.[490] His understanding is that objective knowledge of God through rational-linguistic truth is required to be rightly interpreted and understood by the mind. In view of this, being able to rightly interpret Scripture through a grammatical-historical method is seen to rely heavily upon the intellectual skill and expertise of the individual, and/or others with the appropriate ability.

Within this process, Packer does not appear to fully allow an individual-social dialectic. Although community and tradition are understood to become means of self-critique, the ultimate locus in biblical interpretation appears to still lie with the individual interpreter as they seek to live in personal obedience to God. In the name of "objectivity," the witness of the Spirit can become subordinate to a person's private interpretation. As well as the a-rational faculties being absent in the first instance, the illumination of the Spirit is also kept for the process of personal application rather than the initial interpretation.

Packer's focus on the need for a prerequisite rational understanding has ramifications for the way in which he sees formation as being able to occur. The need for rational interpretation of Scripture in the first instance leads to an overwhelming reliance upon the need for proper reception and comprehension in order for persons to be able to come to true knowledge of God and experience transformation. The possibility of formation is seen as being based wholly upon being able to know objective rational truth. However, Packer does not see rational understanding as an end in itself, but rather as a necessary prerequisite for personal communion with God. The possibility of persons coming to personal

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[490] Packer, *Under God's Word*, 98; *Celebrating Saving Work*, 95.

acquaintance of God, and being able to be obedient to his will, is seen to be wholly dependent upon their ability to correctly comprehend what God is saying through Scripture.

In contrast, Maximus does not start with the need for the rational faculties to rightly appropriate, understand and receive rational-linguistic truth from Scripture. Maximus relates Scripture to the incarnation for the purpose of deification. He draws attention to the Logos behind the surface of the text itself; the text being seen to be the vehicle for the Logos to become flesh in human beings. Maximus does not position rational propositions about God at the forefront as a means for persons to come to true knowledge of God. Therefore, comprehension through the rational faculties is made neither a prerequisite to formation, nor seen as being superior to the a-rational dispositions of the heart. In speaking of a participatory form of mystical knowledge that remains intellectual in character, Maximus seeks to unify the task of the rational and a-rational faculties in coming to knowledge of God.[491] For an effectual process of formation there is a need for belief systems to be shaped because they are pivotal to the possibility of transformation in a person's life. A suitable re-reading would need to give weight to the importance of a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, in order for persons to be able to come to a rational understanding. An effectual model would keep rational-linguistic truth as a prerequisite, while recognising the specific place and function of presence and act.

4.5.3 Knowledge-in-Union

The second category of knowledge to be explored relates to that which is a-rational and involves communion with God. Although Packer places primary emphasis on the need for rational engagement with the Scriptures, he affirms that the purpose of coming to knowledge about God through the Scriptures is in order to be able to know God personally.[492] Packer speaks of a relationship with God as involving both a mind-to-mind reality, and knowledge by acquaintance. He affirms that the primary need is for persons to know God rather than to simply

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[491] Confessor, "Chapters on Love," 64.
[492] Packer, "Scripture," 630; *Celebrating Saving Work*, 95.

know about God in a rational sense. The process through which persons are seen to be able to get there involves "gatekeeping," in terms of knowledge-in-union being seen to rely rather heavily on the prerequisite need for a rational and individualistic appropriation of Scripture. Consequently, the understanding is that there is no sense in which persons are able to come to any personal knowledge of God unless it is first mediated to them rationally through the Scriptures.

The process that Packer advocates of moving from knowing about God, to knowing God, may appear to involve a rather mechanical technique, in that it occurs strictly by means of meditation upon rational-linguistic truth in Scripture about God. He suggests that there is a need to meditate on Scriptures before God in order to move from head to heart knowledge.[493] Such meditation is seen to involve a heartfelt rumination on Scripture based upon already having an understanding of its objective meaning. This is seen to enable persons to be led towards the appropriate verbal response to God, in personal communion, and come to right thoughts about God, rather than towards some form of non-conceptual contemplation on God. Packer assumes that rational understanding is both necessary and able to lead persons towards the actual experience of knowledge-in-union. He seeks to do this in a way that is wholly facilitated by true propositions, rather than beginning with a lived experience of God in congruence with the biblical witness.

Packer minimises the importance of knowledge of God being derived outside of the rational appropriation of Scripture. He appears reluctant to give central focus to knowledge that comes from personal experience. This is evidenced by the absence of any attempted description of his own experiences.[494] Given his distrust of the possible knowledge derived from lived experience, the question remains as to why the purpose is to move towards knowledge that is understood in more individualistic and subjective terms, as opposed to remaining with the certainty of a more objective truth revealed in Scripture. Although the goal of Packer's method is clearly to move towards knowing God rather than knowing about God, he does

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[493] *Knowing God*, 21-22.
[494] Ibid., 22.

not portray knowledge-in-union as assuming any authoritative place. As an experience, it is seen by Packer to remain secondary in the process of formation, being entirely subject to the rational knowledge derived from Scripture, which is understood to be objective.

In making "knowledge-through-love" secondary, and subordinate to that which is known through the intellect, the way in which persons first approach God (i.e. rationally without their affections being involved), appears divided. Packer could appear to be setting up a false dichotomy between discursive rational acts and non-conceptual affective acts, between what allows for knowledge to be objective or subjective. This reflects his anthropology, where the initial emphasis is on the rational faculties, rather than the affections and emotions. Any inner inclinations, desires, affections and a possible knowledge through the Spirit are made subservient to the rational faculties. Though the need to understand is seen to come before the need for inner affectivity, it does not disregard the fact that the rational faculties can be just as prone to subjective individualism as the a-rational faculties.

Maximus' approach to knowledge could appear to be more integral than Packer's. He highlights the need for a dialectic between two forms of knowledge in the process of deification, between the revealed Logos mediated through creation and Scripture, and "direct" unmediated knowledge of God through inner recollection, i.e. contemplation. Maximus seeks to integrate both within the person of Christ, holding them in dialectical tension. Both forms of knowledge are also seen to be reflected in Scripture and the cosmos, because Christ is understood to be the centre of all. Maximus' focus on the incarnation causes persons to focus on Christ's person and presence. His understanding is that the central way persons are to approach God is through faith and love, rather than beginning with communication leading to rational comprehension.

Packer does not follow the contradictions of the Dionysian tradition where there is affirmation and denial of the same truth. As noted, Maximus seeks to hold the two forms of knowledge together in Christ. They are held together in tension,

without contradiction. This may appear to provide a "third way" for persons to come to know God, holding together both mystical and dogmatic dimensions. In seeking to rightly hold together the knowing of God in both mind and heart, as both hidden and revealed, rational and a-rational, transcendent and immanent, Maximus' epistemology could appear to present more scope for transformation. Although Maximus attempts to bring out a broad epistemology, in the end his approach comes to be less than fully integrated and transformational because rational-linguistic truth, which (as argued in this thesis) is essential, does not always assume the primary role. Although Maximus' thought is rooted in a common centre, it would appear that the reason for the "cohesion" and internal consistency is not because it is wholly grounded in biblical teaching.

Maximus' understanding of revelation, which is grounded in the person of Christ, is seen to determine the process by which persons respond to God in order to be formed. He understands the process of deification to involve a dialectic between the two forms of knowledge, knowing God in "natural contemplation," through Scripture and creation, and knowing him beyond both.[495] He speaks of an awareness of God that goes beyond the rational knowledge being revealed, while at the same time still holding to a rational element.[496] This is demonstrated in the way he sees persons coming to Christ to know God as both hidden and revealed, something that is played out in creation and Scripture, as both are seen to contain the hidden and revealed Logos.

Maximus may appear to allow for the possibility of a deeper experience of God, in terms of going beyond thoughts about God to knowing God, and experiencing him in a way that cannot be achieved by means of any determined process or prerequisite understanding. He seeks to keep (what he understands to be) the two parts of the "soul" together in how persons are to approach God, while also seeking to avoid placing the intellect above the a-rational faculties.[497] An effectual re-reading would need to integrate the discursive acts of the inner faculties, so

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[495] Confessor, "Chapters on Love," 47.
[496] "Ambigua 1-22," 163-165.
[497] It should be noted that Maximus and Packer use the term *soul* very differently. Maximus understands the soul to include the complex inner life and core of a person, while Packer refers to the soul as the immaterial part of a person that animates physicality.

that there is a more fully human epistemology, instead of one that primarily appeals to the intellect. Rather than simply maintaining a strong hierarchy between rational knowledge and a-rational knowledge, they need to also be reciprocal, while the latter remains subordinate.

Like Packer, Maximus would affirm the centrality of a "personal relationship" with God. However, he does not place mind-to-mind communication at the centre of this relationship. Maximus speaks about the reality of the immediate personal experience of God, by virtue of the active presence of the Logos in creation. He appears to express the normality and necessary of some kind of mystical/existential encounter with God. For Maximus, at its core, formation is understood to necessitate a "direct" a-rational personal encounter with God at the deepest part of the self, something that Packer appears more cautious to speak of. Maximus focuses on the importance of contemplation (theoria), and love for God as a practice. In essence, he speaks of an inner disposition of the heart towards God that involves pure faith, and is therefore not wholly conceptual or wholly rational in nature. Inner dispositions are central within a relation to the Father, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Such needs to be seen as core to a life lived in relation to the Triune God, occurring as a result of union with the risen Christ.

Although Packer places absolute importance on faith towards God in the scheme of sanctification, he does not focus on the need for any form of sustained inner disposition as being able to lead to personal knowledge of God, or as fostering formation. Though the stirring of divine affection is clearly important to Packer, he does not propose there is formative value in any kind of inner receptivity or awareness of God in terms of desire or loving knowledge. Central for Packer is the inner response of faith towards God, though such is understood as being an act based wholly upon what has been revealed in the Scriptures, rather than being a "contemplative" practice. He does not advocate any place for inner discursive acts of the heart on God, nor affirm the need to move from conceptual to non-conceptual rumination.

For self-identified "evangelicals," there is often a focus on active engagement, either in terms of active rational engagement with Scripture, active communion with God (i.e. ways of verbally responding to God) or active mission in society. Packer sees sanctification itself in terms of active co-operation, i.e. involving the "mortification" of sin. His focus on a person's active responsibility leads him away from placing any real value on forms of mystical/passive prayer, which he dismisses as "quietism."[498] As well as making an overtly rational approach to Scripture a necessary prerequisite, Packer focuses on the importance of biblical meditation as a means towards communion with God, rather than meditation on God through any form of inner disposition. Given that divine-human communion does not simply involve mind-to-mind communication, there is a need to focus on the inner disposition towards God alongside the rational faculties.

Packer points to the importance of fellowship with God as being a "means of grace."[499] His understanding of existential communion, as evidenced by his descriptions, rests largely upon verbal expressions towards God (e.g. prayer, praise, thanksgiving, etc.), all in response to God's own verbal communication.[500] In terms of communion with God, Packer's focus is clearly on rational-linguistic dialogue, with there being a need for persons to hear God in the Scriptures properly and respond verbally. He does not focus on the communication of God as being heart-to-heart, something that would necessitate a response of the affections in the deepest part of the self. Although Packer focuses on cultivating affections in the Christian life as a result of rational comprehension, in the first instance the primary need is not seen as involving the application of the a-rational faculties towards God. Although there is a central need for the affections to be involved, the central catalyst behind them, whether directly or indirectly, is rational-linguistic communication.

4.5.4 Applied Knowledge

The final category relates to knowledge being practiced/applied. Packer's primary experiential concern is for persons to grow in their relationship with God as a

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[498] Packer, "Path of Prayer," 56.
[499] Ibid., 58-59.
[500] *Serving People of God*, 15.

result of obeying his commandments in Scripture. He focuses on the need for persons to receive rational communication from God in order to live a life of holiness. For Packer, the application of knowledge is grounded in the need for persons to follow the example of Christ's obedience to the Father, in terms of expressing a subordinate law-fulfilling life. Therefore, the possibility of formation in the Christian life is primarily seen as being dependent upon a person's obedient response to God, based upon having rightly interpreted the Scriptures. Obedience to what God has spoken is seen to be done from the place of a recognised union with Christ, out of which there is the need to co-operate with the activity of the indwelling Spirit in order to do the will of the Father.

Maximus seeks to integrate knowledge and praxis in an entirely different way. He does not see knowledge of God as being separate from the lived Christian life; instead he understands there as being a dialectical interplay between knowing and doing.[501] This is evident in Maximus' teaching on asceticism, where there is a continual dialectic present between theoria and praxis. His understanding is that deification is to involve the interpenetration between knowledge of God and praxis, holding both together in this way being the foundation of the movement towards deification. Maximus maintains that the goal of deification is achieved through the integration of three different areas, the intellect, the affections and praxis, without making any primary. The ascetical life is seen to enable persons to grow in their knowledge of God, while knowledge of God is understood to enable persons to maintain and pursue a virtuous life.

Although knowledge of God received is seen to be principal, Maximus places it in dialectical relation to praxis, so that there is a reciprocating role in the process of deification. Christ is seen as the paradigm for the Christian life, in terms of the incarnation expressing the relation between knowledge-praxis, and between soul-body. For Maximus, the need for both knowledge and the practice of virtue is congruent with the integration of (how he sees) the soul and body, e.g. the engagement of the inner faculties with God, and the engagement of outer faculties in ascetic practice. Maximus sees the dynamics between theoria and praxis as

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[501] Confessor, "Questions and Doubts," 90, 111, 131, 136-137.

being integrated in the self, by means of a love for God and love for others. As persons grow more to express love of God and neighbour they are understood to demonstrate more integration in congruence with the incarnation. Therefore, deification is seen to involve the need for a dialectic between the two. This "integrated" perspective would suggest a more dynamic and less mechanical understanding of formation.

4.5.5 Summation

Within an effectual transformational theology, the areas explored in the three categories above need to be integrated together. It has been demonstrated that these categories are arranged differently by Packer and Maximus. The need is for a framework that allows a central function for rational-linguistic knowledge, while also expressing an understanding of knowledge that is broad and holistic. It is proposed that the motif of "theo-drama" is able to provide a suitable means of holding together a holistic expression of knowledge demonstrated in both divine and human roles.[502] This motif will contribute towards enabling a suitable understanding between theology and spirituality, which in turn, leads to an effectual transformational theology.

Packer's understanding is that through a response to the rational-linguistic communication of the gospel, persons come into union with Christ, and are brought into relationship with the Father, through the Spirit. He does not give the incarnation any present epistemological role. Nor is it seen as something that

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[502] The "theo-drama" involves the narrative and self-revelation of the eternal Triune God playing out in history in speech, presence and act. The historical ground of this narrative is chiefly demonstrated in the objective knowledge of God revealed in Christ, who, now risen and exalted, has inaugurated the eschatological drama which God's people are to participate, and in doing so come to greater express knowledge of him. Recent usage of "drama" as a theological motif is seen in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Leicester, UK: IVP, 2000); *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2005); "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Edward P. Meadors (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2014); Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015); "The Drama of Discipleship: A Vocation of Spiritual Formation," in *Pictures at a Biblical Exhibition: Theological Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

persons participate in. Instead, he recognises that through Christ's salvific work, persons are able to come into union with the Triune God. This becomes the ground of the present transformational "theo-drama." Although Packer recognises that union with Christ stems from a response to the propositional gospel, the means of participating in the fullness of the present "theo-drama" would be seen to occur through a response to rational-linguistic communication of God's revelation in Scripture, in congruence with the illumination of the Spirit, and a co-operation with the work of the Spirit. A person's co-operative response to God is not simply seen to be on the basis of passive faith in Christ and his work, but also in obedience to God's law given in Scripture, by means of Spirit-empowered effort. Packer clearly affirms that there has to be a focus on divine and human action working together in dialectic.

For Packer, the present epistemological role of Christ is replaced by Scripture and the Spirit. However, he does not focus on how union with the risen Christ through the atonement relates to the functions of Scripture and the Spirit in the process of sanctification. As a result, revealed knowledge of God is primarily understood to be through Scripture, rather than being "direct" knowledge given to persons through means of union with the risen Christ, by the Spirit. Packer's understanding is that formation occurs by means of rational-linguistic communication, mediated through the divinely inspired and inerrant Scriptures, of which the propositional gospel is the centre. His belief is that the Christian life needs to be rooted in the application of biblical truth, which requires rational reflection and meditation, all leading towards communion with God and a life of obedience. In focusing on mind-to-mind communication, Packer places an emphasis on the position of biblical authority in the Christian life, with submission to the Scriptures simply being submission to divine authority. Clearly, an effectual approach to Christian formation needs to be wholly grounded in the reading, teaching and living of Scripture.

A suitable engagement with Scripture needs to be understood as being rooted within Christo-triune dynamics, which allows for a fullness of knowledge. Maximus relates Scripture to the incarnation and the process of deification. His

understanding of the nature of Scripture points beyond a rational reading of the text, so as to not simply invoke a rational response. Maximus emphasises the importance of a knowledge given beyond the mediation of the Scriptures, a knowledge acquired through contemplation. While Packer places initial focus on the need for a rational appropriation of Scripture, he recognises the need for a holistic response and broad experience as a result. For Packer, lived experience of the Triune God is not the starting point or locus of formation. An experiential knowledge of God is seen to come as a result of a rational appropriation of Scripture, by means of the illumination of the Spirit. Scripture is required to witness to the experience, and whether directly or indirectly, be the catalyst and prerequisite to the experience.

Packer understands the Holy Spirit to play an incisive role within the present transformational drama. As well as focusing on the function of Scripture in the process of transformation, he brings to the fore the present role of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the Scriptures to the mind, and enabling persons to obey the law given in the Scriptures. Although Packer understands the Spirit to be working together with the Word, in practice, the Spirit appears to be given a more subordinate role. Though he affirms that the presence and action of the Spirit is at the heart of the Christian experience, and the primary agent in transformation, he does not understand the Spirit as having an essential revelatory role. In focusing on the external authority of Scripture, Packer stops short of affirming that a lived knowledge of Father and Son (through the indwelling Spirit) is *the* fundamental means of authoritative knowledge in the Christian life, recognising that *the* true external authority is God himself. As a result, the witness of the Spirit is treated with caution, being given less of an authoritative function, and not seen as a primary source providing objective knowledge.

Given that divine self-revelation begins with personal and relational communion that is core to the intra-triune life, the dynamics of the divine-human communion have to express appropriate epistemology grounded in this. The introduction of the authoritative witness of Scripture is not simply for the purpose of moving persons towards a mind-to-mind rational knowledge, but rather to lead them to

experience a lived knowledge of the Triune God. If there is recognition that the Christian life is, first and foremost, a relationship with the self-authenticating life of the Triune God, then Scripture would need to be seen as being given by God to initiate a response to him, and as an universally authoritative witness to the lived experience of participating in the "theo-drama," rather than being a substitute for it. Knowledge is to be given to persons as a result of a lived experience of God, through the Spirit. Given that the Scriptures perform a temporary function, and are eschatologically superfluous to the self-authenticating life of the Trinity, their role is not to replace the function of the Son in this present age, but instead, to represent Christ's authority. An effectual transformational theology would need to start with a grounding in the epistemology of the self-authenticating Trinity, through which persons are able to experience lived union. However, a present participation in the unfolding dynamics of the "theo-drama" would require the facilitation of the rational-linguistic Scriptures, on the basis of union with Christ and the work of the Spirit.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide further analysis of the thought of J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor, and to provide a critical dialogue in order to ascertain requirements for an effectual model of transformational theology. In this chapter, various areas relevant to developing an integral framework of transformational theology have been looked at separately. This has enabled an examination of the broad scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and also allowed for an analysis of common elements and characteristics. Packer and Maximus have been seen to express differences in how they integrate the concerns of theology and spirituality, and consequently, differences in how they understand formation as occurring. The observations and conclusions expressed throughout the chapter point towards what is needed to outline a systematic model of Christian formation that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre.

In Chapter One, the proper centre and starting point of a "proto-evangelical" approach was described as being rational-linguistic in nature. It is understood to be the right centre because it provides the most suitable means towards a broad

and integrated framework, while also being central to the actual process of formation itself. Both Packer and Maximus would agree that an integrated system of thought must be logocentric, in terms of a central revelation of the Logos from God being the only basis for an orthodox and a unified framework. However, the crucial difference is that Maximus focuses on unifying around the incarnation, while Packer grounds his theologising in rational-linguistic communication, based around the unity of Scripture, of which the gospel is the centre.

Although Packer does not construct a comprehensive and integral treatment of transformational theology grounded in rational-linguistic centre, he provides insights that point towards it. Maximus makes a significant contribution in attempting to integrate key concerns within a cohesive theological system. Rather than presenting a system made of distinct and disconnected parts, his thought demonstrates cohesiveness in being unified around the person of Christ. In holding to a dialectical divine-human relation across his theological system, Maximus can be seen as always maintaining the implicit need for transformation. However, his overarching theological motif is at times too simplistic and one-dimensional in how it is used, and there are no biblical grounds for it to be applied in such a way within the Christian life.

Maximus suggests an entirely different approach towards an integrated and broad vision of transformation. He expresses an alternative way of integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality, and subsequently expresses a different way by which transformation occurs. Some of his concepts lend support towards constructing a suitable model of transformational theology. However, there are also areas where his approach is in conflict with a method that seeks to be grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, and this cannot be overlooked. Although Maximus seeks to express a broad and coherent system, it is not all congruent with an grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture.

Packer seeks to rigorously defend Scripture as the authoritative basis for the Christian life. In doing so, his logocentric focus always remains strongly rational and linguistic. An effectual framework of transformational theology has to be

rooted in the authority of Scripture. At the same time, a truly logocentric approach needs to be wholly Christocentric as the centre of the drama of the revealed Logos in history, being witnessed to by the Scriptures. A suitable re-reading of transformational theology needs to hold to a centre that wholly integrates Christology with bibliology. Although the communication of the rational-linguistic Scriptures is now the means by which to understand and participate in the fullness of the "theo-drama," Scripture cannot be understood in any way apart from its epistemological and ontological grounding in Christ.

Packer uses an incarnational analogy of Scripture. However, in terms of the Christian life, he sees the person of Christ as having a secondary epistemological function to Scripture, which may suggest a false dichotomy between the epistemological function of the two. Maximus may appear to hold to a stronger integration between the two, and in so doing keep a central focus on Christ. However, the problem is that his focus is on the function of the incarnation, rather than the function of Christ as exalted Lord. Although Maximus may appear to bring out a broad epistemology, he does not allow rational-linguistic truth to remain central. His thought may seem to lead to the possibility of a more "holistic" logocentric model, but there is a distinct problem with its central ground. Though centred on the actual person of Christ, it is not centred around the fullness of the biblical gospel. Packer believes that a coherent and consistent worldview can be derived from the Scriptures. He points to the central message in Scripture being the communication of the biblical gospel, which is understood to enable persons to come into union with Christ in his death and resurrection. An effectual model of transformational theology needs be grounded in the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, the centre of which is the gospel of Christ.

In the chapters that follow, there will be systematic interaction between the separate theological categories that appear in this current chapter. In demonstrating how all these categories can be held together in an appropriate way, I will outline a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology, pointing towards the possibility a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and

distinctly Christian vision, an approach grounded in rational-linguistic truth. Chapter Five will involve the development of a propositional framework, within which an understanding of the Christian life expressed in Chapter Six will be located. Together these two chapters will illustrate the integration of the concerns of theology and spirituality.

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSFORMATIONAL THEOLOGY I –
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the thesis is to point towards the possibility of a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology, by outlining a model grounded in rational-linguistic truth. A "proto-evangelical" commitment is characterised by the need to hold to a common approach, based upon the presupposition that God has revealed himself objectively in history (in his Son and the Scriptures), which the church is to communicate through rational-linguistic means. It is argued that an understanding of transformational theology must be grounded in a distinctly rational-linguistic centre, which is proposed to be the only true means to demonstrate the breadth and integration necessary for an effectual, unified and holistic approach.

In previous chapters I have explored the thought of two conversation partners for the purpose of moving towards the development of an integral view of Christian formation. By examining how J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor have each understood the relation between theology and spirituality, I have shown how they may be seen to point towards the possibility of a broad, integrated and effectual approach.

The centre of a "proto-evangelical" approach expressed in Chapter One has been drawn out through an examination of Packer's thought. I have examined Packer's attempt to point towards a prototypal view of the Christian life that is cohesive, integrated and balanced. I have subsequently looked at Maximus' thought in order to explore a broad vision that would challenge the rational-linguistic view represented by Packer. Some of Maximus' insights support the construction of a broad understanding of transformational theology. In being able to hold together various concerns of theology and spirituality within a cohesive framework, he provides some means towards an integrative transformational theology. However, given that his approach is not based around the correct centre, it does not provide

the proper means towards a wholly integrated, broad and cohesive understanding of transformational theology.

In Chapter Four, the purpose was to understand the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and to ascertain common characteristics in its nature and practice. It was determined what was suitable for a holistic re-reading of transformational theology, while defending a perspective grounded in rational-linguistic communication, which has been put forward as the means through which a broad and integrated approach occurs, and as the only effectual centre for transformation. As a result of the discussion and conclusions arising from the previous chapter, there is an understanding of what a "proto-evangelical" approach needs to incorporate, and a solid basis upon which to outline a suitable model.

In chapters five and six, I will seek to outline a "proto-evangelical" model grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, which will point towards the possibility of a common, cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology. This will be done through interacting more between the various theological categories expressed in Chapter Four. While being rooted in the discussion and conclusions from Chapter Four, there will be the development of an original synthesis.

In this chapter, I will lay out a framework for transformational theology by formulating a propositional outline in which an understanding of the Christian life will be located. It will provide the proper framework within which to integrate the broad scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and also express common characteristics of Christian formation. In outlining a cohesive framework, I will attempt to express the appropriate connections and relations, focusing on the importance of the "whole," in order to overcome dualisms and false dichotomies. I will specifically emphasise a subordinate-perichoretic dialectic, as this combines the two different modes that Packer and Maximus make central in their thought. For Packer, formation is seen to involve subordination to the law of God in Scripture, in order to reflect the divine image.

In contrast, Maximus' focus is on the unification of all things in Christ, with a perichoretic relation of union-distinction being demonstrated. In order to hold together the areas expressed in Chapter Four, there is the need to express both subordinate and perichoretic dynamics.

This chapter will begin with an introductory section outlining the theological method for the proposed theoretical framework. I will then start to lay out the groundwork for a transformational theology. Firstly, I will focus on the nature of the triune life. Next anthropological implications will be explored, in recognition that human personhood provides the ground for understanding the nature of Christian formation. Following this, there will be an examination of the Christological groundwork required for an integral view of transformational theology. The final part of this chapter will look at the present context for Christian formation, based upon the preceding groundwork provided in the chapter. The implications of the preceding sections will then be demonstrated as the Christo-triune dynamics are seen to play out across human reality.

5.2 Theological Method and Transformation

This section will fully outline the basis upon which to formulate a "proto-evangelical" transformational theology. In Chapter Four, it was suggested that an effectual model needs to be centred around two core dynamics – namely, the epistemological and ontological dynamics denoted in Christ and the Trinity. Together these provide the absolute means in which to ground an integrated understanding of Christian formation.

Although the central theological point of reference is the intra-triune life, there can be no false transposing of Trinitarian dynamics into the nature of human experience. The nature of the intra-triune life, as characterised by the subordinate-perichoretic dialectic, is not identical to any dimension of human reality. However, human life must be understood as being wholly and inescapably bound up in relation to this, because there is no other *a priori* ground. Christological dynamics are also central in formation because human personhood can only relate to the Trinity in congruence with them, the divine-human relation always

being present together alongside the intra-triune dimension. Consequently, the need is to explore both Trinitarian and Christological dynamics together, in order to understand the proper framework by which integration and formation occurs.

Transformation is rooted in the work of the Triune God within history, being driven by his intention and will. God is able to make himself known through his Logos. Revealed truth in Christ and the Scriptures is *a priori*, in that it exists as independently true within history, being *a priori* to any human experience or human witness, wholly other and wholly objective. In correspondence with that which God has already revealed in history, a "proto-evangelical" view requires truth to be verbally communicated in accord with the Scriptures (of which the gospel is the centre), for any possibility of formation to occur.

The central ecclesial task involves the need to guard and communicate rational-linguistic truth, and to reform based upon this. A proper view of transformation and integration wholly depends upon the possibility of there being proper reception to rational-linguistic truth, and an appropriate human response. The task is simply for persons to respond to what is there, to be a faithful witness to God's objective self-revelation in history, and so be conformed by it in accord with God's *a priori* will and intention. It is as persons continually grow in their knowledge and response to rational-linguistic truth that they can increasingly come to reflect the divine image.

The ground of Packer's system is the rational-linguistic truth revealed in Scripture, the authority of which he continually defends. Scripture is the only possible means through which a theology of the Christian life can be understood and practiced. A transformational theology has to be solely based upon Scripture, as this is God's authoritative revelation for both belief and practice. The possibility of a "proto-evangelical" view is dependent upon the inherent unity of Scripture, in order to be able to express a coherent and unified understanding.

However, the initial starting point for transformational theology is not Scripture, but the life of the intra-triune drama. Scripture derives its authority from the triune

life, based upon the witness of Christ and the Spirit. Scripture has sole authority, not only because of the witness of the Trinity to Scripture, but also because of Scripture's own internal unity and coherence. A proper understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture can only occur in light of a proper understanding of the triune life. The nature of the triune life will be discussed in the next section. Scripture has to function in congruence with the fullness of the triune life that persons are to live in relation to, as a result of their receptivity to the propositional gospel.

A response to rational-linguistic truth, in the light of the historic revelation of God, is the means through which persons are able to participate in the unfolding redemptive drama of God in this present age. The Christian life does not simply involve obedience in light of Scripture, but a continual response to the propositional gospel of Christ, which grounds persons within lived union with the Triune God. Although all of Scripture provides the ground for the development and verification of a propositional framework, it is union with Christ, through a response to the proposition of the biblical gospel, which provides the central ground of a lived relationship with God.

An effectual transformational theology needs to express the most appropriate way of integrating both propositional doctrine and lived experience. Christian formation involves the process of persons coming to right beliefs, right affections and right practices. There is a call for persons to come into the life of the Trinity in order to be gradually formed and reflect the knowledge of God to others. The church is called to witness to the knowledge of God, both in terms of intellectual assent to rational-linguistic truth and lived experience.

Revelation is primarily something that is expressed as rational-linguistic truth that can lead to a propositional framework of belief and the formation of the whole person. At the same time, propositional doctrine is not simply to exist as a separate system of truth apart from an experiential formation of human life. Maximus believes that orthodoxy is not solely about an isolated belief system that persons believe and seek to apply; more broadly, it arises through the lived

participation in divine knowledge. A theological system is not simply something that is articulated as a result of a rational understanding of propositional truths in Scripture. Maximus begins from the standpoint of a lived participation in the life of God, without the necessary prerequisite series of propositions or understanding. In this sense, orthodoxy is seen as arising from lived experience of the *a priori* and objective Logos in creation, rather than being overly dependent on a prerequisite rational understanding. Knowledge of God can be seen to come through living in the life of God in a way that both witnesses to the proposition and stems from the proposition.

It is necessary to set out the propositional framework before lived experience. The remainder of this chapter will involve the presentation of a suitable propositional structure of transformational theology from an integrated perspective. The specific focus of the framework being put forward is around the motif of transformation, hence being a called a "transformational theology." This is in recognition that theology always needs to be wholly orientated towards the goal of the Christian life, namely, the ongoing formation of the covenant community into the image of Christ, rather than being for the purpose of abstracting conceptual principles to exist apart from human experience. That which is experienced needs to be authenticated by a propositional framework, while doctrine also needs to be present in the praxis, being understood and lived.

5.3 The Ground of Transformation

5.3.1 Trinitarian Dynamics

In the sections that follow I will start outlining an integrated model by describing the ground of Christian formation. This begins with expressing the ontology and epistemology of the Trinity, in light of the previous chapter. I will speak in propositional terms about the nature of the divine relations, rather than specifically focusing on the divine attributes themselves. This will provide an understanding of both the central goal and means of Christian formation.

The central ground of transformational theology is the ontological and epistemological dynamics within the Triune God. The *a priori* intra-triune life

fulfils and goes beyond the nature of human experience and the Christian life. The triune life, being central in the thought of Packer and Maximus, influences their views of the nature of the Christian life. Although the Trinity is behind Maximus' Christology, it is not fully expressed or developed upon because he focuses on an apophatic perspective. In contrast, Packer is more interested in expressing an understanding of God's character. Although neither make Trinitarian dynamics a centralised theological motif, they do provide insights on the triune life that contribute towards the possibility of a cohesive transformational theology.

The eternal Triune God exists as the self-sufficient and perfect being. His own "being" and "becoming" is dependent on the mutual self-revelation in intra-triune relations. Within the triune life there is an absolute personal knowledge that is wholly objective in nature, because within intra-triune relations there only exists an absolute and complete knowledge of the other. The full nature of mutual intra-triune self-revelation would both encapsulate and go beyond the human experience of knowledge. It includes the mutual self-revealing of rational-linguistic truth, yet involves more. The intra-triune life can be seen to involve the self-authenticating witness of the other, and the full reflection of their life and glory.

A central understanding of Trinitarian dynamics involves the inherent interrelation between particularity-mutuality. Maximus highlights the principle of union and distinction, of communality and individuality. He emphasises the equality and dialectical nature, affirming the union-distinction in terms of "monad and triad." This supposes that an individual-social dialectic is at the centre of human existence, and helps in constructing an integrated framework of transformational theology. Given the particularity and mutuality within the triune life, distinctive identities can be said to emerge from their own reciprocal relations. The existence of the divine community is solely dependent upon the mutual interdependence between personhood and communion, which co-exist by virtue of their relation to each other. Such understanding becomes a fundamental ecclesial dynamic within the Christian life, in terms of a person's formation being seen to be inherently bound in relation to the other.

In Chapter Four, the concept of dialectic was seen to be at the heart of an orthodox theology, being clearly evident in categories that were discussed. The concept of *perichoresis* can be used to denote the dialectical nature of the paradox between the particularity and mutuality within the Trinity. The perichoretic motif is implicit in Maximus' Trinitarian thought, denoting union-distinction as the fundamental paradox of Christian theology. It infers the unity of God without mixing and without separating – each person being wholly taken out of themself in order to be wholly in the other while still remaining distinct. This can be used as a unifying principle through which to construct a transformational theology.

Packer affirms some form of the "social Trinity," given his affirmation of the ontological dynamics of giving-receiving and interpenetration. The substance and cause of the union-distinction occurring through perichoretic dynamics includes the concept of mutual self-donation and receptivity of the other. Perichoretic movements suggest the Trinity as being bound together in "love-union," the activity signifying that each person is loving and being loved by the other. Therefore, a personal and relational knowledge is at the core of divine essence, the knowledge revealed being a "loving presence." The perichoretic interpenetration within the Trinity denotes an "exchange life," a self-emptying while receiving one another by virtue of an unwavering desire, so being filled by the other. This means that as well as giving themselves to each other in entirety, the divine persons are also the object of each other's attention and devotion. These perichoretic dynamics of mutual self-donation establish the triune life in both particularity and mutuality, the divine persons simultaneously affirming both their identity and their unity. Through the paradoxical interchange of mutual self-giving, the divine being is fully realised.

Not only is the divine being characterised by perichoretic relations, it is also grounded in subordinate roles, without any conflict between the two. Packer acknowledges the importance of role subordination, in particular the Son being subordinate to the will of the Father. The Triune God has witnessed to himself in his *ad extra* self-revelation within history, and the eternal subordinate roles in the

Trinity have become more evident in history through the "sending" of the Son and Spirit. As well as being characterised by subordination, the revelatory action of "sending," namely the procession of Son/Spirit, denotes witness and mission. That which is sent, is being seen to witness to that which it is sent from, not holding to its own authority but witnessing to the authority of another, and glorying in another. The subordinate-perichoretic dynamics within the Trinity demonstrate worship as being central to the triune life. These intra-triune dynamics are to filter throughout a transformational theology in some form or another.

5.3.2 Anthropological Implications

This next section will focus on outlining an integral theological anthropology, in recognition that an integrated understanding of the human person is necessary to provide the ground for an integral understanding of Christian formation. The ontology and epistemology expressed in the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics of the Trinity (and subsequently, in the person of Christ) provide the principles for both a cohesive anthropology and formative theology.

Trinitarian dynamics fully determine the nature of human life and formation, given that the relations among Father, Son and Spirit enfold through history, being open for humanity to partake of their relations. Created order must in some form or another reflect and be grounded in relation to divine activity. The dynamics within the triune life must be fully demonstrated in created order, albeit in a form suitable for creaturely existence. The triune mystery of unity-in-diversity infiltrates the nature of a person's relation to God, and is consequently also to be demonstrated within them and in their relation to others. Given that human personhood (and all of human existence) is inescapably and universally related to the Trinity, it is also grounded in relation to the person of Christ. This current section will outline a theological framework that affirms a fully integrated understanding of the human person that is Christo-triune, i.e. integrating both Trinitarian and Christological dynamics, the former being anticipated in light of the section on Christology that will follow.

God relates to human creatures out of his own "selfhood," the ontological ground of humanity being realised by virtue of intra-triune activity displayed outwards. As a result of the divine movements, the self-communication of God present within the intra-triune life is wholly extended to creation. In revealing himself, God is willing that his creatures know and reflect his nature. God's self-revelation is grounded in intra-triune relations, leading to the formation and reformation of created order in congruence with God's own life. This means that God's purpose and will for creation is bound up in his own being. God reveals himself *ad extra* in order that creation may participate in the triune life. In the same way that God is being himself, he is drawing humanity into his life so that it may come to reflect his nature more fully, albeit within physicality.

Packer understands human beings as being created to worship and glorify God. He believes that God has revealed himself in order that persons may know him, imitate him and reveal characteristics that match his own. Maximus sees created order as structurally reflecting the dialectic between "whole and parts," the union and distinction being a reflection of the triune image. This suggests an individual-social dialectic at a structural level, as a result of a singular unifying Logos in creation, opening it to the multiplicity of its humanity. God's linguistic self-revelation establishes the nature of human personhood and intra-human relations, created order structurally reflecting the intra-triune life of union-distinction, albeit in creaturely form.

Just as human personhood cannot be understood outside of a relation to Trinitarian and Christological dynamics, so present and eschatological transformation are also inescapably bound to the same ontology and epistemology. Maximus seeks to properly integrate the anthropic transitions of "original-middle-end." He focuses on the understanding that human destiny is inseparable from God's original purpose in creation, there being a collapse of creation and fulfilment, beginning and end, with protological creation being seen to wholly contain its eschatological purpose. Given that God's relation to humanity establishes personhood, it also determines the purpose for humanity, and the way through which persons are able to be formed. In being created in the

image of God (and later recreated in the image of Christ), the elect are to fully reflect the divine image in the eschaton.

The Triune God is the ground of all human experience. There is an inherent divine-human relationship established by virtue of God creating humanity in his image. God has formed creatures in his image through his Word, in congruence with the nature of intra-triune relations. Therefore, he is inherently able to communicate to them rationally and objectively, so they can grow in the knowledge of him, respond appropriately, and increasingly reflect his image to others. The personal self-revelation within the Trinity is the ground of the epistemological relation between God and humanity. Although mind-to-mind communication is central to this relation, as it is in the triune life, a broad epistemology involves more: namely, love expressed in presence and action.

The divine-human relationship is both perichoretic and subordinate in nature. Maximus understands it in terms of perichoretic union and distinction. Although remaining distinct from God, persons are in relation to him based upon necessity, while God remains wholly free and self-sufficient. Being an expression of God's nature, kenotic self-revelation is demonstrated in his *ad extra* activity. This brings forth the divine likeness in humanity, the *imago Dei* becoming the ground of divine-human relation, and the intrinsic structure of human personhood. Such provides the grounding for persons to participate in the dynamics within the triune life, both in terms of present existence and eschatological fulfilment.

Given its absolute dependence upon the divine, human personhood can have no other point of reference than the triune life. While God's being is wholly established by intra-triune relations, humanity derives its being wholly from the divine being. Given that the nature of mutual self-giving here is different from that of the divine relations, the nature of divine-human relation does not in the strictest sense reflect the divine life, for that which is reciprocated is not identical. Nonetheless, it cannot be seen as being anything other than perichoretic, for it is solely established upon, and sustained by, the divine movements. The nature of mutual self-gift within the divine-human relation is different from divine relations

simply because human personhood is intrinsically dependent upon divine giftedness, while the Trinity is only dependent on its intra-relations being the self-existent cause of its own being and communion.

The divine-human relation is grounded in the presupposition that God is wholly transcendent, over and above creatures. All of human life is inherently under divine sovereignty and authority. Packer focuses on the need for persons to reflect the moral characteristics of God in congruence with the divine law in Scripture. Although knowledge of God is not only given through linguistic speech, the imperatives of the law can be seen to have a specific role in enabling divine nature and human sinfulness to be made known. Humanity is created to worship God and to reflect his image in perfect righteousness, something that was exemplified by Christ in his example of obedience to the Father. While Christ lived in complete submission to the will of the Father, the intra-triune life involves its own distinct form of subordination and *perichoresis*, i.e. there remains equality of nature, self-sufficiency, etc.

The structural divine-human relationship has to be seen in relation to the person of Christ. For Maximus the relationship between the two natures of Christ is the paradigm for the relation between God and creation. He sees the incarnation as enabling the reconciliation of God and created order, Christ being the eternal mediator, based upon his own two-fold nature. The dialectic of union-distinction is present in the relation between God and humanity. Such can be seen as a structural perichoretic relation, a mutual exchange of properties of equal reciprocity in congruence with the interpenetration between the two natures of Christ's person. Christology must also be seen in relation to the union and distinction within the Trinity, the divine Logos being the unifying element within the multiplicity of physicality.

The divine-human relation is established through the revelation of the Logos, and foreshadows the fullness of the archetypal divine-human relation that is exemplified and fulfilled in the revelation of Christ, the begotten Word. Given that Christ is *a priori* to (and the fulfilment of) creation, a protological framework

cannot be understood apart from him. Christ demonstrates the fullness of the divine-human relation, fulfilling what the created world is to be like. Maximus rightly highlights the Christological structure of creation, although more nuance is required to recognise the additional redemptive ground alongside this, i.e. union with Christ. He focuses on everything in creation being in union-distinction because of the incarnation. An effectual view would focus on this structure as being anticipatory of union with Christ, rather than being "incarnational" in nature, given that the incarnation is only implicit in creation.

The intra-self also has to be understood as being in proper relationship, i.e. in the relation within the inner faculties, and the relation between inner and outer faculties.[503] The inner faculties of both rationality and affections can be seen to be in perichoretic relation. Maximus gives particular attention to the activity of the heart, in terms of persons needing to approach God with the core of their whole being, without simple subordination between the intellect and the affections, i.e. the rational and a-rational. The inner-outer relation cannot solely be understood to be hierarchical, because reciprocity of some kind exists between outer physicality and the rational faculties.

Maximus points to the need to develop a framework for anthropology in which persons reflect the tension of union and distinction, through a perichoretic mutual penetration and exchange. As well as there being a mutual dependence between the two, there is at the same time the need for a proper subordination between inner-outer faculties, in congruence with the divine-human dialectic. There is a need to speak about the ascendancy of the inner faculties over the outer faculties, and also to recognise the perichoretic relation between the two, there being the co-existence of these two realities without contradiction. This all sets up a proper understanding of the human person for the purpose of transformation.

In terms of the intra-human relation, Trinitarian ontology provides the fullest expression. Persons are created to reflect the divine nature in community,

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[503] Varied language is used in Scripture to delineate the intangible inner core of human expression (e.g. mind, will, emotions, heart, etc.) from outer physicality, though all parts within the whole person are recognised as being united.

revealing the character of God to others, and expressing the triune life in terms of a proper relation between individual and social dimensions. Maximus' thought suggests a dialectical relation between the two, affirming an inherent individuality and unity in creation. This principle determines the nature by which persons are to live and be formed, individuals being bound up in relation to others. In essence, everything in creation contributes to the being of everything else, enabling distinctiveness and union without contradiction, each being mutually affirming of the other. The perichoretic nature of human relations wholly affirms distinctiveness, the close relatedness never being to the detriment of particularity. Therefore, persons are able to become more themselves through their relation to others, with their "selfhood" becoming fully established rather than being lost.

Clearly human personhood is not dependent on other creatures in the same way that it is dependent on God. The divine-human relationship is in turn different from the way in which the members of the Trinity are interdependent on each other. Therefore, when speaking of union and distinction in creation, it cannot be expressed in the same way as divine-human relations. A person's central identity is bound up in their relation to God, yet shared humanity binds persons together in a different way. The intra-triune notion of mutuality and particularity is transferable in expressing the perichoretic life; human beings are unique individuals in reciprocating relationships with others. While human beings do not derive their being from their relation to each other, the Trinity cannot exist apart from its own intra-relations. Intra-human relations are brought forth to imitate intra-triune relations because they are a by-product of divine-human relations, where the primary focus is God's giftedness and human receptivity.

Intra-human relations are integral to ontological formation and are to reflect the nature of the divine being. That which persons are to give and receive from one another is in some way a result of their participation in the triune life. Human personhood is brought forth by virtue of Trinitarian activity, and dependent upon the triune life. It is centrally grounded in the Logos, and so inherently interrelated in its diversity. Persons cannot reflect the triune life apart from their relation to one another, for their relation to others is a necessary facet of their own relation to

God. The full realisation of human personhood is dependent upon the perichoretic movements being displayed within intra-human relations, a mutual giving-receiving being needed for persons to imitate the Triune life.

This sets up the proper nature of human relations in terms of how knowledge of God is revealed, albeit in a sacramental form. Packer's focus on the relation between Father and Son means that the *imago Dei* denotes a subordination to the image-maker, with an emphasis on individual obedience and holiness. This emphasising of subordination and individual obedience lessens a need for equal reciprocation. Although a relational understanding of personhood is grounded in the *imago Dei*, alongside ontological equality and reciprocity in human relations, there is the also the need for functional subordination in human relations for the purpose of holiness.

All persons are grounded in relation to God because they have been created in his likeness through the Logos. The *imago Dei* is what constitutes a person as a human being, and so it cannot be lost. The invitation is for persons to engage and participate in a relationship with the living God through obedience to divine truth. Sin is demonstrated when the created world is left to itself without any communion with an uncreated being.[504] In affirming its existence apart from the triune life, humanity becomes ruptured from its inherent union with God and its status becomes elevated. As a result of being created in God's image, human beings are given the responsibility to live in accord with the divine will. Packer depicts sin as being disobedience to the law of God, demonstrating an inability to reflect God's image. In being created in God's likeness, human beings are worshipping creatures continually being conformed to an image of some kind, for good or ill. In denying inherent God-given personhood, sinful habits lead to the construction of an illusionary and distorted self, which contradicts the divine structure present in the *imago Dei*. This rejection of the divine life can be seen as

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[504] For a more detailed study of harmatology, see Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Fallen: A Theology of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

a rejection of a person's own humanity and their need to more fully reflect the divine life.

The possibility of formation is dependent upon persons being able to come to true knowledge of God, albeit only in part. God wills to make himself known to all, humanity having a God-given capacity for true knowledge of him. Therefore, "deformation" would be seen to stem from a suppression and rejection of the knowledge of God that has been clearly revealed in the divine Logos. God has revealed himself in a way that persons can truly know and understand. An effectual approach to Christian formation does not stem from an understanding that undermines the possibility of objective knowledge of God being known, specifically through rational-linguistic means. To reject this would be to accept that persons are unable to be transformed by God, but are instead to live autonomously, under their own authority, with no true knowledge of anything apart from themselves. Given that God is indeed able to make himself known to creatures, they are accountable and able to be formed by that knowledge and to reflect it to others.

In rejecting the divine life, persons become subject to the pursuit of that which cannot give life, i.e. idols.[505] Although humanity is called to engage "perichoretically" with creation, appropriate engagement ceases if persons are not grounded in the divine-human relation, i.e. they come to engage with created order apart from God, without recognition of divine transcendence. In seeking to affirm a life that exists outside of the divine life, the pursuit of idols does not lead to the creation of a new reality, only the construction of a narcissistic illusion. Rather than seeking to be conformed to the likeness of God, they become conformed to the nature of their idols.[506] Any expressions of personhood that stem from a rejection of the "divine ground" would ultimately need to be seen as a simulation of reality constructed apart from God.

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[505] A discussion on the nature of idolatry in Scripture is given in Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Gregory K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).
[506] This understanding is particularly demonstrated in Beale, *We Become What We Worship*.

Maximus' understanding of the divine purpose for humanity involves the unification of all things in Christ. He recognises that present reality expresses the fragmentation of parts and divisions at all levels, beginning with the sense of there not being a proper union and distinction in relation to God. Maximus also speaks about the division in the self and of disunity within created order. In view of the inseparable link between divine-human relations, and the interrelatedness of the created world, the distortion of the divine-human relation brings disunity in persons, and in their relation to the world.

5.3.3 Christology and Transformation

This next section will involve outlining the proper Christological ground, which enables an integrated and broad approach. This ground will be seen to encapsulate both the nature of the incarnation and death-resurrection of Christ.

God seeks to bring integration within created order, and purposes for his people to more fully express their humanity by being formed into the image of his Son. The kenotic giftedness that was demonstrated in God's proto-creative activity is present in his redemptive activity, reconciliation being made possible as a result of the Logos being begotten of the Father. Through the revelation of the divine Son, the triune life has been fully revealed in human history for the redemption of humanity. God's self-revelation in Christ is neither intra-triune, nor dependent on human experience as a means of verification. According to the witness of Scripture, it is a fact of human history, being a representation of God's embodied truth in human flesh, both personal and propositional. It is not simply characterised by rational speech, but a holistic expression of the triune life within human flesh, the fullness of objective revelation embodied in human history, demonstrated in speech, presence and act.

The eternal Triune God, who has revealed himself within human history, demonstrates the integration of their *ad intra* and *ad extra* life, the kenotic humiliation of Christ being expressed as an overflow of the same self-giving dynamics present within the intra-triune life. It is through the unconditional donation of the kenotic Logos that God reveals the fullness of his image in human

flesh (the *imago Christi*), causing a hypostatic union of divine and human natures. God's self-revelation in his Son is *the* expression of his will for humanity, and *the* means through which he inaugurates a new humanity. Persons are now able to be recreated into the image of Christ, in the same way they were created in the image of God. In this sense, the destiny of the redeemed is irrevocably entwined with the destiny of Christ.

Packer's understanding is that Christ's divinity is demonstrated in his law-fulfilling life, Christ being the obedient Son in subordination to the rational-linguistic word of the Father. In contrast, Maximus develops a whole theological system integrated around the Chalcedonian commitment, making the divine-human dialectic central to the Christian life. The dialectical ontology of divine-human interpenetration is seen to be what integrates, the perichoretic concept providing a dynamic way of exploring union and distinction within the divine-human relationship. As God expressed in human flesh, Christ becomes the mediator between God and man. Given that formation is grounded in this divine-human encounter, the Christological dialectic is central to the formational process.

The triune life is also expressed in the life of Christ. In the relation of the Son to the Father, there is a clear expression of intra-triune gift-giving of *perichoresis* alongside subordination. Given that the life of the Trinity becomes sacramentally demonstrated in the person of Christ, he expresses a model for human life in which humanity is called to participate. In Christ's life, his use of rational-linguistic truth is irreplaceable in the process of making disciples. However, discipleship can also been seen to involve the need for representation of the divine image, with Christ's exemplar expression of a law-fulfilling life. Christ is seen to reveal the Father by living and teaching in community, wholly showing forth the knowledge of God in speech, presence and act. Such revealing of God in the context of relationships becomes the paradigm for enabling formation.

Christ came as the eschatological forerunner of a new humanity, which is predestined to be conformed to his image. His salvific work demonstrates the full revelation of the triune life in human flesh, with the invitation given for persons to

participate in Trinitarian dynamics. The death-resurrection dialectic needs to be understood in relation to both the Trinity and the person of Christ. Christ's salvific work is grounded in his two natures, being an act that is both fully divine and fully human, in order to integrate all things in himself. The full demonstration of the triune life in Christ's death and resurrection is also the means by which humanity is able to be reconciled to God and participate in this life. Such participation in the life of the Trinity enables persons to become more fully human. Humanity does not participate in the intra-triune life as it is; it participates in the intra-triune life in the context of Christ's salvific work, i.e. within the Trinitarian dynamics of death and resurrection. Consequently, death-resurrection can be seen as the central redemptive dynamic.

The death and resurrection of Christ is first and foremost an expression of intra-triune dynamics, while also incorporating the intra-human relation – the God-man giving himself to both God and man, so that both may be reconciled together in himself. Christ expressed the fullness of divinity and humanity together in his person, becoming a substitute for humanity in his salvific work. He lived in obedience to the Father, which ultimately culminated in his sacrificial and substitutional death on the cross, before being resurrected to new life by the Father. Death-resurrection can be seen as a mutually dependent dialectic, demonstrating the redemptive exchange between the Father and the Son. The obedience of the Son to the point of death was not just a demonstration of individual obedience and holiness under the law; it was also a demonstration of intra-triune love overflowing towards humanity.

Christ is now in his eternal session as the exalted Lord at the right hand of the Father, the mediator between God and humanity. The redemptive Trinitarian activity demonstrated in Christ's death and resurrection becomes the ground for human transformation. In his risen glory, Christ reveals the eschatological image of the new humanity before the Father and towards creation. He is the ground of a person's eternal relation before God. Through being united with him; persons are able to fulfil their created destiny – to be transformed into the image of the Son. It is not a simple participation in the life of God that enables a participation

in the formational worship of the Triune God, but a union with Christ's death and resurrection.

The eternal worship in heaven is characterised by redemptive dynamics that have been integrated into the life of the Triune God. Christ's death-resurrection and subsequent exaltation have established the eternal redemptive life of the Trinity and heavenly worship drama that the people of God are invited to participate in. In Christ's salvific work, intra-triune love is demonstrated as mutual self-gift, i.e. Christ giving himself to the Father (in his death) and the Father resurrecting him to new life through the power of the Spirit. The intra-triune act of death and resurrection is the ultimate revelation of the Triune God in Christ, making it possible for humanity to enter into union with him. The call is for persons to live within the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics of the triune life, which not only initiate "positional salvation" culminating in the eschaton, but also lead to the possibility of transformation occurring in this present age.

5.4 The Context for Transformation

5.4.1 Positional Union with Christ

The next section moves on to looking at the present context in which transformation occurs. The starting point for present formation is a person's response to the risen Christ, being a response to the proclamation of the biblical gospel. Such is a rational-linguistic proposition that corresponds with God's self-revelation in history, concerning Christ's person and salvific work. Persons are called to respond in repentance and faith in Christ. This leads to initiation into an eternal covenantal relationship with Father, Son and Spirit. In identifying with Christ's death and resurrection, persons are both giving themselves to Christ and receiving him. Christ has become like humanity, as a substitute, in order that his perfect reflection of God's righteousness would be received. In this sense the redeemed can be seen to derive their eternal identity from their relation to Christ, while still remaining distinct persons – a union and distinction being expressed. Being in union with Christ means that persons have died and become new creations, having been given a "new self" in Christ. This may be expressed in perichoretic language, i.e. Christ being in them, and them being in Christ.

Through union with the salvific work of Christ, persons come to be united with the Triune God, sharing in the Son's relationship with the Father.[507] Being in union with Christ means persons are in positional standing with the exalted Christ before the Father, having been justified in order that they may be reconciled with God as adopted children. The need is for persons to be identified with Christ's substitutionary death, which leads to imputed righteousness and right standing with the Father. This is an important legal dimension of the atonement, yet the central focus has to be union with Christ, not simply justification, because justification by the Spirit is the means of coming to be positionally adopted in the Son, and indwelt by the Spirit.

Being "in the Son" means coming into the redemptive dynamics of death-resurrection, and the triune life characterised by subordination and *perichoresis*. While Packer highlights a person's need to reflect the divine nature through a life of obedience to God, Maximus brings out the purpose of salvation as involving integration, leading everything towards a greater union-distinction. Christ's perichoretic relations within the life of Trinity, and with humanity, enable all to be reconciled together in him. The perichoretic relation between Christ and the believer is inseparable from intra-triune relations. Through sharing in Christ, the redeemed can be seen to participate in the Son's eternal communion with the Father, and so fully participate in the life of God while still retaining their particularity.

An "eternity-history" dialectic provides the proper framework in which to ground the redemption and transformation of God's people. Christ is the forerunner, enacting the path for the elect to follow. His entrance from eternity to history, back into eternity, has eschatological ramifications for humanity in setting up the already-not-yet of the new creation. Furthermore, it is Christ's future revelation out of eternity to history that enables the final consummation. The eschatological transformation of the elect is wholly bound up in the eternal inauguration of the

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[507] See Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). Fairbairn brings attention to the central importance of the "life of the Son" for the Christian life.

new humanity brought about in Christ, through union with his life, death and resurrection.[508]

This is not the same as a linear "past-present-future" progression, e.g. justification, sanctification and glorification. Nor does it follow Maximus' incarnational methodology, which does not find its locus in the heavenly redemptive drama. The coming of Christ into history, and his exaltation in eternity, both have eschatological implications for humanity. The present age should also be wholly grounded in relation to this. The central focus and reality for the redeemed is union with the exalted Christ in eternity, this union being the source of present formation, and the assurance that in the future age the elect will come to reveal the glorified image of Christ as he is now.

Given that the redeemed are united with the Trinity, they also come into positional relation to the communion of saints in heaven, being eternally inaugurated into the covenant community. The relation between the redeemed and the Triune God in eternity is both individual and corporate, rather than "either/or." The church is called to reflect by grace what God is by nature. This occurs as a result of the individual's call to union with Christ. Salvation is not something that occurs through the church; it is through union with the work of Christ that individuals are saved, and as a result of this become part of the church. The ecclesial reconciliation is perichoretic in nature; it denotes a positional union and distinction in the body of Christ. Given that there is participation in Trinitarian subordination, the implication is that there are also subordinate roles in the church.

5.4.2 The Nature and Position of Scripture

Scripture exists as a body of truth that God has brought forth in human history, expressing rational-linguistic truths that stand independent of human witness and interpretation. This is a reflection of the way that Christ was revealed in human history, being the fullness of divine truth, independent of human experience.

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[508] Gregory Beale has brought into focus the full implications of the already-not-yet new creational reign of Christ, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*.

The church is given both the gospel and the Scriptures to faithfully steward and confess. Doing so leads to the possibility of formation occurring within the life of the church. Scripture is absolutely central to an effectual understanding of transformational theology, the Christian life being grounded in the knowledge of God given through Scripture. Scripture itself can be understood to be sufficient for facilitating worship of the Triune God, leading to transformation. It is given within the context of the covenant community, who are called to worship God. Scripture can be seen to witness to the nature of the triune life, in order that the church may come to more fully reflect the image of Christ.

Packer places a central emphasis and importance on the authority of Scripture. He believes that without Scripture being inspired and inerrant, there is no possibility of it being able to enable formation. Scripture must be seen as being a witness of God's authoritative truth that persons are to come to understand, believe and obey. The church can be seen to be under the authority of Scripture, as Christ was, while in submission to the Father. Given that Scripture carries full authority, being in submission to it is the same as being in submission to the authority of the Triune God.

The self-authenticating witness of the Triune God to the truth of Scripture (demonstrated on earth by Christ and the Holy Spirit) gives Scripture an authoritative position. Scripture has to be understood in relation to the ontology and epistemology in Christ and the Trinity, both in terms of its nature and function. This opens up possibilities to how it is understood and used within the formational worship of the covenant community. Scripture must be portrayed in its fullest sense, and wholly within the parameters of biblical authority. It forms part of the Trinitarian economy of salvation, being given within the context of a personal relationship with the Triune God. It is given as the law of the Father; Christ witnessed to its divine authority and placed himself under it. In turn, the Spirit is integrated with the Word in a relation that is both subordinate and perichoretic in nature. The Word (Son) alongside the Spirit includes Scripture alongside and Spirit, because Scripture has been given the authority of the Triune God in Christ.

Because of the way Maximus relates Scripture more directly to Christ and the Trinity, his understanding of the nature of Scripture may be seen to allow for a "broader" view of how persons are to engage with it in the process of formation. Maximus understands Scripture as fully assuming a Christological character, containing the hidden Logos. He recognises that Scripture cannot be understood outside of its relation to Christ, because it is seen to be grounded in the incarnation. An incarnational view of Scripture provides a defence of inerrancy, Scripture being seen as both fully inspired by God, and fully human – yet without any error.[509] Such understanding is an affirmation of Scripture's inherent unity-in-diversity, without contradiction, involving a perichoretic relation between divine and human.

Scripture can be seen as being united by Christ's divinity, while also demonstrating multiplicity through his humanity. This understanding sets up a proper incarnational view that sees subordination between divine and human elements in its internal nature, the human element being subordinate to the divine will and intention, hence being without error. The potential for Scripture to transform reflects its own divine-human nature, which is both subordinate and perichoretic. This enables it to perform the divine will of transforming persons to reflect the divine image more, which includes enabling both union and distinction.

Given that Scripture is grounded in a Trinitarian and Christological context, it takes persons beyond an experience that is solely rational. Understanding Scripture in a Trinitarian and incarnational sense means it has a fundamentally rational nature, but does not lead to an experience that is solely rational. It is grounded within the context of a lived relationship with the Trinity, being within a fuller ontology and epistemology.

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[509] See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 434-435. Some parallels may be drawn between the divine-human relation expressed in the incarnation of Christ and the nature of Scripture. Both portray the Word of God as being revealed in human form, as fully objective truth in human history. The incarnation analogy could be used to affirm the nature of Scripture as being fully divine and human rather than being partly both. Both Christ and Scripture are seen to be fully (not partly) true, and (though in human form) not erring. The divine-human relation is not in conflict here, for the human will has become subject to the divine, there is a dialectic where each pole serves a specific function.

Maximus relates Scripture to Christ, seeing it as maintaining both hidden and revealed categories of knowledge in the same way that creation does. Knowledge is given through a lived relationship with God that is beyond, yet in congruence with, the witness of the Scriptures. The purpose of Scripture is to enable persons to participate in the knowledge of the triune life, and to increasingly reflect this. This does not simply involve rational-linguistic knowledge through the biblical text, but also a "direct" knowledge of God through Christ in the Spirit. The nature of God is rational, but not solely characterised by rationality. Therefore, in choosing to address humanity through Scripture, God may also be seen as indirectly addressing persons in ways that are a-rational through his Spirit.

The need is for a full understanding of the nature and function of Scripture based upon its Christo-triune ground, so that it is seen to be effectual in enabling transformation. A rational-linguistic understanding of Scripture that involves a mind-to-mind communication is central to an effectual approach. However, such understanding is rooted within a wider context. The relation of persons to Scripture is bound up in the fullness of their union with Christ and the Trinity. If Scripture is understood within the epistemological context of Christ and the Trinity, then it would be recognised that God is not simply concerned with mind-to-mind engagement, in the same way that a rational-linguistic communication is not the totality of the intra-triune life.

Maximus sets up an understanding that does not negate or suppress rational-linguistic communication, nor make such communication the absolute prerequisite for formation to occur. He sees Scripture as including the character of proposition, without it solely being rational-linguistic in nature. Opening to a full epistemology is understood to mean being open to Scripture addressing all the faculties without division. Perhaps of more importance is that the church's relation to Scripture be in absolute congruence with its relation to Christ and the Trinity, and the internal "incarnational" nature of Scripture itself. The church can be seen to be both fully under Scripture, and also in perichoretic relation to it. Such understanding sets up the most appropriate framework for formation to occur. In this present age, Scripture is in the position of being the mediatory

means through which persons are able to participate in the ongoing "theo-drama," which will lead them towards being formed.

5.4.3 Experiential Union with Christ: Living in the Trinity

The next two sections on "experiential union" will focus on describing the nature of the current theoretical framework that is lived in by the redeemed, namely, through the lens of a lived union with Christ.[510] These are the culmination of the preceding sections of this chapter, and will become the focal context within which a more practical understanding of Christian formation is explored in Chapter Six.

Present transformation is rooted in the prerequisite of "positional salvation" and participation in the life of the Triune God as a result of a person's response to the propositional gospel of Christ. The stimulus for ecclesial worship is continual dependence upon a reception to the Scriptures, of which the gospel is the centre. A focus on the soteriological position is not in conflict with the need for a present realisation of salvation. Packer does not highlight justification at the expense of sanctification, but rather recognises the process of progressive sanctification as being wholly grounded in justification. Therefore, in order to fully affirm the need/possibility of formation, it is necessary to focus on positional union so that persons may live out a proper relation to the Trinity.

The possibility of formation in this present age is dependent upon persons living in the light of eternity, i.e. living out of their eternal union with Christ. The central focus should not primarily be around concepts such as justification and sanctification, but more crucially on the need for persons to live in eschatological union with the exalted Christ. In recognising union with Christ as the central redemptive ground, there is the possibility of formation occurring as an outworking of what is already the eternal reality of the exalted Christ within the triune life. For persons to be conformed to the image of Christ the central focus

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[510] A full discussion of union with Christ can be seen in Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*.

has to remain on their eternal salvific position and the future revelation of Christ that will consummate heaven and earth together in union-distinction.

A proper continuity across the "transitional modes" expressed in Chapter Four (i.e. the progressive stages relating to the narrative of creation and redemption) depends upon them being seen to be in relation to Christo-triune dynamics. A truly integrated framework cannot be centred on the incarnation without the salvific filter of union with Christ. Formation occurs in view of persons being wholly subordinate to that which has stemmed from the spoken Word, namely the anthropological structure in creation via the *imago Dei*. It also occurs through persons living in union with Christ, by participating in the redemptive heavenly worship, via the *imago Christi*. Therefore, transformation in Christ involves filtering human destiny through this salvific union, as opposed to simply placing persons in relation to God at the point of the incarnation. Emphasis on the centrality of union with Christ stems from recognition that it wholly determines the possibility of transformation in this present age.

Packer recognises that positional union with Christ is foundational to the possibility of transformation. The basis for a transformed life is grounded in the substitutionary work of Christ, and the subsequent definitive standing of persons reconciled with the Triune God. Consequently, in this present age, central focus is to be on the risen Christ at the right hand of the Father. Based upon rational-linguistic communication of the propositional gospel, persons are called to continually respond in repentance and in faith towards the exalted Christ – turning from self and looking to him. Eternal fulfilment is seen in the full realisation of union between heaven and earth, the redemptive "theo-drama" in eternity becoming fully outworked in history. Transformation in this present age is wholly related to a redemptive union with the risen Christ, who demonstrates the fullness of the image of God. This becomes the absolute ground of present formation because it is the ground of a person's union with the Triune God.

Experiential union is not about "incarnational" living. The eternal covenantal union with the exalted Christ is the redemptive centre, not the incarnation. Union

with Christ means identifying with both Christ's life and his salvific work. It is the determining factor for the outworking of sanctification in this present age, looking to the eschatological revelation of the exalted Christ. A person's position in Christ is on the basis of both Christ's law-fulfilling life and death-resurrection, both of which set out the transformational pattern that God's people are called to follow. Progressive transformation into Christ's image occurs as persons focus on the exalted Christ in order to identify with his death and resurrection and follow the example of his obedience to the Father.

Given that the redeemed have been adopted in the Son, they are able to participate in the intra-triune life. In the context of redemption, this dynamic enables them to be progressively transformed into the image of that which they are in communion with, while still retaining their own particularity. Persons are formed as they live in the life of the Trinity, within the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics. As adopted children, the redeemed are called to imitate Christ in terms of following his obedience to the will of the Father, fulfilling the law of God revealed in Scripture through dependence on the Holy Spirit. Packer recognises the work of the Holy Spirit in the illumination of the Scriptures to the mind, and in enabling persons to walk in obedience to what Scripture teaches. The indwelling Spirit is clearly the primary agent in present formation.

Worship towards God involves a participation in the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics within the triune life, leading to transformation. The redeemed participate in the life of the Trinity through union with Christ's death and resurrection, in the perichoretic dynamics of self-giving and receptivity. Packer sees the relational life of the Trinity as a model of the Christian life, the presence of giving and receiving in the triune life suggesting the structural shape of a person's fellowship with God.[511] The Trinitarian notion of mutual self-gift can be assimilated with the death-resurrection dialectic, which expresses a person's participation in the sufferings and glory of Christ.

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[511] Packer, *18 Words*, 186.

The need is for the redeemed to live within the redemptive dynamics of death-resurrection, as part of the Trinitarian drama. Such participation implies an "exchange life," where the believer continually gives up their life, and receives their true self in Christ – while still remaining themselves. This requires the continual surrender of the person to God through "carrying their cross," a notion which is entwined with their ability to experience "new life" in their daily walk. The ongoing centrality of the dialectic between death and resurrection is the redemptive dialectic within the triune life that can be seen to be forming human life in this present age.

Scripture is to have a central place in the divine economy of present formation, on the basis of there being a lived covenantal relation to the Triune God. Without the witness of Scripture, there is no authoritative revelation of God, no means of facilitating the worship of God within redemptive dynamics, and consequently no possibility of authentic transformation. Persons come to know the self-authenticating objective knowledge of God through a lived experience of the triune life, by the Spirit. The Spirit's primary function is to witness to the Son, and subsequently, to also witness to Scripture. The central external authority is the knowledge of Father and Son through the Spirit, yet knowledge is also witnessed to and transmitted, in an authoritative sense, through the Scriptures themselves.

The redeemed are able to more fully participate in the triune life through engaging with Scripture. Scripture enables persons to live within the fullness of the "theo-drama," being an authoritative witness to the experience of life in the Son, helping to facilitate a lived knowledge of the Triune God. Objective knowledge within the triune life is grounded in a lived "personal relationship" with God, which is not wholly governed by mind-to-mind communication. To engage with Scripture is to seek participation in the dynamics of the triune life. The marks of a suitable approach to engaging with Scripture are to be formational, in terms of involving subordinate-perichoretic dynamics. Engaging in a perichoretic relation to Scripture through dialoguing with the text is what forms. This relation is wholly subordinate, not simply perichoretic. Persons are to follow Christ in his submissive obedience to the law that is revealed in Scripture, all

through the power of the Spirit. Therefore, the church is both fully under Scripture and in perichoretic relation to it, the outworking of this subordinate-perichoretic engagement being what enables formation to occur in the truest sense.

Packer recognises definitive salvation as occurring solely through faith in the salvific work of Christ. However, he is clear about the process of sanctification being synergetic in nature. Through being in Christ, present formation is seen to depend on the nature of a person's active response to divine self-revelation, the relation between divine and human being one of initiation and response. The dialectical movement between divine and human activity is perichoretic, while at the same time humanity is in submission to the divine. While definitive salvation is solely dependent upon a faith response to the rational-linguistic communication of the gospel, present formation requires the necessary active response of worship, which persons are to perform from the position of faith in Christ's salvific work. Such a response requires dependence on the Spirit; the understanding being that with the proper reception to revelation comes the power to respond to it.

A Christological understanding of transformation is strengthened by exploring the ramifications of Maximus' understanding of the deification of the whole person, in terms of the dialectical (union-distinction) relation between divine and human. Maximus speaks of the relation between divine and human activity through means of the incarnation. The kenosis in the incarnation is understood as divine action, while human co-operation with this grace is the necessary response. For Maximus, there is a perichoretic relation between the two wills, which is in congruence with the two natures of Christ. This means that all is seen to work together in the process of transformation, rather than being seen to be opposed. Divine and human activity can be seen as being in dialectical tension, so that formation occurs by both grace and human effort.

In acknowledging Christ as the representation of the fullest expression of human personhood, there is a necessity for persons to become more fully human by expressing God's life in the fullness of their humanity. The incarnation, as

understood by Maximus, demonstrates God's concern to transform the whole of human life and the need for subordination to divine action. Though there is a perichoretic relation between the involvement of the divine will and human will, there is also a necessary subordinate relation. For Maximus, divine activity involves the movement of Logos and divine energy in creation. As in Christ's person, there is the demonstration of the human will and the divine will, a dialectic of union and distinction between the two co-operating together in a continual interpenetrative movement. Formation becomes possible as persons co-operate with the divine activity through the submissive response of the human will.

5.4.4 Experiential Union with Christ: Personhood and Community

This second section on "experiential union" will look at the present nature of both "intra-self" and "intra-human" relations in relation to union with Christ. To begin with, there is a need to affirm a proper understanding of the inner faculties, and the relation between inner and outer faculties in the process of formation. This involves recognising how the whole self interacts within the process of formation, in congruence with an integrated anthropology, rather than neglecting or overemphasising the rational faculties, a-rational faculties, or outer physicality.

Packer points to the need to recognise that the inner faculties have ascendancy over the outer faculties, with the subordination of all to the intellect. He sees the will of God for humanity as being to express the divine image by following Christ's example of obedience to the Father. For Maximus, Christological dynamics denote the need for participation in a dialectic between divine-human and intra-self relations, so that persons may move towards deification. In this sense, physicality is seen to be fully involved in formation, through the mutual penetration between soul and body. Maximus points to an integrated relation between the mind and the affections, and between (what he understands to be) the soul and the body, all based upon a perichoretic reciprocal nature, not simply a subordinate one. He focuses on the need for a proper integration in the self, involving both union and distinction.

Transformation is dependent on dialectical ontology both within the inner faculties, and within the person as a whole. The process of formation is "incarnational," only in that it involves the whole self in relation to everything. Maximus provides a model that helps to recognise the need for the self to be integrated in the process of formation, by means of a relation to both God and creation. Persons are formed through the movement between both dimensions of the self as they relate to both God and the created world in dialectic. The relation between inner and outer faculties is not simply hierarchical, in terms of outer physicality being in subjection to rationality without reciprocity, the perichoretic dynamics are also present.

Through walking in union with Christ, persons are able to experience the triune life, and live reconciled with the covenant community. Though persons enter into union with Christ as individuals, the expression of this union is only realised in community, therefore formation is dependent upon the communal dynamic.[512] In this present age, the focus is on the church needing to participate in, and witness to, the life of the Trinity through worship. Persons come to reflect Christ and the triune life by responding to God in community. More precisely, there is a need for the right relationship between self and other in the process of formation, based upon a participation in the triune life. It is important that the proper focus on relationships in formation is highlighted in order to avoid an overly individualistic approach. Ultimately, the call for the divine image to be reflected in persons is a communal call; the need is not only to individually reflect the image of Christ by expressing the moral attributes in a fully human life, but also to reflect the nature of the Trinity (the *imago Trinitas*) as the church.

Through union with Christ, the redeemed community participates in the eternal heavenly worship within the life of the Trinity, and as a result is able to

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[512] The fundamental importance of community in Christian formation has been explored in Whitney, *Disciplines Within the Church*; James G. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); James M. Howard, *Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification: An Exploration into Community-Based Transformation Within Pauline Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); James C. Wilholt, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); James W. Thompson, *The Church According to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

increasingly come to reflect Christ's image towards one another. There is a need for persons to demonstrate the relations of the Trinity in a Christological way, the ecclesial relations coming to greater reflect the divine relations sacramentally. The church is to image the Trinity, being characterised by subordinate-perichoretic dynamics, for this is what brings formation. The need is for a dialectic between community and individuality in the process of formation, to emphasise individual obedience in subordination to God, and also to focus on the importance of reciprocity in community. In participating in the triune life, the people of God are seeking to embody Trinitarian dynamics and so reflect the glory of God.

A proper focus on the individual-social dimension of the Trinity would remove overemphasis on subordination and individualism, which weakens the need of equal reciprocation in relationships. The process by which formation occurs is essentially a communal one, yet there is also a need to emphasise individual roles. There is a dialectic between a person's relation to God, and their relation to the communion of saints, yet at the same time a relation to others is subordinate to a personal relation to God. Maximus' emphasis is on the need for the church to express union and distinction, expressing both individuality and community. The life of community is central in formation, yet at the same time the individual's personal obedience to God, as emphasised by Packer, is also an important focus.

The individual-social relation is realised through imitation of the divine *perichoresis*, with persons bringing forth the divine life in their relation to one another. In doing so, they participate in the redemptive activity of God, reciprocally mediating his unconditional love. The notion of kenotic gift towards others can be seen to be an empowering act – gift-giving that simultaneously affirms the divine image in both the giver and receiver. It is this kenotic activity that enables persons to be in a state of receptivity towards others, so becoming fully able to receive the gifts of God. Ultimately, reciprocation of perichoretic movements within intra-human relations allows God to progressively transform persons in such a way that they become more distinct and more united to both God and one another. The sharing of divine gifts in community leads to mutual formation, enabling persons to be formed as they seek to reflect the character of

God to one another. In the same way that the eternal triune being is realised by intra-triune revelation, so intra-human expressions are integral to the formation of persons, so that they grow more towards reflecting the character and nature of the Triune God.

The church is to participate in the worship in heaven; such is to dictate the structure and substance of earthly worship in this present age. The "social Trinity" is to be expressed in ecclesial life through the presence of intra-triune giving and receiving.[513] This involves a present participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, which means sharing in the giving-receiving of life within the drama of heavenly worship in order to more fully reflect the knowledge of God to others. A holistic understanding of the Trinity needs to be revealed in the church, divine knowledge being expressed in both love and rationality. For Maximus, Christological dynamics suggest an understanding of the knowledge of God that is both hidden and revealed, as apophatic and cataphatic. Persons are to reveal the knowledge of God to one another, forming both self and other, while leading all to a greater knowledge.

Within the life of the church, persons are formed through gift-giving, not only in ways that are rational and verbal; but also through that which involves presence and act. Formation occurs through both giving and receiving, and involves different expressions of the knowledge of God. Although rational-linguistic communication fulfils a specific function, imitation of Christ involves the sharing of both the revelation of word (teaching) and image (lived example). As persons grow in their knowledge of God, they are able to live as disciples and progressively come to express Christ's likeness towards others. For formation to occur, the dynamics of subordination have to be rightly present in the life of the church. It can be argued that God-ordained expressions of leadership/authority and subordination are clearly evident in various contexts throughout Scripture,

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[513] For a more detailed discussion of the "social Trinity" in relation to human personhood, see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2001).

and are ultimately seen within the intra-triune life itself.[514] This being the case, the perichoretic dynamics within the church must also allow some function for subordination in terms of leadership modelling the triune life to others.

In participating in the triune life, the church can be seen to be subordinate to the worship occurring in heaven. This participation provides the context for earthly worship that is both "gathered and scattered." "Gathered worship" can be seen as being a microcosm of the Christian life, demonstrating how all of life is to be lived. In the same way, speech, presence and act are to be demonstrated in the gathered setting; they are to correlate to what occurs within the scattered context. These elements may also point towards the worship in heaven. Both "gathered worship" and "scattered worship" are in subordination to the heavenly worship of the communion of saints within the triune life. At the same time, worship that is scattered is in subordination to worship that is gathered, while both are in mutually dependent perichoretic relation.

The formation occurring in the lives of the people of God is to happen in an ecclesial context that is both "gathered and scattered." In participating in the "sending" of God, the "scattered church" is to be formed through its lived witness, while also inviting others into communion within the triune life. Packer does not focus on the importance of the scattered context, in terms of formation occurring within vocational roles, so the transforming "means of grace" are largely seen to remain within the context of individual and corporate worship setting. It is necessary to correctly appropriate the purpose of the gathered context and not disassociate God's transforming grace from the scattered context. Given that both contexts are grounded in relation to heavenly worship, in a scattered context the emphasis still remains on worship and formation, the church seeking to be formed in order to reflect God's glory to the world. While persons can be seen as being positively involved in cultural preservation, this is not the redemptive

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[514] One example being in the First Epistle of Peter, where the themes of authority and submission are evident throughout. With regard to functional subordination in the Trinity, see John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28; Philippians 2:6-11.

transformation of society.[515] However, when vocational work is done as worship, everyday activities become redemptive for the subject, for they are being done towards God for his glory.

Given that Christian formation is grounded in structural anthropology, it is not something that is bound to a specific context, but rather something that occurs within a constant narrative. The "scattered worship" of the church in society brings its own formation, the experiences within everyday life and activity within societal roles having the potential to form the subject. Given that the centre of the divine will is for God's glory to be revealed through his church (as it reflects the divine nature), the principle imperative is not the surface (and temporal) "transformation" of an unredeemed society who do not willingly submit to the reign of God. The central purpose within vocational roles is to worship God, reflect his glory through the displaying of his characteristics, and invite others to follow Christ as his disciples.

A rational-linguistic perspective focuses on the verbal communication of the gospel as the prerequisite to salvation and subsequent transformation. Christian formation can only truly happen when persons receive the gospel and come into covenantal relationship with God and his people. The only position from which true transformation can be seen to occur is from within the community of the redeemed, through union with Christ. Maximus specifically focuses on the church gathering as the place of transformation, while seeing the gathering as a symbol of the whole world, and a symbol of human person. The need is for the redeemed to be a sacramental witness through presence and enactment, to reveal God in their humanity. This witness is not just to be seen in gathered symbols, but also in the

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[515] An emphasis on societal transformation is seen most notably in the Neo-Kuyperian model of cultural engagement, see William D. Dennison, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (1999); Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); James Eglinton, "To Transform and to Transcend: The Neo-Calvinist Relationship of Church and Cultural Transformation," in *The Kuyper Center Review: Volume 3 – Calvinism and Culture*, ed. Gordon Graham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). See also David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). VanDrunen critiques a view of Christianity and culture that focuses on the redemption of earthly society.

sacredness of the lived narrative, which is demonstrated in a daily obedience to the divine law. The worshipping church is called to be a witness to Christ and the triune life, serving as a sign of the future age by revealing God's glory to the world.

In seeing the "social Trinity" as a model for the church, parallels can be drawn. Firstly, in terms of exclusivity, based upon the unique nature of their intra-relations, and secondly, in terms of inclusivity with regard to their missional nature and outflowing. As "gathered and scattered," the church is to demonstrate the triune life as a sacramental community. The focus is always to be on expressing the worship within the triune life. The church is called to proclaim the gospel to the world, inviting persons to respond in order that they may be reconciled with the Triune God, and become part of the covenant community.

The act of mediating the divine life may be seen to involve the church drawing those who are outside into the unceasing community of God, through their witness to Christ in speech, presence and act. Though ultimately, the possibility of Christian formation occurring depends on the propositional gospel being verbally expressed by the church and responded to. The church participates in Christ's present role of mediating between God and created order. Through being in Christ, persons are called to reconcile humanity to God, and to itself, unifying all opposing poles in themselves. The need for such integration is wholly congruent with what it means to be transformed into the image of Christ.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the first part of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology as a result of the discussion and conclusions in Chapter Four. There has been an outline of a propositional framework for a common, coherent, integrative and broad approach, rooted in a rational-linguistic centre. This has involved constructing a synthesis that is internally coherent, and focuses on the connectedness and cohesiveness of the "whole," rather than on any individual "part."

In providing a broad outline, the purpose has been to express how different theological categories laid out in Chapter Four are held together in a unified way. The outline provides a suitable framework within which to properly integrate the broad scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, without demonstrating bias. It is a framework describing common characteristics and underlying principles of an integrated transformational theology. In the conclusion at the end of the thesis, all deductions and implications will be expressed, based upon the model provided in chapters five and six.

The starting point of the expressed model is the intra-triune life, which is characterised by both subordinate and perichoretic dynamics. Firstly, there is the expression of subordinate relations, most notably in terms of Christ being subordinate to the will of the Father. There is also the demonstration of loving relationships characterised by perichoretic giving and receiving, which enables both union and distinction.

Given that all Christian formation occurs within physicality, it is Christo-triune in character, not simply Trinitarian. The triune life has been revealed in Christ, who came demonstrating the fullness of the divine image in human flesh. He also came demonstrating a perichoretic relation between the two natures, with his humanity being subordinate to his divinity. Christ has also been revealed as the obedient Son, demonstrating his divinity on earth through his perfect law-fulfilling life. It is participating within these Christo-triune dynamics that enables persons to be formed more into the image of the Son.

The death-resurrection of Christ has been put forward as being the central redemptive dynamic that the people of God participate in, given that it represents both the dynamics of Christ and Trinity together. Christ's death and resurrection can be seen as the sacramental expression of Trinitarian redemptive dynamics, and the fullest intra-triune expression of subordinate-perichoretic dynamics, which persons are called to participate in. While Christ's obedience to the point of death was a demonstration of individual obedience to the Father, it was also the fullest demonstration of intra-triune love. What is required is for persons to

live in union with Christ, identifying with his death and resurrection. This denotes both giving-receiving and subordination.

Through living in union with the risen and exalted Christ, persons participate in the relationship that the Son has with the Father, through the Spirit. This involves partaking in the redemptive heavenly worship within the Triune God, which enables the possibility of transformation. Christian formation is wholly orientated towards an eschatological vision already inaugurated in eternity – the redemptive triune activity being revealed in Christ's death and resurrection. With this in mind, the goal in this present age is for persons to participate in all stages of Christ's life, identifying with his death and resurrection as well as following the example of his law-fulfilling life in obedience to the Father, all through the power of the Spirit who mediates the life of God to humanity on the basis of Christ's salvific work.

In Chapter Six, the second part of the "proto-evangelical" model will be outlined. The nature of the Christian life will be understood in relation to the framework expressed in this chapter, with attention moving towards how the conceptual dynamics can be more fully lived and experienced. The next chapter will explore the nature of lived experience in appropriate relation to the propositional framework in this chapter. Together, chapters five and six are proposed to represent an appropriate integration of the concerns of theology and spirituality. In doing so, they express an integral understanding of a transformational theology, grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, which points towards the possibility of a common, cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision.

CHAPTER SIX: TRANSFORMATIONAL THEOLOGY II – LIVED EXPERIENCE

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the thesis is to point towards the possibility of a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology by outlining a "proto-evangelical" model. The argument being put forward is that the rational-linguistic centre outlined in Chapter One, provides the proper ground for constructing a cohesive, integrated and balanced understanding of Christian formation, and the fundamental means through which true formation and unity is able to occur. The purpose of the two constructive chapters in this thesis is to develop an understanding of transformational theology that is grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. This current chapter will be largely rooted in content derived from Chapter Five, with reference to selected sections of Chapter Four that were not fully addressed in the previous chapter.

Chapter Five has provided an integrated, cohesive and overarching framework of transformation theology derived from analysis and dialogue presented in Chapter Four. The understanding expressed in the previous chapter is that persons are able to come into the life of the Trinity, through union with Christ, and as a result more fully live within redemptive Christo-triune dynamics. In this current chapter, the experience of Christian living will be wholly understood within the context of the propositional framework outlined in the previous chapter. It will focus on lived experience within the ontological and epistemological dynamics that were expressed. Any experiential or practical description of the Christian life must be explored within these dynamics. Such an approach removes any false dichotomy between the concerns of theology and spirituality.

The soteriological framework already expressed in Chapter Five provides the ground for a dynamic relationship with the Triune God that involves both divine revelation and human response. In this chapter, I will particularly focus on the nature of the human response to rational-linguistic truth within the framework of a *worship* motif, which was central to the dynamics in the propositional framework in the previous chapter, being demonstrated in relations characterised by

subordination and *perichoresis*.[516] Worship can be said to involve participation in the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics within the triune life. It involves persons living in the death-resurrection dialectic, in terms of self-giving and receptivity, and in experientially expressing these same dynamics. Worship is also grounded in the need for obedience to the will of the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The next section will look at the nature of divine knowledge, which occurs as a result of persons being in union with Christ. I will attempt to outline a holistic understanding based upon the broad epistemology already discussed in previous chapters, while recognising the central function of rational-linguistic communication. This will be followed by a more lengthy section exploring the holistic nature of formational worship, with a focus on the nature of communion with God, engagement with Scripture and ecclesiology. In the final section of the chapter, the discussions on divine knowledge and human response will be brought together and explored within the context of the two "ecclesial modes," i.e. within the context of a gathered-scattered dialectic.

6.2 Integral Knowledge

6.2.1 Revelation and Transformation

The possibility of formation occurring depends upon persons being in a dynamic personal relationship with the living God, one that necessitates consecrated worship from the position of union with Christ. Such a relationship involves both a divine initiation and a human response, there being a continual dialectic between divine-human action. I will explore the integral nature of revealed knowledge, while recognising the central function of rational-linguistic truth. As a result of the ongoing divine-human dialectic persons can gradually be formed in

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[516] Others have also highlighted the link between worship and transformation. See Carolyn Headley, *Liturgy and Spiritual Formation* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1997); Peter Craig-Wild, *Tools for Transformation: Making Worship Work* (London: DLT, 2002); Alexis D. Abernethy, ed. *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Paul Bradshaw and Peter Moger, *Worship Changes Lives: How it Works, Why it Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008); Beale, *We Become What We Worship*; Richard E. Averbeck, "Worship and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008); Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom.*

an integral sense, coming to reveal to others the knowledge of God that has been revealed to them.

God has fully revealed himself in history in his Son, so that persons may come to know him, and in turn grow towards reflecting his image, as an act of worship. Such revelation is Trinitarian, wherein the Father initiates and the Son is revealed in the power of the Spirit. In this present age, formation occurs because the church is in union with the exalted Christ as a result of responding to the propositional gospel. Christ is eternally being revealed from heaven, expressing the fullness of God's image for the new humanity. Such will only be fully realised within the church in the age to come. The goal of the Christian life is to grow towards revealing that which has already been inaugurated in the risen and exalted Christ.[517] The focus here is eschatological, given that the possibility of formation in this present age is wholly bound up in the church's relation to the heavenly image of Christ presently being revealed. There is a direct correlation between the nature of a person's relationship with God and the process of coming to reveal his image. Persons are being gradually transformed into the image of the person they are in relationship with. Through living in the "theo-drama," the church is able to come to increasingly witness to divine knowledge within the world – expressing the eternal glory of the exalted Christ.

Given that the goal of transformation is for persons to reflect the image of the divine Son, the central need is for the church to continually seek to engrain Christ-orientated dispositions and virtues, as a result of their response to the propositional gospel. Persons are required to practice virtues that come as a result of them seeking to live wholly orientated towards faith in the risen Christ, living a life of worship within the Triune God. Such revealing of the glory of Christ is the distinctive characteristic of Christian formation. Transformation is the process that involves persons moving away from lives of self-glorification, towards lives of God-glorification, coming to reflect Christ's character and nature, rather than an image they have constructed themselves. This process would necessitate the

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[517] The resurrected Christ can be understood to be the distinctive ground of Christian identity and formation. See Anthony C. Thornhill, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Spiritual (Trans)Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (2012).

formation of the heart (i.e. the core of a person), leading to a person's thoughts, desires, emotions, affections, beliefs, intentions, feelings, actions, attitudes, speech and behaviours being gradually changed to reflect and glorify Christ.[518] It is a process that involves a progressive movement towards the cultivation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

The goal of the transformed life is for persons to reveal both the image of Christ (the *imago Christi*), and the image of the Trinity (the *imago Trinitas*). The means of this occurring is through living within the triune life of subordinate-perichoretic dynamics, and reflecting this within physicality. J. I. Packer emphasises the fact that the central goal of the Christian life involves following Christ's example of being obedient to the will of the Father. Imitating the obedience of the Son is clearly a primary formational act. At the same time, formation has a wholly communal goal: the image of God cannot be expressed individually, but only in relation to others. Notably, Maximus Confessor describes an eschatological vision that fully recognises the importance of integration, with all dimensions of human existence being seen to express union and distinction.

A proper response to rational-linguistic truth has to be understood within the context of Christo-triune dynamics that encapsulate a full epistemology. The nature of divine knowledge being revealed to persons is grounded in the epistemological categories reflected in Christ and the Trinity. Self-revelation begins within the intra-relations of the Trinity, their own mutual self-disclosure demonstrating a complete revelation, and an absolute knowledge of the other. The essential character of triune knowledge and true revelation is personal, being the whole self-disclosure of one person to another. Such would need to determine and fulfil all creaturely epistemology, e.g. being a true knowledge, which is both loving, and rational-linguistic. As a result of faith in the propositional gospel of Christ, the elect are adopted in the Son, into the life of the Triune God. This means the church is grounded within the triune relationships that express an

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[518] The need for transformation to focus on the "heart" is demonstrated in Robert Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013).

absolute objective knowledge of the other. God's self-revelation becomes known to those in his Son, through his Spirit.

Objectivity cannot solely be linked to a specific form of knowledge, or a specific way of receiving such knowledge, i.e. rational-linguistic truth in Scripture. True knowledge is, first and foremost, personal and lived knowledge of God, that he is able to make known to persons so they may reflect his image. Such knowledge can be understood to be both rational and a-rational knowledge, as propositional, yet also knowledge rooted in love. Because such knowledge is wholly personal and holistic, it addresses the whole person and the depths of the human heart. A true knowledge of God is not only possible through a rational communication to the intellect, but also through communication, which is a-rational and not solely linguistic. As well as an initiation and response to rational-linguistic knowledge in Scripture, there is also knowledge of God derived from experience that is congruent with Scripture. However, the rational-linguistic truth in Scripture has the central function in witnessing to the Triune God revealed in Christ, and faith in the propositional gospel is the means through which persons are able to live in experiential relation to the Triune God.

6.2.2 The Nature of Divine Knowledge
In Chapter One, a "proto-evangelical" approach was said to be grounded in the need for the people of God to be faithful to the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. Such is understood to correspond with God's objective self-revelation in human history. This historic "theo-drama," which exists apart from individual human experience, provides the basis upon which present knowledge of God occurs, leading to the possibility of transformation.

Being able to have true knowledge of the transcendent Other is the only means by which there can be true worship, and as a result, the only means possible for authentic ecclesial formation to occur. The transcendent and omniscient God is able to make himself known objectively, in order to save, redeem and restore human life into what it was originally created to be. Without the possibility of any

true objective knowledge of the divine Other, persons are unable to be formed in any Christ-glorifying way. Instead they remain, by means of their own will, wholly unable to escape a self-glorifying trajectory, rather than being recreated in the image of a transcendent God. The present ecclesial task necessitates growing in the knowledge of rational-linguistic communication, in correspondence with God's self-revelation in history. Christian formation necessitates an element of self-transcendence, in terms of persons being moved beyond themselves by means of experiencing true knowledge of the divine Other.

The possibility of an integral view of transformation begins with recognition of an integral understanding of divine knowledge. The Triune God communicates himself in redemptive history, in ways that go beyond rational speech; the "theo-drama" being demonstrated in speech, presence and act. Christ, as the mediator between God and man, expressed the triune life in human flesh, culminating in his death-resurrection and exaltation, and now stands eternally revealed from heaven as the risen Saviour. The church is now called to proclaim the biblical gospel so that persons may be united with Christ and reconciled with the Father, through the Spirit.

As a result of the present rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures (of which the gospel is the centre), the church is called to respond in worship, and follow in Christ's obedience to the Father, through the power of the Spirit. This enables persons to participate in the "theo-drama," and experience a true, full, and holistic knowledge of the Triune God. True knowledge of God comes to those who are in union with Christ, the lived experience of the Father-Son relation being mediated to persons through the Spirit. The present witness of the Spirit is the authoritative witness of the Father and Son, and therefore the self-authenticating ground of all objective knowledge, albeit being in congruence with the witness of Scriptures.

In the same way the Spirit mediates the will of God in congruence with the scriptural witness, he also mediates the power to obey God's will. The procession of the Spirit is the overflowing abundance of triune giftedness that necessitates

human receptivity, with persons being in subordinate-perichoretic relation. A person's openness to God becomes the means by which God is able to recreate his image in them, through his Word and Spirit. This is wholly different from a person's own subjective experience being assimilated with the "internal authority" of the Spirit; for the indwelling Spirit still remains wholly external and transcendent/distinct. The primary function of the Spirit is to witness to the knowledge of the Son, and as a result, to witness to Scripture. Therefore, the central self-authenticating authority is first and foremost, the knowledge of the Father and Son given to persons through the Spirit, which is an objective knowledge-in-union that is witnessed to in the Scriptures.

6.2.3 The Means of Divine Knowledge

This next section will introduce the means through which knowledge of God occurs. The context of a person's relationship with God takes place wholly within physicality, namely, within the context of Christian community and their embodied experience in all of life. The central need is for persons to participate in the heavenly worship within the sacramental context of both an ecclesial and cosmological liturgy. Given that all is grounded in relation to both Christ and the Trinity, Christo-triune dynamics are to determine the nature of the relations within the church and cosmos. The purpose of sacramentality is to help persons to grow towards a deeper knowledge of God.

It is important to recognise the dialectic between apophatic and cataphatic forms of knowledge, which enable the process of formation to take place. This demonstrates participation in a Christological epistemology so upholding the central need for divine transcendence alongside divine immanence. The term *apophatic* would pertain to knowledge of God that is obtained through negation rather than through positive assertions and images, with God being known in terms of what he is not. It indicates that God cannot be fully known or mediated through human concepts/means, instead appealing to "direct" unmediated knowledge. Such is grounded in the recognition of divine *transcendence,* in terms of God being wholly distinct, hidden and other. In contrast, the term *cataphatic* refers to the revealed expression of divine knowledge through positive language,

images and physicality, in recognition that God can be known in some way in human terms. Such appeals to divine *immanence*, in acknowledgement that God is present and united with his creation, with divine knowledge being mediated through human and physical means.

A person's relation to the Trinity determines the nature of the revelation made known to them through engaging with Scripture and physicality, and sets the context for the nature of their response to God. In being made known through both Scripture and physicality, divine knowledge remains both rational and a-rational, occurring within a lived relationship with the Father, experienced in Christ, by the Spirit. Primarily, divine knowledge comes through the authoritative revelation in Scripture. It also comes in a general sense through created order, and in a redemptive sense through the church, who are called to reflect knowledge of Christ as a result of their engagement with Scripture. Given that the church is there to witness to the knowledge of Christ, it is necessary to engage with present ecclesial experience and past ecclesial tradition. At the same time, the recognition is that, unlike Scripture, the knowledge being revealed in the church is not inerrant, or the initial source of knowledge. If Scripture is understood as being given as an objective revelation of God in history, then it can be argued that the present rational-linguistic communication of Scripture is (either directly or indirectly) a necessary prerequisite to divine knowledge revealed through the church. Indeed, knowledge received and expressed through the church is a secondary means, coming as a result of direct or indirect subordination to Scripture.

Given the need for persons to maintain a lived relationship with the Triune God, Scripture is not given as an end in itself, but as a means to facilitate this relationship within the context of the worshipping community. It is to enable persons to move towards a fuller experience of the triune life within community, not simply to be a means towards an individualistic and rational mind-to-mind relationship with God. Given that Scripture is to be used by individuals-in-community within the context of the Christo-triune ontology and epistemology, the nature of the knowledge being experienced as a result of engaging with

Scripture is to be holistic. Although the Trinity is, in itself, self-authenticating, in this present age Scripture is given to the church to witness to the triune life in an authoritative way, as well as being the primary medium through which God communicates himself to his church. This being the case, it becomes the central means of facilitating worship, enabling persons to come to lived knowledge of God and be formed.

It is problematic to focus on the character of God's self-revelation in Scripture apart from the fullness of his self-revelation in Christ, as this would not reflect a proper integration between Christology and bibliology. As the living Word, Christ is revealed in the Scriptures. Like the person of Christ, its divine-human nature is both subordinate and perichoretic in character. The nature and function of Scripture can be understood as being integrated with the life of the exalted Christ, through the Spirit. The role of the Spirit is always primarily to witness to the risen Christ, and as a result, to witness to Scripture also.

Given that the Triune God is behind Scripture, a lived relation to him is the context that determines how Scripture is to function in the church, and how it is to be approached/responded to. Although an effectual understanding would maintain that Scripture communicates rational-linguistic truth (mind-to-mind), such knowledge is made known to persons in the broad context of a living relationship with the Triune God, which is also a-rational in nature. In a personal relationship, the primary characteristic is the sharing of true objective knowledge, of which rational-linguistic communication is central. The use of Scripture must lead to a holistic knowledge of God, allowing a lived experience within the triune life that is simultaneously both rational and a-rational.

6.3 Formational Worship I: Orientation Towards God

6.3.1 The Integrated Response to God

This next section will look at "formational worship," in terms of exploring the nature of a person's present response to God. The possibility of transformation requires there to be a proper relationship occurring between divine initiation and human response (or worship), the relationship between these reflecting the

dialectical relation between divine and human that is fully exemplified in Christ's person. The relationship between revelation and response may be seen to necessitate a perichoretic movement, while also involving the need for absolute subordination to God.

In this chapter, the worship motif is understood as encapsulating the nature of the proper engagement and response to divine self-revelation, which leads persons to reflect the knowledge of God more to others. In the first instance, this involves a response of repentance and faith to the rational-linguistic proclamation of the biblical gospel, in correspondence with God's self-revelation in history. As a result, persons come to live out of union with the Triune God. As already noted, the need is then for an active response of worship, enabling persons to participate in the "theo-drama," and as a result reflect the image of God more in speech, presence and act. Given that the worship of God is grounded in a personal orientation towards the risen Christ, it involves entering into identification with his death-resurrection within the triune life. In participating in heavenly worship dynamics, persons come to live within patterns characterised by both submissive obedience, and a dialogical perichoretic movement.

The rational-linguistic communication of the gospel and the Scriptures is directed towards the human heart – the core of the whole person. Although there is the initial need for rational appropriation, it is not simply directed to evoke a response in a specific part of the self. It is the whole person that is to respond and be changed. Given that the core of the human response in worship involves the heart, the need is for persons to engage with God at the deepest level of their being. The heart contains both the rational faculties and the affections; consequently worship involves the full engagement of both. The whole self is to be orientated towards God in an undivided way. Formation requires there to be a subordinate and perichoretic relation within the inner faculties, so that the fullness of epistemology is present. As a result of rational-linguistic (mind-to-mind) communication, understanding is a central prerequisite to a holistic experience, where there is a loving knowledge of God that is participatory, while also being intellectual in character.

A false dichotomy can be made between the two forms of knowing, in terms of them being unnecessarily split apart.[519] Use of the rational faculties, to understand, is not the only means by which persons come to know and respond to God. The central response of persons to divine self-revelation is not understanding, but faith. The central epistemological goal is for persons to come to know God in Christ, through the Spirit, not simply to remain with a rational understanding about God, but to have an immediate personal relationship with him. Persons are to come to know God in a true and objective sense through faith, in a way that is not altogether conceptual. A "personal relationship" with God does not wholly consist of a rational mind-to-mind communication, and rational knowledge does not only invoke a rational response. However, as already noted, comprehension of rational-linguistic truth derived from Scripture, through the rational faculties, serves the purpose of being the central catalyst by which persons come to grow in the knowledge of God and experience formation.

Given that the person of Christ is the paradigm for the Christian life, the church is called to embody the triune life in physicality, participating in the divine-human dialectic. Transformation involves the full integration of personhood, for the whole self to be involved and be integrated by means of a proper relation to both God and the created world. Although there is the need for the prerequisite rational engagement with rational-linguistic communication, the process of formation involves the demonstration of a holistic response of worship to God, through the intellect, the affections, and the "practice" of knowledge within physicality. Ultimately, it necessitates an integral response to revealed knowledge, and active engagement at all levels.

The essential dialectic in an integral approach is not just of holding together the symbiotic union-distinction between inner and outer faculties, but also in terms of integrating knowledge and praxis, and love for God/love for others. Each of these is in perichoretic relation, yet with the latter being in subordination to the former.

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[519] Esther L. Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 327ff. A holistic approach to epistemology is explored in Steven B. Sherman, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008).

This would suggest that each pole enables and affirms the importance of the other, e.g. practice would help persons to be able to grow in deeper knowledge of God, while growing in deeper knowledge of God would also mean that persons would be able to be more effective in pursuing a virtuous life.

In summary, a person's response to God begins with a response to rational-linguistic truth in Scripture, in which the gospel of Christ is the centre. However, rational-linguistic communication is to lead to a response that is integrative, rather than expressing false dichotomies. Packer focuses on the initial need for persons to respond to rational-linguistic truth, through rational comprehension, which will in turn lead to communion with God and active obedience. Such an approach suggests a way of demonstrating full participation in conceptual dynamics by means of believing, lived experience and practice. Reciprocity between each of these is needed for there to be a balanced formation. However, it is also important to recognise that a proper "knowing" and "being" are required to precede "doing," and to acknowledge that experiential knowledge is to be derived, either directly or indirectly, from an application of rational-linguistic truth in Scripture.

6.3.2 The Essence of Divine Engagement

In response to divine self-revelation, worship involves the orientation of the whole person towards the risen and exalted Christ, which leads to all gradually coming to reflect his image. Of central importance is understanding what enables worship, in terms of cultivating God-ward characteristics and dispositions. The central focus in the Christian life is to imitate the divine virtues by engaging in the proper processes of thinking, feeling and doing. The church is called to live towards the eschatological image of Christ in heaven, an image which is not only the destiny of the elect, but also the means through which they are being formed in this present age. The section following this one will show how engagement with God has to be grounded in physicality, within which the rational-linguistic communication of Scripture remains the central catalyst for formation.

The central disposition that persons are called to adopt is that which enables them to most essentially live in relation to God and engage most fully with him. In broad terms, being able to grow in reflecting divine virtues is based upon being orientated towards self-transcendence, i.e. where persons are moved out of themselves towards God. Without true engagement and true knowledge of the transcendent God, they remain unable to be formed in any meaningful way. The central need in a person's response to God is repentance and faith, where there is a turning away from themselves, and a living towards Christ in absolute dependence. Being able to grow in personal relationship with God is not based upon any individual abilities. This places persons in the position of dependence upon God, needing to engage with that which is outside of themselves, in order to be able to reflect God's glory, rather than glorifying themselves.[520]

Formation occurs in person's life as a result of authentic engagement with the divine. An appropriate response to God involves a participation in the dynamics of worship already expressed, i.e. both subordinate and perichoretic engagement. Such involves an ongoing identification with Christ's death and resurrection. This is characterised by living within perichoretic dynamics of giving-receiving towards God – of persons giving up their lives and receiving their true self in Christ. Subordination is also characteristic of a central response to God. Worship involves the orientation of a person's whole life towards God's will, it means following in Christ's example of obedience to the Father in full submission. A proper response to divine self-revelation does not simply depend on "spiritual practices," or on seeking particular experiences of God, but more centrally, on the absolute need for persons to live a life of faith and obedience.

Worship involves persons sacrificing themselves for the glory of another, i.e. persons giving themselves to God in order that they may come to reflect his nature more. Such would demand that persons continually surrender to Christ, necessitating an ongoing "mortification," i.e. putting to death the deeds of the

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[520] The glory of God in the Christian life is explored in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); David VanDrunen, *God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

flesh.[521] The giving of self includes the need for persons to practice forms of verbal self-disclosure towards God. Central to an effectual understanding of communion with God is the need for rational-linguistic response, most essentially in terms of confession of sin, supplication (i.e. petition and intercession), praise (or adoration) and thanksgiving.

A person's communion with God does not simply consist of what they communicate verbally. Rational-linguistic response to God is rooted in the inner dispositions of the heart that underlie it. Verbal response can both affirm and cultivate inner dispositions, just as it can also be an expression of what is in a person's heart. Therefore, it is neither a secondary or inferior element of communion with God; it simply represents another necessary dimension of it, which serves a specific purpose. Communion with God will in some way necessarily involve verbal expressions made towards him. Underlying this is the central need for right inner dispositions towards God, the focus of the heart being congruent with a verbal response.

Within a perichoretic scheme, responding in worship involves receiving as well as giving. It involves persons focusing on God and being open to receive more of him. The desire to know and glorify God will mean persons will seek to be filled with knowledge of him, and demonstrate openness to the truth. To grow in the knowledge of God, the need is for persons to move towards a true perception of what is being revealed to them, to truly hear and see as God has intended. Such involves the need for persons to engage deeply, in terms of coming out of themselves and being fully attentive.

In terms of "receiving" and knowing God more, the fundamental need is for the orientation of a person's desire and affection towards him. The response from inner dispositions is central to a living relationship with the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. Formation is dependent upon persons forging proper receptive dispositions towards God, which will grow as personal characteristics.

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[521] The importance of mortification in the Christian life has been fully demonstrated in John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

There is the need for persons to be continually and intentionally attentive to God, and to build necessary dispositions and virtues that reflect Christ's own, primarily inner dispositions of faith and love.

Faith and love are inner dispositions of the heart towards God, which may be nurtured by some kind of "contemplative" practice or non-conceptual rumination.[522] Such practice is in one sense an act of obedience, in that it involves the proper orientation of a person's inner dispositions towards God. At the same time, inner dispositions should not be dependent on contemplative practice, as they may be cultivated through various means. Crucially, based upon an orientation towards the eschatological image of the risen and exalted Christ, the need is for persons to adopt the inner dispositions of Christ, which are both the focus and the goal. This is nurtured through a response to rational-linguistic communication.

6.4 Formational Worship II: Scripture and Physicality

6.4.1 Introduction

This next section will focus in more detail on understanding transformation as being grounded in a response to God, through means of Scripture and physicality. Through receptivity to the propositional gospel, persons are united to Christ and called to respond to Scripture within the context of physicality. Consequently, the response (of repentance and faith) to rational-linguistic truth remains the central catalyst for formation, and demonstrates an engagement with the God behind the spoken Word. It is God's means of initiating the ecclesial worship "drama," where persons are able to live within the triune life, which occurs within the context of the church and physicality.

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[522] For discussion on evangelical responses to contemplation, see Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Kyle C. Strobel, "In Your Light They Shall See Light: A Theological Prolegomena for Contemplation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014); Tom Schwanda, "'To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord': The Evangelical Resistance and Retrieval of Contemplation," ibid.; John H. Coe, "The Controversy Over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution," ibid.; Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014).

Transformation is by nature Christological, in the sense that it is grounded in a mutually affirming dialectic between divine and human. Given that persons live as embodied beings, their formation is dependent on God wholly working within the context of physicality. The knowledge of God occurs in the life of the church by way of speech, presence and act. Such firstly depends upon a person's response of repentance and faith to rational-linguistic truth, which is the starting point and catalyst behind the holistic drama.

Maximus points to Christ's mediation as being shadowed in the function of Scripture, creation and the church. Along with recognising commonalities in these three, there is a need for a clear delineation in the specific function they have. In the Christian life, Scripture has the primary place above church and physicality because it is seen as being an authoritative witness. Secondary is that God is revealed through his creation, most crucially in the part of created order that is called to reveal the risen Christ to the world – the church. The church is called to uphold and proclaim the biblical gospel and the Scriptures, for this is the means of initiating worship of the Triune God. Participation in the transformative drama is initiated through rational-linguistic communication, occurring within the context of the church.

This section will look at the nature of a person's engagement with both Scripture and the church within the context of the Trinitarian and Christological framework, characterised by subordinate-perichoretic engagement. The understanding is that there is a knowledge being revealed through that which is physically observed, and knowledge beyond, by means of union with the Triune God. In the process of formation there needs to be a dialectic between the two, knowing God as both revealed and hidden, a knowing that involves both a rational and a-rational elements. Because of this, formation can only be seen to occur by means of persons being-in-the-world-with-God, within a process that involves a dialectic between cataphatic and apophatic. However, the central catalyst behind formation is the rational-linguistic communication of Scripture, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre.

Persons also do things that enable them to cultivate the central dispositions towards God, so that they may be formed. Both engaging with Scripture and physicality are to be a means of enabling persons to grow in their faith and love towards God. Persons are formed as they fully engage with that which brings them out of self-absorption into God's life. Scripture and physicality are the means of enabling such self-transcendence. There is the need for a dialectic, between holding to the physical while also simultaneously holding to that which is transcendent. The earthly engagement becomes a means of enabling persons to be able to grow closer to God, while the nature of engagement in the world also changes as a result of engaging with God. Given that the "direct" unmediated knowledge of God, via inner recollection, can bring persons to "natural contemplation," both are able to lead to the other.

6.4.2 Engaging with Scripture

A lived knowledge of God mediated through Scripture, is in the first instance, possible as a result of a person's response to the biblical gospel, bringing them into a lived relationship with Father and Son, through the Spirit. A lived relation to the triune life is both the prerequisite ground for God's people to come to the Scriptures and the end to which Scripture points. The eternal reality of a lived relationship will present a fullness at the eschaton that requires no further need for scriptural witness or engagement.

Persons engage with Scripture because they are seeking to engage with God, and invoke the inner dispositions of faith and love. Engaging with Scripture is central to the possibility of transformation in this present age. Scripture is given as the central means of facilitating worship, so that persons may come to knowledge of the Triune God, grow in their relationship with him and be transformed. Given that the purpose is to engage with the Triune God, a proper reading of Scripture would occur solely within the context of Trinitarian and Christological dynamics.

The risen and exalted Christ is to be made known to persons through the witness of the Scriptures, by the illumination of the Spirit. Scripture demonstrates an incarnational nature, which may be appealed to as a means of affirming inerrancy.

It is both divine and human, displaying unity-in-diversity in perichoretic relation, but with the human mode being subordinate to the divine. Persons are to respond to Scripture in light of its nature and purpose, engaging with it in order that it may form them. The way in which persons engage with Scripture has to be determined by their lived participation in Christo-triune dynamics.

As persons approach Scripture, the self is not segregated. The reading of Scripture is to be an act of worship that involves the deepest part of the self engaging with God. In the first instance, this occurs through use of the rational faculties, leading towards right thoughts, right feelings and right actions. Persons are to approach Scripture with the heart in order that they may grow in their relation to God and reflect his image more. Though there is the need for a proper reception to divine knowledge for formation to occur, the possibility of such formation is not wholly dependent on the intellectual skill of the interpreter, or on their ability to fully comprehend Scripture, but more centrally on their willingness to know, believe and obey.

Maximus' understanding of the nature of Scripture, as both revealing and concealing, would suggest the need is to approach it in ways that are both rational and a-rational. More accurately, Scripture is to be read in a love relationship with God in Christ, rather than a "spiritualising" of the text beyond the plain reading. In this sense, the text is seen to be able to keep its rational objective function of expressing the singular authorial intent. The text would also maintain its characteristic nature of being both able to both "reveal and conceal," in terms of expressing knowledge of God, both in and beyond Scriptures. There is recognition that the rational truth derived has a specific function that cannot be replaced or subverted, yet is not to be an end in itself.

The nature of Scripture infers that there is not simply the need for a rational response to it, based upon the place and function of the mind. There is a need for the rational faculties to firstly appropriate what God has communicated in Scripture, which will lead persons towards a holistic response, and be the means towards knowing God personally. The possibility of persons being able to truly

know and obey God, and be transformed, cannot solely be dependent on their rational understanding about God, but rather upon their faith and willingness to respond appropriately to divine self-revelation. The central means of a proper interpretation and application of Scripture is most crucially dependent upon a person's relationship with God, the Scriptures being illuminated to the mind through a dependence upon the Spirit. Therefore, there is no proper reading of Scripture without relationship, and no purpose for reading Scripture but for relationship. Knowledge of God through Scripture enables persons to come to know God in a personal way, and to know what obedience requires.

The reading of Scripture is not simply to be an isolated exercise of the individual interpreter; rather, it is to occur within a wider context. The nature of Scripture, and the proper approach to using Scripture, is derived from its relation to the Triune God. A lived relation to the Trinity demands that engagement with Scripture follows the same dynamics. When engaging with Scripture, persons come to the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. In doing so, they participate in the subordination of the Son, alongside the perichoretic relationship that exists. Furthermore, a Trinitarian reading denotes that Scripture is, first and foremost, required to be understood in the context of the Christian community, past and present, rather than being for private interpretation.

A transformative reading is characterised by "conversation" with the text, giving and receiving in a perichoretic movement of to-and-fro, so that the reader may come to "embody" the text as a result of being "in" the text. The emphasis here is on receptivity, and involves the need for persons to have more awareness by going beyond themselves and being absorbed in the text. The continual dialogical engagement should lead closer towards determining what God is saying in Scripture. The purpose of Scripture is to enable self-subversion and self-transcendence, as a result of persons moving towards true knowledge of objective revelation from God, rather than them being over the text (in a wholly subjective sense), and consequently remaining unchanged by it.

Packer's understanding is that God is able to convey truth to the human mind, to be understood and applied. The need is for persons to responsibly engage with Scripture, to properly see and hear, to comprehend what it is saying, to rightly interpret the intended objective meaning through grammatical-historical exegesis and be a faithful witness to what is there. This means there is a need to move towards the divine objective intention, in order to become closer to the original intended meaning of the text. The extent to which this is done limits the extent to which persons are able to change. Persons need to receive mind-to-mind communication from God in Scripture, and to understand the objective meaning. This can then facilitate their communion with God and point them towards a life of obedience.

A Trinitarian reading of Scripture is characterised by a singular meaning in the text, with multiple applications. The possibility of gradual formation depends upon the possibility of being able to move closer to a singular interpretation of Scripture, the task being faithfulness to the original intended meaning that is expressed through rational-linguistic communication. Multiplicity is seen in the text being applied in a variety of ways, not in a subjective interpretation, which reflects the individual will and consequently does not allow formation. Any disagreement over singular meaning does not mean that there is none intended, or that God has not revealed truth in Scripture in such a way that it is clear. Instead, it demonstrates how human depravity can affect a person's ability to know what was originally intended for them to know. The alternative understanding would involve being given to subjectivity, and/or accepting that the divine originator is unwilling and/or unable to clearly communicate himself to his people, so that his words may be consistently understood, applied and united around.[523]

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[523] A robust defence of biblical perspicuity has been outlined in Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); "The Generous Gift of a Gracious Father: Toward a Theological Account of the Clarity of Scripture," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

There is a need not only for persons to seek the objective meaning in the text, but also to reflect upon on it through the practice of meditation.[524] Meditation suggests a need for persons to be active participants in the text, seeking to engage with it with their heart. It is a practice that involves a continual rumination, an incessant practice of attention, necessitating self-transcendence through an absorption into the text. This can lead towards the possibility of more spontaneous reflection on Scripture, rather than simply being a practice that is bound to a specific time and place with the physical text. As well as holding to the text itself, there is the need to know what is behind it. Rumination upon objective rational-linguistic truth in Scripture is to lead to deeper faith and affection towards God, while holding to the rational-linguistic truth.

In living within the Trinity, the call is for persons to imitate Christ's obedience to the law revealed in Scripture, through the Spirit. The need to hear and apply the objective truth that God has spoken in Scripture is foundational to Christian formation. The need is not simply for persons to understand the text, but to place trust in what God has said, and in doing so express faith in the omniscient self-revealing God himself, i.e. demonstrating both reliance upon rational-linguistic truth and on a wholly transcendent being.

It is not simply seeking objective meaning, or adhering to a practice of meditation that transforms, but obedience to God. However, obedience to Scripture would not be possible without each of these already being present in some form. The central focus is not on the practice itself, but rather on the need for obedience to the Word through the power of the Spirit. As a result of continual engagement with Scripture, and submission to it, persons are able to become increasingly conformed to it, being shaped in accord with the will of God. Such formation is to be integral, by involving a renewing of the mind (i.e. a person's understanding and beliefs changing), as well as inner dispositions and outer virtues being cultivated.

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[524] For a study of biblical meditation within a broader theological context, see Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God.*

6.4.3 Transformation and Physicality

The way in which persons live and engage within physicality, namely with the church and created order, is integral to the process of Christian formation. Both of these carry different functions within the divine economy. All created order is in one sense "sacramental," revealing knowledge of God in some way, though not in a redemptive sense. The church is called to progressively grow towards revealing the knowledge of Christ in a redemptive and holistic manner. This occurs as the church places itself under the rational-linguistic truth of Scripture, which is to be a means of enabling persons to worship God. As a result of this, ecclesial engagement will become a means of persons growing in relationship with the Triune God.

All lived experience involves physicality and can be a means of enabling persons to be more conformed to the image of Christ. Given that all human experience is grounded in relation to God, persons are always being presented with opportunities to positively respond to him in some way or another. There is a need for persons to appropriate the "common grace" that is ever present in all dimensions of life, albeit that it is there in a different way than it would be through the Scriptures and the church. Being absorbed in the "world" can, with discernment, be a means of enabling worship, and help persons to grow closer to God, e.g. creation can lead persons towards the transcendent God behind it. While persons may engage with created order in order to grow in their relation to God, their engagement with it is also to be a result of their relation to God.

The central purpose of the covenant community is to worship God through a participation in the triune life, and as a result, reveal the glory of Christ to the world. Individuals cannot reflect the triune life apart from the church, for formation requires corporate dynamics to be present. Rather than being the means of salvation, ecclesial life is to enable persons to worship God and become increasingly formed into the image of Christ. In this context there is the need for recognition of a dialectical relation between a person's relation to God and others, relations to one another being in subordination to a person's relation to God, with there also being reciprocity between the two.

Formation occurs when persons seek to express Christo-triune characteristics within lived experience. The church is called to express the triune life within physicality, as a result of being grounded in relation to the heavenly worship drama. Ecclesial worship in this present age will necessarily be characterised by living in the triune life (in subordinate-perichoretic dynamics) and reflecting this sacramentally. Given that a person's experience of the triune life can only occur in physicality, and through union with Christ, its expression is inherently Christological. The need is for persons to follow Christ in personal obedience to the will of God, and seek to reflect the triune life within ecclesial relations.

Engaging with others in appropriate ways strengthens the individual-social dialectic. In order to express Trinitarian dynamics, there is the need for a dialectic to be held between individual and corporate dimensions, demonstrating a right relationship between self and other. In seeking to maintain this, persons give opportunities for the formation of the other, in that a person's worship and reflection of divine knowledge can lead others to respond in worship to God and be changed. These relations are to enable individuals to be more distinct, and more united to each other, as well as leading to greater possibility of individual obedience. The practice of corporate disciplines does not negate the need for personal devotions. There is the absolute need for personal discipline, for persons to engage in private as well as shared practices. Much of what is practiced corporately may also be practiced personally, albeit differently, and each of these fulfils a specific purpose.

Each pole of the individual-social dialectic is mutually affirming of the other. Persons become more themselves as a result of their relation to each other, while at the same time corporate worship is served by personal discipline and individual obedience. The possibility of reflecting the triune life in community is bound up in the responsibility of each individual seeking to appropriately respond to God themselves. A person's relation to God is one of individual submission, involving the need for proper appropriation of the divine law and obedience to his will, following Christ's example of submission to the Father. The Christian life in community involves loving others as an act of personal obedience to God.

Through participating in the death and resurrection of Christ, persons share in the Trinitarian dynamics of giving-receiving, which is the core of heavenly worship. Within the church, giving and receiving occurs as a result of persons participating in the life of the Trinity, in seeking to express perichoretic movements. In demonstrating God's love to each other, both giver and receiver can experience formation, and become both more united and distinct in their relation to God and others. Christian formation is not an individual pursuit; it is wholly dependent on God working through his church. The need is for persons to engage with others in ways that will allow opportunities for the formation of self and other. All persons are given differing gifts for the benefit of others. This increases to the need for interdependence in the process of transformation.

The focus within the life of the church has to be one that enables persons to experience self-transcendence, so that they live within the redemptive heavenly drama and increasingly express it within physicality. The purpose of ecclesial engagement is to enable persons to grow in their knowledge of God, and to engage with him within the life of the church. It provides the context for persons to express Christ to one another. Persons are called to sacrificially love and serve others with the gifts that God has given them, and to receive God's gifts through others. In everything, the focus remains on the other, the need being for persons to enter into each other's lives and sacrificially minister as an act of worship to God. Proper stewardship can be demonstrated in various ways, with persons mutually using and distributing gifts God has entrusted them with, so that both giver and receiver can enter a process of mutual formation.

Ecclesial relationships are not only to be characterised by *perichoresis*, but also by subordination. Through participating in the subordination within the Trinity, the church is to express this functional characteristic within its own roles, while also maintaining absolute ontological equality. The ecclesial "ministry" already expressed is to be initiated by ecclesial leadership, whose role is to give the call to worship. This involves them leading the way in the sharing of the word and imaging Christ to others, revealing the knowledge of Christ through both doctrine and example. The whole church are then called to respond, both in teaching and

in modelling towards each other that which has been modelled and taught to them, discipling one another through both doctrine and example, while recognising the specific function of each. Persons are to speak the truth to one another, and be open to God speaking truth to them through others. Although persons may come to knowledge of God through both a person's example and rational-linguistic communication, each of these has a distinct function, and the former ultimately has to stem from the latter.

6.5 Formational Worship III: Ecclesial Modes

6.5.1 The Gathered-Scattered Dialectic

In this final section, a broad outline will be given of how God forms persons within the context of the "ecclesial modes," i.e. the context of the church "gathered and scattered." It will bring together previous sections of the chapter and provide more practical descriptions. I will look at how the key elements of divine revelation and human response discussed in this chapter are integrated together within the context of the two "ecclesial modes," where the central call is to worship God.

The redemptive "theo-drama" in history has involved the revelation of Christ, and his subsequent exaltation in eternity as the risen Son. As a result of a person's response to the propositional gospel, they live out of union with Christ, and participate in the intra-triune heavenly worship drama that enfolds the communion of saints. This is the context from which the earthly church engages with God in this present age, in order to be formed more into the image of Christ. This engagement begins with the communication of rational-linguistic truth derived from Scripture, and subsequent response of worship. The worship of the church in this present age can be seen to fit within the two "ecclesial modes" of "gathered and scattered." These two need to be understood in a dynamic relation to each other, based upon their mutual subordinate relation to the drama of heavenly worship. Both a "gathered and scattered" context are to reflect this in sacramental form, albeit by serving two different purposes.[525]

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[525] The importance of an "otherworldly" focus for sacramentality in this present age is explored in Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

Transformation occurs when persons increasingly orientate themselves towards God, and as a result, their lived "earthly patterns" come to increasingly reflect "heavenly patterns." The need is for persons to be able to grow in the knowledge of God through both "gathered and scattered" liturgies, and so increasingly grow in their own reflection of divine knowledge within both of these contexts. The problem occurs when there is a dualistic separation made between privatised/ecclesial worlds and everyday/public life. In reality, the need is to recognise a dialectic between shared worship gatherings and the narrative of everyday life. Given that the gathered setting is (in the best sense) to become an intentional corporate space (under ecclesial governance) that facilitates specific means of grace, then "scattered worship" is to be subordinate to "gathered worship," while each also being mutually dependent on the other. This dialectic challenges all dichotomies, because the central focus is placed upon the person-in-relation to God, rather than on a specific context or means for formation to occur.

The "gathered worship" of the church is to be a microcosm of the whole Christian life, symbolising the nature of a person's lived narrative in concentrated form. The gathered context can be seen to contain certain "means of grace," which fulfils a specific role, of which the scattered context is to be subordinate. Ecclesial gatherings involve specific shared experiences and practices within a specific time and place. Such has a specific formational role, alongside the need for the more frequent practice of personal disciplines in the daily life of the individual. These intentional occasions, whether shared or private, are to determine how the whole of a person's life is to be lived before God.

Although the scattered context may be understood to be subordinate to the gathered, there is also some reciprocity, because the nature of the scattered experience will also inform the gathered experience, albeit in a different way. The formation that occurs through special "means of grace" cannot be separated from the formation that is occurring in daily life. Rather than all focus being on the grace of corporate disciplines, there is the need for the "everyday" to be punctuated by individual disciplines such as personal Bible study and prayer. The

"gathered and scattered" contexts each provide space for persons to be formed as they worship God through an obedient life. The lived narrative provides opportunity for Christian formation, as opposed to simply being the context for "natural" human development. Persons are being formed through various expressions of work, play and rest, through everyday relationships, through crisis and suffering, etc.[526] Although such experiences may be common to all humanity, it is life lived as worship towards God that forms persons more into the image of his Son. While recognising the formation that occurs in the daily narrative, it is important not to overlook the particular value of intentional acts and practices occurring at a given time and place, and not see everything as being sacred/sacramental in the same way. Though everything may be involved in formation, all does not have the same function, place or value in the formation process.

6.5.2 Integrating Revelation and Response

The broad framework in this chapter has been around the dialectic between the revealed knowledge of God and the ecclesial response of worship. This final section will seek to hold these two elements together within the context of the dialectic between the "ecclesial modes" of "gathered and scattered." This will involve speaking about the "theo-drama" in which the people of God participate. As a result of the redemptive drama in history, Christ is being revealed as the exalted Lord, and has established the eternal worship drama in heaven. The rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre, remains the catalyst through which persons participate in the transforming drama on earth. The "theo-drama" involves both the enabling and expressing of worship, leading to transformation to the glory of God.

The starting point is the understanding that God has revealed himself in history, in Christ and the Scriptures. As a result of a response to the rational-linguistic witness of the Scriptures, God is able to be made known to his church within both the "gathered and scattered" context. The role of the church is to facilitate worship as a result of this knowledge, and to grow more in this knowledge so that

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[526] See Ford, *Shape of Living*; *Drama of Living*.

persons may increasingly come to reflect it more. As the church participates in the "theo-drama," and in turn witnesses to the triune life in the world, it invites others in. Both ecclesial and cosmological liturgy is there for the facilitation of self-transcendence; it is to help persons to come to knowledge of God, to engage their senses, mind, emotions and body within both a "gathered and scattered" context. This necessitates there being a rich sacramental experience both "gathered and scattered," in order to be able to facilitate the possibility of a holistic means and process of formation.

What follows will be informed by the content already expressed in this chapter. The purpose will be to explore how previous sections may be integrated together within the context of a gathered-scattered framework. I will outline a holistic understanding of Christian formation that gives a central place to rational-linguistic truth, which is seen as being the means towards an effectual approach. This will involve looking at the response of the whole self in relation to revealed knowledge of God, demonstrating an integral understanding of formational worship. I will speak broadly about the nature of participation in the "theo-drama" rather than defining prescriptive means of formation, in recognition that it is Christ who transforms persons not any specific practice or liturgy itself.

Divine Speech

God has already spoken through his Son in history. In congruence with this, he has also spoken through the authoritative witness of the Scriptures. Through a present hearing of rational-linguistic truth in the propositional gospel and the Scriptures, persons are called to respond with their whole self and participate in the worship in heaven. As a result, they are able to experience the fullness of the redemptive drama on earth, and grow towards revealing the knowledge of God in a holistic sense.

God speaks to his covenant community as it places itself under the authority of Scripture. Though there is a need for God to be "heard" through all that happens in a gathered-scattered context, the underlying catalyst is the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures. Through the position of union with Christ in the

Trinity, a person's relation to Scripture is to be characterised by perichoretic engagement and submissive obedience. Through the present hearing of the Scriptures, persons are to fully engage in what God has already spoken in history. They are called to speak God's Word to him and each another, and to glorify God in all their speech. In every context, persons are called to live in obedience to what has been spoken, in congruence with Christ's submission to the will of the Father.

There is a need for a regular reading of Scripture to punctuate daily life, and for the scriptural reading to be central in corporate gatherings, where persons can respond both corporately and individually. Maintaining an individual-social dialectic is important as persons seek to hear from God through Scripture. While a personal reading of the Scriptures is imperative, hearing the Word within the context of a covenant community that is committed to living under an orthodox interpretation of Scripture, aids in the subverting of individual subjectivity, private interpretation, and traditions that are over and against the original/objective meaning intended by God. In dialogue with past tradition, the people of God are called to come together under the authority of Scripture, and in doing so, guard against unorthodox interpretations that are driven by the human will.

Within both "gathered worship" and personal devotions, there is a need for persons to verbally respond to God in various ways, as a means of expressing and nurturing their faith. Although both shared and private worship may assume their own distinct form and purpose, each can include Scripture being used in a variety of ways, i.e. in reading, hearing, speaking, praying or singing. Both provide a context for persons to express God-ward verbal disclosure, taking various forms, such as confession, petition, thanksgiving, praise, lament, etc. A verbal response towards God is not limited to a specific time, but the aforementioned contexts do present a selected space for it to occur.

The mutual sharing of rational-linguistic truth in the gathered setting is the initial means towards formation. The need is for persons to listen to God through others, in congruence with the scriptural witness, primarily through leadership dedicated

to preaching and teaching. At the heart of corporate worship is the verbal reading of Scripture, and the ministry of the Word, consisting of rational instruction and exposition. Such ministry would include a need for catechising and transmitting truth for the purpose of holistic formation. There is also a sense in which persons need to be open for God to speak in any context, and be ready to speak God's words, in congruence with the scriptural witness.

Divine Presence

The fullness of the divine presence has been made known in history, being revealed in the redemptive drama of the Son and in giving of the Scriptures. Through union with Christ, the Spirit is given to the church and makes God known as persons engage with the rational-linguistic truth in the Scriptures. God's people are to respond as Scripture is read and heard, recognising that truth can only be illuminated to the mind through the Spirit. As persons respond, they can come to bear traces of the image of Christ and the Trinity in a both a "gathered and scattered" context. Formation can then occur as a result of persons continually expressing the divine image to one another.

There is a dialectical relation between the sacramental expressions present within both "gathered and scattered" contexts. The people of God are to know and make known his presence, both individually and corporately. Individually, persons are temples of the Holy Spirit, being called to carry and display the divine presence within a scattered context. The whole cosmos is also "full" of God, albeit in a different sense. Although being-in-the-world is formational, being with God's people for fellowship is to provide a specific "means of grace." The need is for the people of God to reflect his glory to one another, and to see God in others. In doing so, the church collectively comes to increasingly express the image of the Triune God.

Within a gathered context, Christo-triune dynamics can be communicated through both sign and symbol. The actual place of worship and nature of the gathering can symbolise the presence of God. In the gathered context there is the possibility of various forms of physicality being presented to the senses for

engagement, everything being there for the purpose of pointing persons towards the transcendent God and his redemptive drama.

Maximus points to the ecclesial liturgy being tied together with the sacramental nature of both human personhood and cosmological liturgy. The need is for persons to encounter God through a liturgy, found within both the "gathered and scattered" contexts. Most notably, the presence of God is known in the communion meal, which contains symbols that are a "concentration" of the lived narrative. It represents how human life should be in terms of persons being in close communion with God and one another, and also points towards the shared meal as an everyday act. Eating and drinking can involve fellowship and shared acts of "feasting" that punctuate daily life. The whole of creation is, in one sense, "sacramental," so all being-in-the-world is, in one sense, supposed to be "eucharistic." Persons are called to engage with God in the world, with all discernment, recognising that the grace and nature of God's presence outside the church is wholly different from the redemptive presence that is to be made known through the church.

Divine Action

God seeks to act within the lives of his people. Within history God has already acted in the giving of his Son and the Scriptures. In this present age, God acts in his people through his Spirit in the hearing of the Scriptures, in order to shape a person's thoughts, desires, actions, etc. In a different sense, God also acts through physicality, specifically through his church. The need is for persons to participate in divine action, and increasingly come to reflect it. The activities and practices that persons carry out in response to the divine initiation contribute to their formation and the formation of others. Persons are called to do what God is doing, responding with their mind, affections and bodies, seeking to live in congruence with divine virtues. It is the habitual practice of right affections, desires, thoughts, feelings, speech and actions that enables persons to become more conformed to the image of Christ.

God is acting through various means in both the "gathered and scattered" context. In response, all activity that persons perform can be formational in some way. There can be no dichotomy between the "spiritual practices" that punctuate daily life, as special "means of grace," and the continual lived obedience that is required. In a scattered context there is to be obedience to that which God has spoken in Scripture. There is also the need for persons to obey the Word in the private and corporate setting, in terms of the central focus being on following biblical guidelines for both individual and corporate worship.

Given the need for primary commitment to the covenant community, there is firstly a call for persons to give and receive acts of sacrificial service, acts that can be formational for all. There is also a need for persons to see what God is doing in and through others, learning from this and responding. Furthermore, there are "spiritual practices" that may be performed at specific times, whether being things persons do or things that are done for them, which provide a special "means of grace" towards formation. Also important is the performing of ritual acts, in terms of what is done to symbolise and express a participating in the heavenly worship drama, such as the initiation ritual of baptism.

Gathered acts of worship can be seen as being a "concentration" of the activity and work that is to occur in a scattered context. The call in the scattered context is for persons to do everything from the place of their union with Christ, to the glory of God. In being called to carry out specific vocations in everyday life, persons fulfil a variety of familial and societal roles. Though the people of God participate in the same everyday tasks and activities as non-believers, performing these acts as worship towards God gives them redemptive value.

Summation

The enfolding "theo-drama" within both eternity and history leads to the transformation of God's people into the image of Christ. There is a need for an integral understanding in terms of the revelation of divine knowledge and human response. In redemptive history God's presence and activity is seen in his logocentric revelation out of eternity into history – in the giving of his Son and the

Scriptures. The triune life is most fully revealed in the central "performance" of the firstborn over creation. With the image of the risen and exalted Christ being revealed, redemption is inaugurated, and the communion of saints come to participate in the eternal heavenly drama of the Triune God.

The present "theo-drama" involves persons living in Christo-triune dynamics and reflecting them through various means within a "gathered and scattered" context that is personal, ecclesial and cosmological. Rational-linguistic truth in Scripture not only witnesses to the drama, and establishes the nature of the drama, it is the very foundation for persons being able to live within it. The church participates in the fullness of the "theo-drama" through an initial response to rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. Persons are called to respond with the whole person so that they come to express the drama of earthly worship in speech, presence and act within a gathered-scattered context, enabling the gradual formation of the whole person into the image of the risen Christ.

6.5.3 Transformation as Witness

The model being outlined expresses the context for Christian formation as being wholly ecclesial, the heavenly drama only being participated in by those who are in union with Christ, by means of a response (i.e. repentance and faith) to the rational-linguistic gospel. Christian formation is grounded in the heavenly worship of the communion of saints, in continuity with the transformation occurring in the elect at the eschaton. It is understood that the church is called to be transformed for the sake of the world, to be a witness to the eschatological image of the risen Christ, inviting those outside into the locus of redemptive transformation.

This does not mean there can be an absolute disconnect between the redemptive formation presently occurring in the covenant community, and the subsequent influence this may have on wider society. However, it would be inaccurate to use the redemptive category of "Christian formation" to describe any positive change/development that may occur within the lives of those who do not stand within the eschatological communion of saints. Persons outside of the covenant

community may experience God's love and mercy through the witness of the worshipping community, but such is not redemptive transformation in the truest sense. What they experience instead is a redemptive witness through the presence of the church, something that would be beyond the "common grace" experienced through other means.[527]

Any formation occurring in the lives of God's people in this present age is a witness to the image presently being revealed by the risen and exalted Christ, and a sign of eternal assurance in continuity with the eschatological transformation that will occur in the elect. Redemptive transformation in this present age is wholly bound up in a person's eschatological position in Christ, only occurring in persons who have been initiated into the covenant community. Clear differentiation has to be seen between the need for the people of God to be formed by Christ for the sake of the world, and the possibility of change outside the covenant community. If the latter was seen as "redemptive" it would denote a change that is simply "imposed" upon all, as opposed to a true and authentic Christian formation that only occurs through repentance and faith, as an intentional response to hearing the biblical gospel and divine imperatives.

As the "scattered church," the people of God individually carry out a variety of different vocational roles within society, contributing to God's temporal purposes of preserving and developing created order for the common good. The only distinctly ecclesial task in this age is to worship God, and subsequently be a witness and sign of God's coming kingdom. The church is called to witness to Christ, in terms of reflecting the knowledge of God to the world, within both a gathered setting and the lived (scattered) narrative. By participating in the divine "sending," the "scattered church" in the world invites persons to come into the life of the Trinity, and as a result bring them into the community of faith, which is the context for Christian formation, whether it be gathered or scattered.

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[527] A realistic proposal for Christian influence in society, with an emphasis on "faithful presence," is explored in James D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010). See also Horton, *Ordinary*.

The church is called to be a steward of the Scriptures in which the gospel of Christ is the centre. The task of the church in the world is to be transformed more into the image of Christ, filling the earth with the knowledge and glory of God, until God fulfils his purpose in creation, bringing all into subjection to himself at the eschaton.[528] Although the witness to divine knowledge in the world is integral in terms of speech, presence and act needing to be revealed, the central need is for the rational-linguistic proclamation of the biblical gospel, and the response of repentance and faith, so that persons may come into union with Christ and be reconciled with the Triune God.

The process of transformation involves the enabling of integration at all levels, within the context of the covenant community. Persons in union with Christ are called to participate in his mediatory role, in order that they may be involved in the process of bringing others into reconciliation with God and with the people of God. Christian formation and the experience of union and distinction, through Christ, is wholly grounded within the context of the covenant community. Therefore, it is "exclusivist" by nature. Without being so, it would cease in any meaningful or true sense, to be distinctly Christian.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the second part of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology has been presented. I have sought to explore how fundamental areas of the Christian life can be held together within the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. This has involved outlining how the conceptual dynamics within the framework are participated in, which demonstrates how a propositional understanding of transformational theology relates to lived experience and practice, removing any dichotomy between the concerns of theology and spirituality. The synthesis points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated and effectual vision of transformation, which remains distinctly Christian.

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[528] See Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Gregory K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014).

The focus in this chapter has moved towards more practical implications, without being overly prescriptive. It expresses the broad diversity and common characteristics of Christian formation. I have demonstrated an approach that is rooted in a rational-linguistic centre, which as a result can be seen to be fully holistic. While remaining grounded in a rational-linguistic centre, the proposed model expresses the need for integral knowledge of God, and integral response, which leads towards a gradual formation towards right thoughts, right feelings and right actions.

Rational-linguistic communication not only provides the means through which to understand the nature of the "theo-drama" in history, but also the means by which persons are able to participate in the present fullness of the "theo-drama," in order to move towards a holistic transformation. Persons cannot change in and of themselves; they are dependent upon growing in the knowledge of God in order to be formed. Rational-linguistic communication has a central function, with persons needing to respond in repentance and faith to the truth of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. Christian formation also occurs through that which is directly in relation to rational-linguistic truth, i.e. the church and physicality. This can all be played out in a variety of ways within the gathered-scattered framework.

In the final chapter, I will express some of the main conclusions and implications coming out of the "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology outlined in chapters five and six. There will be a summary of the argument presented and the contribution made.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Executive Summary

In this thesis, it has been noted that "transformation" is a widely discussed notion within the contemporary church. However, the way it is understood is often misguided, and there are a variety of contradictory views about what it is and how it occurs. The divine call is for the church to be continually transformed into the image of Christ, in accord with the divine will. Rather than maintaining a distinctly Christian centre, the developmental focus within the church often shifts towards being human-centred, in accord with the human will. This results in a plurified landscape characterised by fragmentation and relativism, rather than demonstrating movement towards true integration and holism. In response to this problem, the thesis has set out to demonstrate the need to move towards expressing and living out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation. It has been argued that the only way this can be done is through an approach grounded in rational-linguistic communication.

The aforementioned problem can be seen within evangelicalism. Self-identified "evangelicals" continue to explore the possibility of authentic transformation. I have noted many of the attempts to "revision transformation," some of which pursue an integrated approach. A perceived "transformational crisis" has led some to seek ecumenical "ressourcement," in terms of looking for approaches outside of rational-linguistic schema. The diversity of views among self-identified "evangelicals" suggests that there is no common and cohesive understanding of transformation, and that it is not possible to progress towards one. The proliferation of perspectives related to the nature and process of Christian formation has served to reinforce the absence of a coherent "evangelical spirituality," as well creating confusion over how transformation may occur. The often-conflicting approaches have also left a landscape characterised by pluralism, fragmentation, relativism, individualism, pragmatism and subjectivism.

Evangelicalism is seen by some as a restorationist movement that seeks to draw the church back towards a prototypal faith. However, a historical-sociological

framing of evangelicalism advocates a "crisis" around the nature of "evangelical" identity, both in terms of an increasing plurality in beliefs and in practice. It suggests a divergent movement that is becoming increasingly fragmented and demonstrates the absence of authentic transformation. Such detracts from the possibility of the church as being seen to be able to move towards a common, coherent and integral understanding of the nature and practice of Christian formation.

In light of the problem expressed, the aim of the research has been to explore the possibility of a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology by outlining a "proto-evangelical" model, grounded in rational-linguistic truth. I have shown the importance of a rational-linguistic approach as a means through which to ground a transformational theology, providing an understanding of Christian formation that is broad and effectual, both in terms of understanding and practice. There has been the construction of a framework that is able to hold together the important elements of transformational theology, rather than dichotomising by placing emphasis on a particular area. In doing so, I have also sought to show that which is common in the understanding and practice of Christian formation.

In Chapter One, the problems with a historical-sociological understanding of "evangelicalism" were noted. It was suggested that the possibility of a "proto-evangelical" approach is dependent on there being a clearly defined centre, and for a need to live in right relation to it. It has been argued that this centre stems from the objective logocentric revelation of an omniscient God in human history. Such is to be witnessed to by the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, of which the gospel of Christ is the centre. This has been put forward as the ground of a "proto-evangelical" understanding of Christian formation.

To accomplish the aim of the thesis, the study has involved a critical conversation between two "theologians of the Christian life." It was suggested that the thesis problem can only be solved by creating an integrated framework that holds a proper relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality, i.e. holding

together doctrinal beliefs with praxis and experience. In Chapters two, three and four, I explored how J. I. Packer and Maximus Confessor provide different ways of integrating the concerns of spirituality and theology. In doing so, each is seen to express their own distinctive systems of Christian formation, and point towards an integrated, broad and effectual understanding.

In Chapter Two, an approach grounded in rational-linguistic truth was initially drawn out by examining Packer's thought. Packer has been put forward as an archetypal representative of this approach, and as someone who has advocated the need for a unified and balanced understanding of the Christian life. His approach to integrating the concerns of theology and spirituality has been used as an initial basis towards pursuing an integrated approach to Christian formation.

In Chapter Three, the vision of Maximus' theology of the Christian life was examined for the purpose of exploring a comprehensive and integrated approach grounded in a different centre. Maximus' whole theological system was recognised as being rooted in a Christological dialectic, which he sees as the means of integration and transformation. He has been seen to be a suitable dialogue partner for the purpose of challenging an approach grounded in a rational-linguistic centre.

In Chapter Four, there was a critical conversation between the two aforementioned "theologians of the Christian life." This allowed more exploration into the scope and diversity of a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and the seeking of common characteristics in its nature and practice. This provided a solid basis for moving towards the construction of a "proto-evangelical" model of transformational theology.

In chapters five and six, an original transformational theology grounded in a rational-linguistic centre was given. In Chapter Five, a rational-linguistic centre was seen to provide the means for a holistic, broad, internally consistent theoretical outline. In Chapter Six, fundamental areas of the Christian life were held together in an organised, cohesive and balanced way, within the context of

the integrated propositional framework provided in Chapter Five. Chapter Six involved expressing the means towards fully living in the conceptual dynamics in Chapter Five, with more practical descriptions, without being overly prescriptive. Together, these two chapters have demonstrated a suitable relation between the concerns of theology and spirituality.

In the sections that follow, I will state what has been achieved as a result of the research, and express conclusions drawn from the development of the synthesis. The model expressed in the previous two chapters has been given to point the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformation. I will look at some implications in the application of the model described, based upon the conclusions drawn.

7.1.2 Transformation and Christian Distinctiveness

This thesis has sought to outline the most suitable means of understanding transformation from a distinctly Christian perspective. In the previous two chapters, I have presented a vision of a transformational theology for the church that invokes the need for continual ecclesial reorientation and renewal. This original synthesis points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated and effectual vision of transformation, which remains cohesive, internally consistent, and distinctly Christian. In presenting a model based upon the solid groundwork laid in earlier chapters, it has been seen to point towards an understanding of Christian formation, which demonstrates common characteristics, while allowing for a broad scope and diversity.

In Chapter One, a definition of the distinct goal and means of Christian formation was given. The thesis has gone on to develop a robust and cohesive model that is grounded in this understanding. The synthesis outlined has demonstrated the possibility of developing an understanding of transformation which is Christian and distinct from the concerns of "natural" human development (which occur to a greater or lesser extent in all people). This does not mean that the common (and God-given) developmental concerns across all areas of life can be completely separated from the redemptive process that solely occurs in the eschatological

community; for such understanding would create a false dichotomy and disconnect between the two, rather than recognising that each effects the other in different ways. Nonetheless, throughout the synthesis the distinct goal of Christian formation has been presented as the eschatological vision of the resurrected and exalted Christ, revealing the eternal image of the redeemed.[529] This already-not-yet revelation has already been inaugurated, and the church is called to increasingly reflect it throughout all creation in this present age. Because this is "ecclesial formation," not simply individual, the goal is Christo-triune, with the church being called to reflect the nature of the Trinity within physicality.

Given the centrality of this vision, it is necessary to challenge supposed "Christian" approaches to transformation that do not wholly centre around the goal of displaying the virtues of Christ. The developmental focus can often be primarily anthropocentric rather than theocentric, being wholly determined by human "needs" rather than by the divine imperative. There is a challenge towards approaches to "development" where the prevailing and ultimate focus remains human-centred. The people of God are called to reveal the knowledge of God expressed to them in Christ, gradually coming to reflect the predetermined image of the one they are in union with. The goal of Christian formation is not self-development or self-glorification, but self-transcendence, for the purpose of coming to express virtues that reflect the glory of the transcendent Other.[530] If this does not remain the central goal then persons will inevitably be led towards being (de)formed more into an idolatrous image.

The synthesis has demonstrated that the means of Christian formation is distinct, in terms of being wholly grounded in divine initiation and the response of the worshipping community. Christian formation is rooted in a redemptive "theo-dramatic" narrative of the Triune God in history and eternity. God's people are called to participate in this on the basis of union with Christ, and be formed

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[529] See Thornhill, "Resurrection of Jesus."

[530] The distinct goal of Christian formation is related to the New Testament view of the image of God. See Craig L. Blomberg, "'True Righteousness and Holiness': The Image of God in the New Testament," in *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Beth F. Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016). See also John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 233 ff.

through the work of the Spirit. The means of Christian formation has been expressed as involving a divine-human dialectic, where there is intentional human co-operation with the divine agency. This response involves the worship of the covenant community orientated towards the redemptive heavenly drama. This understanding challenges approaches to transformation that are not fully grounded in the redemptive narrative and vision, and consequently, not fully grounded in the divine-human drama. Such transformation is not occurring as a result of divine revelation and the response of ecclesial worship. Instead, the focus is on developmental change that is occurring apart from the eschatological worship of the eternal communion of saints, and apart from the revealing divine glory on earth through the covenant community. Therefore, it is not distinctly Christian in nature.

The model put forward in the previous two chapters re-orientates how a distinctly Christian approach to transformation should be understood. It provides a basis to challenge so-called "holistic" (or "whole-life") approaches to mission and transformation that are deemed to be "Christian," but do not maintain a central Christian distinctive with regard to the goal or means. A "holistic" approach to transformation from a Christian perspective may be understood to be "broad" and "inclusive," in terms of involving the transformation of the whole of created order. The problem is that the ground of such approaches often ceases to be union with Christ and the covenant community. The model put forward points to the reality that positive (God-given) change/development occurring outside of personal union with Christ cannot simply be designated as a "redemptive" form of transformation, or be understood within the category of "Christian formation," which is Christ-centred change solely reflected in the lives of those who are part of God's eternal covenant community.

Within the model expressed, a necessary characteristic of Christian formation has been understood to involve personal repentance and faith in response to the gospel and the Scriptures. Any form of so-called "transformation" or "development" that does not involve this as an intentional response to divine predication cannot be seen to demonstrate a Christian distinctive, nor does it

maintain the proper catalyst for Christian formation to occur. Human-centred approaches to development avoid focusing on a distinctly Christian view of transformation, and replace it with a universalistic societal agenda. Although the temporal preservation and development of a fallen created order for the common good may be grounded in "common grace," it does not stem from a redemptive narrative, because there is no correlation with the new and eternal creation inaugurated through Christ, i.e. it does not place the central goal on the need for the church to express the eschatological image of the exalted Christ.

The positive influence that the church has on society does not fall within the category of redemptive transformation. However, it has become common for ecclesial mission to incorporate expressions of human development and societal transformation, primarily being driven by needs and preferences of unregenerate humanity, rather than by the divine imperative and demonstration of a Christ-glorifying distinctive. Given that interdisciplinary approaches focusing on "holistic" transformation do not stem from an integrated biblical-theological method, they can confuse between formation that is distinctly Christian, and other forms of (God-given) development that are commonly experienced by all humanity. Though a holistic approach should bring synergy, areas of developmental concern can become relativised in their level of importance, which can lead to the redeemed existence in Christ ceasing to be central, and the distinctively Christian goal and means in formation being distorted.

7.1.3 The Imperative of Christian Formation

In this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate the importance of the transformation motif in the Christian life by developing a theological synthesis around it, namely a "transformational theology." The concept of transformation has become increasingly popularised within the church and continues to be understood in a wide variety of ways. The literature review has shown that there have been various attempts to renew perspectives on Christian formation using diverse methodologies. The approach to Christian formation deemed most suitable is one that is a rooted in the imperatives of orthodox theology, so integrating the concerns of both theology and spirituality. As yet there has been no

comprehensive attempt to provide a broad, integrated and coherent theological framework for Christian formation.

This thesis has explored the possibility of outlining a broad and comprehensive approach to Christian formation, and provided a framework within which to integrate the central elements of a transformational theology. The model given has demonstrated the importance of transformation as the imperative and central trajectory within the Christian life. The transformation motif is important because it denotes the goal of the Christian life, and points towards the need for radical and authentic change. The call on the people of God is to lives that are distinctive, reflecting a lived existence that becomes increasingly Christ-centred, as opposed one that remains human-centred. God has formed human beings in his image so that they may reflect his glory. The divine will and intention to fully transform human life has, in the model, been understood as already being demonstrated in the revelation of the risen Christ, who is the archetypal image of the new humanity. Christ has been understood to be revealing the fullness of the divine life in his person, demonstrating the perfect example of obedience to the divine will. In coming to inaugurate the already-not-yet new creation, the eternal resurrected Christ now reveals himself as the true image that the elect will come to reflect at the eschaton.

As well as demonstrating the importance and possibility of Christian formation in this present age, the model also points to the need for continuity-discontinuity between present and future transformation. Given that persons are able to participate in the inaugurated eschatology of the risen and exalted Christ, there is to be faithful witness to this reality. The expression of transformation before the eschaton will always be in part. Although the call is towards the fulfilment of the divine will expressed in the already-not-yet revelation of the risen Christ, the ultimate fulfilment of God's will only comes to fruition in the eschaton.

Given that transformation is a central element of the Christian life, it is important to challenge any understanding that does not allow it to be the central trajectory. However, this trajectory can sometimes demonstrate imbalance. This happens in

two ways, both of which need to be challenged. Firstly, there is imbalance where the understanding of transformation is "over-realised," in terms of there being an unrealistic focus towards perfectionism or "cultural redemption." Secondly, there is imbalance where the understanding of transformation is "under-realised," in terms of authentic, sustainable and significant change in this present age not being seen to be possible, given the depraved human condition remains this side of the eschaton.[531] Ultimately, transformation only occurs by means of the will and work of God, rather than through the human will or human effort alone. The model points to the understanding that, in this present age, persons can experience authentic and sustained change because they are united to Christ and the work of the Spirit, on the basis of the eschatological inauguration of the new creation.

The absence of any authentic formation in a person's life may ultimately point more to their unwillingness to change and glorify Christ. Any absence of formation is not because God has not spoken clearly, or because persons have not come to true knowledge of him. If there is absence of formation it is because there is reluctance in persons to rightly respond to the knowledge they do have, based upon an innate desire to suppress God's revealed truth, and maintain their own autonomy. Given that human beings are always "worshipping," they are also continually being formed in some way or another. Ultimately, the direction of formation can be influenced by a person's own will and desire, in choosing to worship and glorify things other than God, and so be recreated into a god (or idol) in their own image, obscuring the image of the God who created them.

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[531] These transformational imbalances can be evidenced in an imbalanced relationship between church and culture. See Timothy Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 245ff. A theoretical solution would involve upholding some form of union-distinction, i.e. fully acknowledging the distinct nature and function of the heavenly-earthly spheres, while recognising how they fully interact and influence each other in different ways. Such would negate any problems that occur from not making a clear distinction (removing "twoness"), or from creating a false dichotomy or dualism (removing "oneness") where little overlap is seen between the two.

7.2 Renewing Christian Perspectives on Transformation

7.2.1 The Possibility of a "Proto-Evangelical" Approach

In Chapter One, I noted the plurification around so-called "evangelical" approaches to Christian formation. From a historical-sociological perspective, "evangelicalism" has been understood as becoming increasingly diverse. I have argued that evangelicalism, as understood from a historical-sociological view, is ultimately a human construct. Such an approach looks to find consensus within a broad and evolving trans-denominational Protestant movement, but is unable to provide any firm understanding of central theological convictions and practices, and therefore unable to provide any distinctive evangelical identity. A historical-sociological perspective cannot offer the necessary criteria for theological discernment and discrimination. As a result, orthodoxy and orthopraxy can become anything persons want them to be. Ultimately, it is not possible to forge a distinct evangelical understanding based upon a historical-sociological approach, for it is too eclectic. Therefore, its usefulness in this context needs to be challenged.

In this thesis, I have shown the possibility of developing a "proto-evangelical" model of Christian formation. Such a model has been seen to be broad, integrated and cohesive, while being faithful to the centre expressed in Chapter One. I have defined and defended a workable definition of the term *evangelical* from a biblical-theological perspective. Such has been defined around a rational-linguistic centre, which incorporates the communication of the two core logocentric concerns – the gospel of Christ and the Scriptures. The synthesis has demonstrated that there is a central need for rational-linguistic truth to be communicated, heard and understood, as the means of witnessing to the fullness of the "theo-drama" in history, and enabling participation in this present age. A rational-linguistic centre has been seen to enable an original synthesis that points the church towards the need to express and live out a full, integrated and effectual vision of transformation, which remains distinctly Christian. Therefore, it is necessary to challenge the understanding that this is not possible, or desirable.

In affirming the possibility of a "proto-evangelical" approach, there are ramifications to be noted. If an approach is seen to be truly "proto-evangelical," then it cannot be aimed towards a specific ecclesial grouping. The suggestion of a distinctly "evangelical" view may infer that it is a specific approach within the context of the wider church. However, a "proto-evangelical" model cannot be exclusive to self-identified "evangelicals." This follows the understanding of J. I. Packer, who suggests that for the term *evangelical* to mean anything of any value, it has to mean that which is most "fully Christian."[532] The central intention of a "proto-evangelical" approach, can by definition, only be seeking to move towards what would be understood to be the most "fully Christian" view, rather than being exclusive to a particular sociological grouping within Protestantism.

There would be a question around the value of the term *evangelical* as a distinctive identity marker, if it was unable to express an approach that was seeking to be "fully Christian." In order to have any solid or definitive meaning, the understanding of the term *evangelical* has to find its root in the biblical gospel. If this is understood to be the core of the Christian faith, then it must also be that which is shared by faithful Christians who do not identify as an "evangelical." If there is a denial of the evangel, then a person cannot be identified in any true sense as being "Christian."

7.2.2 The Importance of a Rational-Linguistic Approach

The thesis has explored the nature of a rational-linguistic approach to Christian formation. The argument being made is that a rational-linguistic centre is the only true basis upon which to move towards the possibility of a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology. The understanding put forward in Chapter One is that the true means of integration and transformation, is through a response to the rational-linguistic communication of the Scriptures, at the centre of which is the gospel of Christ.

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[532] See James I. Packer, *Honouring the People of God*, vol. 4, The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 330-331. Packer states: "In a word, evangelicalism is Bible Christianity, gospel Christianity, apostolic Christianity, mainstream Christianity. It is an understanding of the Christian revelation based upon two principles: the final authority of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith and life, and the centrality of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

The study has shown originality in being able to demonstrate the importance that theological method plays in relation to the process of formation in the Christian life. The model developed has shown forth the importance of a rational-linguistic approach. I have described the method that is most conducive to providing a cohesive framework for understanding transformational theology, and the most conducive means of enabling formation to occur. I have demonstrated that rational-linguistic truth fulfils a specific and central function within the "theo-drama" that cannot be replaced.

The model developed has shown the importance of rational-linguistic communication within the process of Christian formation itself. Rational-linguistic truth has a central function within this process. There is a need for it to be heard, understood, believed, confessed and lived. A response to rational-linguistic truth in Scripture, of which the propositional gospel is the centre, is the means through which persons are able to understand and fully participate in the enfolding drama of God, leading to the possibility of transformation. Without a reception to rational-linguistic truth, there can be no unified, broad, common or coherent understanding of transformational theology, and no authentic formation of beliefs or practices.

In recognising the importance of an approach grounded in rational-linguistic truth, there is a challenge to any understanding that does not hold to the same method, and is consequently unable to lead towards the construction of a distinctly Christian approach to formation that is fully integrated and transformative. As well as challenging approaches that are not grounded in rational-linguistic communication, there is also a challenge towards approaches that do not make it the centre of the formation process. An understanding not centred on rational-linguistic truth overlooks the central and divinely ordained means through which God himself determines to carry out his will to bringing formation. Ultimately, where the importance of the prerequisite rational-linguistic truth is undermined, it simply removes the possibility of true worship occurring, and suppresses the true imaging forth of divine glory.

Any rejection or suppression of rational-linguistic truth in the Christian life allows persons to remain grounded in subjectivism, where the authority remains within the individual, as opposed to being transcendent and above them. This does not create the opportunity for the self-subverting change that Christ demands. Instead, it allows persons to follow their own developmental trajectory characterised by self-glorification and idolatry, being formed (into an image) in accord with their own will and desires.[533] Rather than being challenged by a divine intent from outside of themselves that directs and enables them to move towards revealing virtues that are not their own, there is an affirmation and justification of their own thoughts, beliefs, feelings and practices.

7.2.3 The Unity and Diversity of a Rational-Linguistic Approach

The thesis has sought to point towards the possibility a cohesive, integrated, broad, effectual and distinctly Christian vision of transformational theology, in terms of both theory and practice. Rational-linguistic truth has been seen to be wholly sufficient in enabling this. Based upon the research and model provided, I have shown that a rational-linguistic approach leads to broadness and multiplicity, while at the same time being cohesive and unified.

The synthesis given, demonstrates an approach that is truly integral and interconnected. I have expressed a framework within which to integrate the broad scope and diversity of Christian formation, describing common characteristics and underlying principles of an integrated transformational theology. The originality of the model is principally expressed in its structural cohesiveness, of suitably holding together all of the centrally important areas. It has demonstrated the need to embrace the interconnectivity of the "whole," focusing on outlining the nature of the connections, rather than focusing on specific parts. The synthesis has demonstrated that the nature and process of Christian formation is not dualistic and fragmented, nor is it characterised by false dichotomies and divisions or contradiction. It has demonstrated that true diversity affirms unity rather than being at the expense of it.

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[533] The notion of self-glorification (the opposing category to the glorification of Christ) is explored in Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

Given the possibility of demonstrating an integrated synthesis, there is a need to critique any understanding of Christian formation that does not focus on the "whole," but instead focuses on specific methods or practices over others. There is also a challenge to approaches that seek to be "holistic" and "integrated," in terms of embracing interconnectivity and the "whole," but are not grounded in the right centre. In seeking a "holistic" perspective, it may be thought that transformation and integration occur in a universalistic sense, in terms of all being formed and all being a means of formation. Although everything may be connected in one sense, this does not mean there should be an affirmation of "holistic" universalism. The embrace of a broadness and diversity does not simply necessitate an unqualified acceptance of everything as part of the goal and process of Christian formation. Anything that stems from the unregenerate human nature cannot be affirmed or embraced, for it leads to humanistic relativism and idolatry, not Christian formation.

The model has shown that a rational-linguistic approach leads to an understanding of transformation that demonstrates unity and commonality. The proposed "proto-evangelical" approach begins with the premise that there is a clear centre, and the understanding that being in right relation to this centre will gradually lead towards commonality, in accord with the will and nature of God. The verification of the rational-linguistic centre is not in whether self-identified "evangelicals" currently demonstrate sufficient unity in affirming and expressing the fullness of orthodoxy or orthopraxy. The central concern is whether God is actually understood to be able to perform his will through his Logos, so that persons are able to grow in a true knowledge of him, gradually enabling the formation of common beliefs and practices.

The synthesis that I have provided is wholly orientated around a common objective, the goal being for individuals-in-community to be conformed to reflect the *imago Christi* and the *imago Trinitas*. The model also demonstrates the possibility of commonality in the central means through which Christian formation occurs – being through the communication of the rational-linguistic truth. I have shown that Christian formation is not something individuals

determine through adopting specific methods or preferences. Rather, it is something that is rooted in the redemptive work of God, being enacted within history, through the work of his Son and the Holy Spirit. As well as being grounded in a universal redemptive narrative, there are also fundamental means by which Christian formation is able to occur, i.e. primarily being grounded in a proper response to the biblical gospel and the Scriptures. The understanding expressed is that without hearing and responding appropriately to rational-linguistic truth there can be no authentic transformation. The need is for persons to respond to rational-linguistic truth so that it leads to lived experience and practice.

Given that the synthesis demonstrates the need to move towards a common approach, and affirms the possibility of doing so, there is a challenge towards approaches that demonstrate an understanding of Christian formation that does not value the possibility and need to move towards commonality, but instead affirm more individualistic and relativistic means and goals. Given that the central means of Christian formation are divine, it is problematic if it is individually determined based upon means that stem from the individual, whether this relates to personality or preference. An approach to Christian formation that is grounded in the subjective experience of the individual will invariably be characterised by pluralism, relativism and pragmatism. Rather than persons coming to know and obey the sovereign God based upon what he has spoken, there is a strengthening of individual autonomy. A consumerist approach can only lead to the acceptance of a pluralistic agenda, where there is the demonstration of individualism stemming from the human will. Confusion arises where there is a proliferation of "spiritual practices," as a result of simply looking to tradition for "ressourcement," rather than looking to the biblical text itself for a series of common imperatives.

The model has also shown that a rational-linguistic approach leads to an understanding of transformation that demonstrates a broadness and diversity. There is a need for divine fullness to be reflected in human life. The thesis has demonstrated that a truly evangelical approach is not lacking, but is holistic and broad by being grounded in a rational-linguistic centre. Given that it is possible

and necessary to hold to an understanding of Christian formation that demonstrates true diversity and broadness, it is necessary to critique approaches that do not express this. Without a rational-linguistic centre there can be no true broadness or diversity, only the affirmation of irreconcilable contradictory narratives. Where there is a weakening of a rational-linguistic centre, and a rejection of a right relation to it, there is the acceptance of a "broadness" and inclusivity that will invariably be characterised by contradiction and conflict rather than "divine diversity." Although difference and diversity is God-given, it is problematic if any expressions of individual personhood are marked by characteristics that are contrary to the virtues of Christ. The desire for individualistic diversity and unqualified inclusivity stems from a person's desire to be formed into an idol in their own image, in accord with their own will. Such stands in direct opposition to the eschatological heavenly image of the risen and exalted Christ.

The difference between the expression of formation into the *imago Christi* (and *imago Trinitas*) and the "deformation" (that stems from the human will and idolatry) is clear. The division between the *Christian* and the *secular* leads to the two contrasting visions of transformation. The problem occurs when a humanistic understanding (i.e. one not primarily gospel-centred) seeps into the church in the guise of a "Christian" view of transformation, and in doing so, distracts from the distinct and eternal call of the church. Often this understanding may be identified by a so-called "evangelical" label. This becomes the means towards affirming a contradictory and broad plurality, characterised in some way by division, fragmentation, relativism, individualism, confusion and subjectivism. Rather than the ecclesial focus being to express and live out a distinctly Christian vision of transformation, towards the direction that God intended, there is seen to be an inversion. Any so-called "Christian" or "evangelical" expressions of "transformation" that are more characteristically human-centred, need to be challenged, so that in this present age the church remains focused on moving towards the eternal goal of being transformed into the image of Christ, to the glory of God.

GLOSSARY

Definitions are given below to clarify how certain terms and phrases have been understood. Some of these assume a variety of meanings in different contexts.

Affections

Inner virtues cultivated through means of a central disposition of faith, in congruence with biblical values. The term is chiefly used in respect to the inner disposition of love, in terms of a person setting their affection towards something or someone. A person's affections reveal what they desire most, and show the condition of their heart. The term has also been used to refer to the actual "act" of the a-rational faculties rather than the inner virtues cultivated.

Apophatic

The dialectical opposite of cataphatic (see "Cataphatic"). The term pertains to knowledge of God that is obtained through negation rather than through positive assertions and images, with God being known in terms of what he is not. It indicates that God cannot be fully known or mediated through human concepts and means, instead appealing to "direct" unmediated knowledge. It is grounded in the recognition of divine transcendence, in terms of God being wholly distinct, hidden and other.

Biblical Gospel

The *euangelion* ("good news"), which is to be verbally announced by the church, so that persons may understand, believe and come to salvation. The message to be proclaimed corresponds with the climax of the divine redemptive drama in history, in accord with the Scriptures, i.e. that the Father spoke forth his Son, who lived the perfect life, died on the cross, has been resurrected and is presently exalted, reigning as Lord and Saviour.

Cataphatic

The dialectical opposite of apophatic (see "Apophatic"). Refers to the revealed expression of divine knowledge through positive language, images and physicality, in recognition that God can be known in some way in human terms. It is most often used to refer to knowledge of God revealed through positive verbal statements, affirming from Scripture who God is. This approach appeals to the immanence of God, acknowledging that he is present and united with his creation, with divine knowledge able to be mediated through human and physical means – in Scripture, church, liturgy, created order, and most centrally in Christ himself (see "Sacramental").

Christian Formation

Refers to the distinctive transformation that takes place in the people of God, who through union with Christ become grounded in the redemptive work of the Triune God. God's will is for his church to be progressively conformed to the image of Christ, to the glory of God, coming to full fruition at the eschaton. The central means of present formation depends on the founding principle of the divine agency to initiate, and a cooperative human response (see "Worship").

[Christian] Spirituality

Contemporary usage has emphasised the lived experience and practice of Christian belief, signifying how faith affects the whole of a person's life. A spiritual life is one that is being consciously lived in relation to the transcendent Triune God, and is therefore distinctly different from a life that is self-glorifying. One who is "spiritual" is being changed to reflect the virtues derived from faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christo-Triune

A method that is characterised by the ontological and epistemological dynamics of the two central concerns of Christian theology, i.e. the person of Christ and the Triune God. The full integration of both concerns are demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Christ, in accord with the witness of the Scriptures.

Deification (Theosis)

Denotes that the goal of human existence is to participate in the life of God and come into union with him. It literally means to become more like God, or take upon the divine nature. In Eastern Orthodoxy, deification is both a transformative process that occurs through both theoria and praxis, and the goal of that process, which is to express the divine likeness. It is understood to occur through both divine activity and human effort.

Dialectic

The interaction between juxtaposed elements or truths that seemingly appear to contradict and be in conflict. Each pole can be held together in paradoxical tension, being seen to affirm rather than oppose the other. This "both/and" position maintains union without confusion, providing a way of overcoming dualism and false dichotomies (see "Unity-in-Diversity").

Evangelical[-ism]

There are two principal and contrasting approaches taken in understanding this term. A historical-sociological approach refers to what is understood to be a global Protestant movement, which is both trans-denominational and divergent. A biblical-theological approach follows the etymology of the term *euangelion*, to be evangelical is to show concern with being faithful to the "good news" of the gospel, as witnessed to in the Scriptures (see "Biblical Gospel" and "Proto-Evangelical"). It consequently also denotes a core commitment to the authority of the Scriptures themselves.

Grammatical-Historical

A method of biblical exegesis used to determine the author's original intended meaning, and what the original hearers would have understood. Based upon study of the grammar, syntax and literary context of a passage, all within its full historical context. This method presupposes the perspicuity of the Scriptures and the possibility of being able to gradually move from a subjective interpretation, towards understanding the objective will of the author.

Hypostatic [Union]

A Christological designation that describes the bringing together of divinity and humanity in one individual existence, without there being a confusion in their substances (see "Dialectic," "Perichoresis" and "Unity-in-Diversity"). In Christian theology, *hypostasis* refers either to the three persons of the Trinity in one nature, or the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ as they co-exist within one person.

Logoi

The plural form of the greek word *Logos*, meaning "word" or "reason." The Logos in Christ is analogous to the *logoi* in all created things; the Logos is present in all created things as uncreated *logoi*. The uncreated intentions of God for each thing, which are brought to their realisation in concrete creation through the Logos. All created things are defined, in their essence, and in their way of developing, by their own *logoi*. It denotes both the singularity and plurality of God's purpose for each created thing, there being a God-given unity of meaning in the Logos, and multiplicity of meaning in the *logoi*.

Ortho-[doxy/praxy]

"Ortho-," meaning that which is "right" and "true," can be related to both beliefs (orthodoxy) and practices (orthopraxy), denoting what is to be universally normative and aspirational for the church. Through growing in the knowledge of God, persons can come to more fully express that which is right and true in a foundational sense, though this will only be demonstrated fully at the eschaton.

Perichoresis

A term used to describe both the nature of the triune life, and the hypostatic union in the incarnation. It denotes interpenetration, yet without confusion, for the purpose of upholding both union and distinction. In contemporary theology, it is most often used to describe the way the persons of the Triune God relate to each other, denoting a mutual indwelling and sharing in the lives of the other, while allowing a distinct individual identity.

Praxis

Refers to practice and action as a lived expression of faith, it also relates to outer behaviour. The term is used to refer to the practical application of theory and active obedience, particularly in the love of neighbour.

Propositional Truth

Assertions or proposals of true rational-linguistic statements that are understood to correspond with objective universal reality or fact, and the revealed mind of God on the subject, in accord with Scripture. It is one form of rational-linguistic expression seen in the Scriptures, often being spoken by God himself. It is associated with indicative statements, divine promises, doctrinal affirmations and theological systems of thought.

Proto-Evangelical

Refers to an understanding that is grounded in the original core message of the Christian faith, the "first gospel" that God spoke in history, which was witnessed by the early church and proclaimed as "good news," in accord with the Scriptures (see "Biblical Gospel"). It consequently also denotes a core commitment to the witness and authority of the Scriptures, which God has already spoken in history. Being grounded in the communication of the gospel and the Scriptures demonstrates a commitment to rational-linguistic truth (see "Rational-Linguistic").

Rational-Linguistic

A logocentric method of communication used to reveal knowledge, often propositional in nature. It is "rational" in terms of involving mind-to-mind communication that is to be understood, and "verbal" in terms of involving the spoken word. In the Christian faith, that which is being communicated is the gospel (see "Biblical Gospel") and the fullness of biblical teaching, in correspondence with the objective revelation of God already spoken in history. It performs a central mediatory function in the church, as communication that is to be believed and obeyed, in order that persons may participate in the transformative "theo-drama."

Sacramental

Something "outward" (or material) that is endued with sacred meaning and significance beyond itself. A sacrament is often understood to be an intentional word, sign, act, symbol or ritual conveying something hidden, mysterious and efficacious, in order that divine grace may be transmitted. In a broader sense, it would refer to God being known in embodied experience, in the life of the church and created order, all in some way pointing to a reality beyond the senses (see "Cataphatic").

Theandric

Literally meaning "God-human." The term is used when understanding something in relation to the union of divine and human natures in Christ, or to the joint agency of divine and human.

Theo-Drama

The narrative and self-revelation (in speech, presence and act) of the eternal Triune God, so that he may be glorified in his creation. The triune life is most fully revealed in the central "performance" of the firstborn over creation, who is now risen and exalted. Through this God inaugurates a new humanity and the heavenly worship drama. By means of union with Christ, the church on earth can participate in the triune life, and the heavenly worship of the community of saints, in order to glorify the exalted Christ. The central means of living in this formational drama is rational-linguistic communication (see "Rational-Linguistic"), and subsequent response of speech, presence and act. The drama is climaxed with the present glory of the risen Son being fully revealed in his church at the eschaton.

Theoria

From an Eastern Orthodox perspective it has been used to refer to the highest form of contemplation, the "act" of beholding of God, as opposed to a "discursive meditation." In a broader sense it refers to the discursive activity of the heart towards God, involving the use of the rational and a-rational faculties for the purpose of coming to both theoretical and experiential knowledge of God.

Transformational Theology

A theological system of thought that is wholly orientated towards the distinct goal of the Christian life namely, the transformation of the people of God into the image of Christ, for the glory of God.

Union with Christ

Refers to the believer's sharing in the life of Christ, both in his history and his eternity. Through faith, persons are identified with the objective death and resurrection of Christ in history, in order that they may be united with the exalted Christ in eternity and adopted into the life of the Triune God. The nature of the relationship is both subordinate and perichoretic, and has implications in transforming the life of the believer that are legal, experiential and final.

Unity-in-Diversity

The dialectic that allows for the presence of union without confusion. This paradox is central within Christian theology and the Christian life, first and foremost being demonstrated in the Triune God and the person of Christ. It points to the presence of both commonality and difference, allowing for broadness without contradictory plurality.

Virtues

Dispositions and characteristics of a person that are deemed to be morally good, right and excellent, in accord with the person of Christ. Often described in terms of the "Fruit of the Spirit" (see Galatians 5:22-23), and most centrally being demonstrated in love towards God and others. Rather than being a demonstration of moralistic self-glorification, virtues are grounded in faith, in recognition of the need to conform to the will of God, in accord with the holiness of the law, to the glory of God. Virtues are demonstrated in the practice and formation of right thoughts, intentions, desires, emotions, affections, actions and behaviours.

Worship

Worship is the proper response of God's people to his self-revelation, in order that they may be formed more into the image of Christ. Most crucially, it involves a

response to the rational-linguistic truth in the gospel of Christ and the Scriptures. Worship is orientated towards the Triune God in congruence with the eschatological worship of the heavenly communion of saints, and involves the whole self participating in the subordinate-perichoretic dynamics within the triune life, so that God may be glorified in his church. "Gathered worship" refers to the intentional ecclesial response that occurs in a particular time and place, allowing for specific "means of grace" to operate. "Scattered worship" refers to the broader response of God's people that occurs across the narrative of daily life within societal roles.

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