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# Theological Observer

## Body, Soul, and Spirit

Francis Pieper, in his *Christian Dogmatics* (1:476-477), devotes only about one full page to a discussion of man's constitutional nature as body and soul. Historically, Christians have generally agreed that a human being consists of a body and a soul, hardly a point of contention deserving extensive discussion. However, when human beings are regarded as little more than animals with a highly-developed reason, the issue of the soul's existence takes on much more importance.

Belief in the soul's existence is not uniquely Christian. Egyptians believed that the soul lived on after death and built pyramids to provide an exit for kings. Plato and other Greek philosophers held that the body was expendable in the afterlife, but they did believe that the soul survived. Philip Melancthon and Jonathan Edwards wrote philosophical essays demonstrating its existence. Widespread belief in the soul's existence after death might provide a reason to place this tenet in the category of natural revelation. However, the Christian doctrine of the body and soul is derived from the Bible. We live on after death. Saints in heaven and earth comprise one redeemed community. Those who die in Christ are "the company of heaven" of the proper preface of the Holy Communion liturgy. There is rational life between death and resurrection.

In the 1950s a controversy over the soul broke out at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis and the LCMS passed the appropriate resolutions affirming its existence. A professor may have misread Oscar Cullmann's monograph, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body?* He held that the resurrection of the dead was more prominent in the New Testament than the soul's existence after death. This was not an either or question, even if the title gave this impression. At the death of parent or a spouse, the survival of her/his soul is of immediate importance to the survivors. The body's resurrection is uniquely Christian. When the controversy was swirling around in the LCMS, a debate about prayers for the souls of the dead arose on the same campus. Lutherans have prayers for bodies in their committal rites, but not for their souls, whose fate is already determined. One controversy canceled out the other. Prayers for souls of the dead had no purpose, if they did not exist. Controversies over biblical inspiration and inerrancy overshadowed ones about the soul. Today no one in the LCMS questions the soul's survival after death or suggests prayers for the dead. Paul taught that the dead are with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and the Athanasian Creed says that, "For that just as the reasonable soul and flesh are one, so God and man are one Christ."

Contemporary denial of the soul may be laid at the feet of Charles Darwin whose theory of evolution held that human beings were only highly advanced animals. Hence, an animal's life has the same intrinsic worth of a human being. Such a philosophy allows for abortion. At the other end of the spectrum is the reincarnation belief of Hinduism in which one soul goes from body to body and

even into those of animals. A swatted fly could be an acquaintance who, after death, was relegated to a lower level on the food chain. Again, we come to the same conclusion by a different route that man and animals are intrinsically the same.

Genesis, from which the Christian doctrine of man is first derived, gives man and woman a higher place in creation. It exists for their benefit and they have dominion over it (1:26-27). God breathes into man and he becomes a living soul (2:7). Human beings are related to God in a way other creatures are not.

If man has a body and soul (dichotomy), is there any possibility that he has a spirit as a third part (trichotomy)? Pieper favors the traditional view of body and soul, but he notes some theologians, including some of the older ones, teach trichotomy. He references the Baier-Walther *Compendium*<sup>1</sup> and notes that trichotomists rely chiefly on the words of Mary in the Magnificat that her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior (Luke 1:46-47). Pieper argues that this is a Hebrew parallelism in which the second line repeats the thought of the first but with different words (1:476). Just as spirit and soul refer to man's spiritual or rational nature, so Lord and God refer to one Deity. If spirit and soul refer to two separate parts in human beings, as the trichotomists hold, then Lord and God would have to refer to two deities, a position that no Christian can hold. Remove the parallelism and that is the necessary result. One cannot have it both ways.

Dichotomy is the favored view of Lutheran, conservative Protestant, and Roman Catholic theologians. Genesis speaks only of the creation of man's body from the ground, into which God breathes his soul. No third "thing" is given to Adam. Ecclesiastes says that a man's body returns to the ground and his spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7). No mention is made of the fate of a third thing. These traditional arguments for dichotomy are convincing. However, while one may dismiss trichotomy as mere speculation, this teaching can have dangerous outcomes. Baier-Walther notes that Manicheans and such Reformation era enthusiasts as the Schwenckfelders held to the body-soul-spirit view (1:92).

Without a credible discussion of trichotomy in contemporary dogmatics, it is hard to engage the issue. A rare, lengthy presentation of trichotomy is provided in the April 2002 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, a biannual theological journal published by Carol Streams Ministries in Anaheim, California, in an article by Witness Lee entitled "Faith, Regeneration and the New Creation." This may not be the traditional view of trichotomy, if there indeed can be one, but it is thorough. Lee holds man is created with a body and a soul and also a spirit,

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<sup>1</sup>Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Joh. Guilielmi Baieri Compendium theologiae positivae: adjectis notis amplioribus, quibus doctrina orthodoxa ad [paideian] academicam explicatur atque ex Scriptura S. eique innixi rationibus theologiacis confirmatur/denuo edendum curavit Carol. Ferd. Guil. Walther* (Sancti Ludovici: ex officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae [Luth. Concordia-Verlag], 1879), 1:91-92.

which stands in need of regeneration. Even Adam's sinless spirit needed regeneration. With only a body and soul, he had "only the created life" and he was "without an active spirit." His created imperfection needed to be completed. Completion would come when his spirit would be made alive by the Holy Spirit. Only then would he become a perfect human being. Then in this regeneration, God and man would be mingled in what Lee calls "a marvelous mystery." This spirit life is also called "the new creation" and "the new spirit." Since regeneration takes place in the spirit and not in the body and soul, it is the primary doctrine and creation, justification, and resurrection are secondary. As soon as a Christian receives "the new spirit," he no longer "need(s) outward rules and teachings." Regeneration in the spirit, the third part to which the Holy Spirit is joined, is as irreversible as physical birth. God dwells permanently in the regenerated spirit. Since "the seed of God" is now in the spirit, moral perfection becomes attainable.

Lee's view that Adam, in his created state, needed regeneration is, for most of us, a novel view, but this is not the end of it. Like Adam, Christ was born with a body and soul and at his resurrection, he was born again (regenerated), so he also could be body-soul-spirit. This view resembles, but is not identical to, Apollinarianism, which held that man was body-soul-spirit and, in the case of Christ, the spirit was replaced by his divine logos. This view also resembles ancient Gnosticism, which saw a divine spark in the "enlightened." Since Christ experiences a kind of moral advancement in his resurrection by a regeneration, Lee's view might fit under Adoptionism. Another novel and unexplained element in Lee's position is that faith is said to be Christ himself. This might follow from defining regeneration in the spirit by the Holy Spirit as the indwelling of God. Trichotomy should not take up much of our time, but when a rare view is so thoroughly presented, it is hard to ignore it.

David P. Scaer

### Proof Text or No Text?

"Proof texting" is one of those unexamined theological taboos that invites universal disapproval. Our disdain for "proof texting" is on par with our views about spousal abuse, as in, "When did you stop beating your wife?" Who could support such a thing? "Proof texting? Not me. I'm strictly against it!" However, if we examine "proof texting," which part are we against? Are we against having "proof" for our theological position, or are we opposed to being bound to the "text"?

In her recent *Authority Vested*, Mary Todd expresses a similar disdain for proof texts: "In its dependence on repetition of selective ('proof') texts to support its proscriptions on women's service, Missouri further aligns itself to a fundamentalist use of scripture. Such citation of authoritative texts thereby becomes a means of ending discussion, because of the authority inherent in the

phrase, 'Thus says the Lord...', which inhibits alternative viewpoints" (271). Missouri is once again being her worst, fundamentalistic self by thwarting everyone's desire for self-expression with selective proof texts.

Todd is unhappy about the use of Scripture texts speaking of women's role in the church to provide scriptural basis on women's role in the church. What are the alternatives? Is the theologian to use texts that have nothing to do with the controverted issues? Perhaps texts speaking of the meaning of baptism should be used to silence those speaking of women's role in the church, as is actually done in some circles.

One wonders what the alternatives are to either proof or texts. Maybe an arithmetical methodology would help. For example, we could count up the texts speaking of women. If Scripture required female silence in the church, say, only four times, we might be able to ignore these injunctions. However, what would happen if we could find seven or ten or twelve texts, would they then no longer be proof texts? Why would they be weighty enough to respond to this issue? What kind of texts would they be then – critical mass texts? Too-many-to-ignore texts? *Schriftganze*? Or just texts we only happen to like better? The Apostles' Creed would need some serious emendation if this theological method would be perpetrated on it. The *descensus* has only one of those pesky "proof texts," far too few by just about any standard.

The classic defense of using texts that treat the actual topics under discussion is in Martin Chemnitz, *Lord's Supper*. "Just as all the dogmas of the church and the individual articles of faith have their own foundation in certain passages of Scripture where they are clearly treated and explained, so also the true and genuine meaning of the doctrines themselves should rightly be sought and developed accurately on the basis of these passages."<sup>1</sup>

The breezy appeal to "an interpretation which rests on the total testimony rather than on isolated texts" (Theodore Tappert, cited in Todd, 271), just will not do. Remember that cheery evangelism bromide: "Evangelism is everybody's job"? Well, if it's everybody's job, it really is nobody's. If all texts are the basis for our theology, then no texts are the basis for our theology, and therein lies the rub. At bottom the attack on "proof texts" is about the authority of the texts themselves.

One cannot dismiss texts merely because they are called "proof texts." They should be rejected if they do not treat of the issue under discussion. However, this requires proof rather than the intellectually bankrupt complaint that they are "proof texts." Proof texts are a problem when they do not prove the point at issue. Let us engage them on their own merits, rather than just derisively dismissing them. A proof from the word of God should hardly be dismissed.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, translated by J. A. O. Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 31.

Certainly, texts should not be ripped out of *the* text (what hermeneuticians usually call context). If they are violently extracted from the text, they only prove the ignorance of those who use them. The texts of Scripture will hang together, or they will hang separately.

The dislike for “proof” is characteristic of postmodern theology, in which all theology is just a subcategory of politics, radical or otherwise. If we just campaign long enough for our particular theology *du jour*, we might get our own way.

But when God speaks he might be inhibiting “alternative viewpoints.” What are alternative viewpoints here? Is this alternative, as in “alternative lifestyles?” So maybe God should just sit down and be quiet while we determine what He ought to believe. Could we picture Moses campaigning with God about Torah, “Hey, God! Don’t squelch alternative viewpoints!”? Finally, there is only faith and unfaith. There is no middling ground *coram Deo*, where the theologian must always stand. One can only listen to or ignore the word of the eternal God.

Proof texts better stand, because a poor sinner like me puts his trust in them. God speaks. The text conveys the gifts. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). When will I stop proof texting? When I stop being a sinner and when God stops speaking.

Scott R. Murray  
Memorial Lutheran Church  
Houston, Texas

### The New Fundamentalism

“ A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is.”  
(Thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation)

In a remarkable irony, critics of a literal interpretation of Scripture have become perpetrators of a new fundamentalism. That new fundamentalism approaches the Lutheran Confessions with a hermeneutic that goes like this: as long as the Confessions do not explicitly mention a subject the church is welcome to teach whatever it wants about that subject. This hermeneutic was used in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was contended that the Confessions did not expressly call Scripture the word of God. If that was true (and it was not), the church was free to teach what it wanted about the divine character of Scripture. Now, this new fundamentalism would say that since the Lutheran Confessions do not forbid female ordination in explicit terms, the church is free to teach whatever it wants in the matter.

Those who reject the church’s practice of closed communion use the same argumentation. Since the Lutheran Confessions do not mention closed communion in express terms, therefore, the stewards of the mysteries are free to give the sacrament to any person they want.

This interpretative method is a-historical, completely ignoring the historical situation in which the Lutheran Confessions came to life. That the Lutheran Confessions do not directly teach closed communion is a witness to the fact that closed communion was no issue within any of the confessional communities in the sixteenth century. The actual practice of the Reformation era churches indicates that closed communion was a given. Perhaps it does not matter what the practice of communion fellowship along confessional-doctrinal lines is actually called. It maybe a purely prudential issue. The fact is that the Lutheran confessional witness presupposes those church and communion fellowship boundaries. The simplest way to denominate this has been "closed communion."

The church teaches the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, although, as our fundamentalist friends on the other side of the fence are always glad to point out, the word "Trinity" is never found in the Bible. The church confesses the *homoousion* because it reflected the teaching of Scripture itself on the incarnation. Both the terms are so deeply imbedded in the church's teaching as to become matters of confession (FC X). They both carry the freight often conveyed by "theological shorthand."

Perhaps the carping and quibbling about the terms should lead us to conclude that the term "closed communion" should become a matter of confession. However, this should be no issue. It would be no issue as long as the proponents of a communion fellowship that ignores confessional boundaries would recognize that their practice is at variance from the historic Lutheran practice as derived from the Lutheran confessional witness. It matters not a wit that the Lutheran Confessions do not use the term "closed communion," unless we would prefer to be "new fundamentalists." Now wouldn't that be ironic?

Scott Murray  
Memorial Lutheran Church  
Houston, Texas