

CHAPTER 10

THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN BEING IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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Introduction

Christian theologians and philosophers have discussed human nature for some two millennia.¹ In light of the daunting smallness of human beings against the backdrop of God's greatness and the vastness of the universe already the psalmist raised the question: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" (Ps 8:4, NRSV). The question: "What does it mean to be human?" has challenged every age, it seems. But no age seems to know so much and so many things *about* human beings as ours does.² Yet, as Martin Heidegger points out: No age seems to know less than ours what human beings are.³ The days are long past when talk about human nature was the preserve of theologians and philosophers.⁴ New discoveries in genetics, neurol-

¹ Already the influential church father Augustine stated: "Men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the oceans that encircle the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves. . . . I'm not now investigating the tracts of the heavens or measuring the distance of the stars or trying to discover how the earth hangs in space. I am investigating myself, my memory, my mind. . . . What then am I, my God?" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 9) as quoted in Malcolm Jeeves, "Introduction," in *From Cells to Souls—and Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Malcolm Jeeves (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), x.

² Wolfhart Pannenberg has said that we live in an age of anthropology where the science of man is the major goal in scientific endeavors of the present times. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart im Lichte der Theologie*, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995 [1961]), 5.

³ Martin Heidegger, as quoted in H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981), i.

⁴ So Jeeves, "Introduction," viii.

ogy, and psychology confront us with new proposals about human nature that have far-reaching implications for our understanding of what it means to be human and for our theology. A recent book review claimed that no fewer than 130 different views of the human person have been documented.⁵ In light of this fact, Nancey Murphy is certainly correct when she writes: “It is a strange fact about our culture that we are operating with a variety of radically different views of the basic nature of human beings. Even stranger is the fact that so few people seem to notice the first fact.”⁶

Indeed, to give an overview of biblical anthropology in Christian Theology poses some daunting challenges. First of all, the historical and theological scope of this topic is so vast that it is impossible to do justice to all its facets in such a limited space as this short essay. Second, throughout most of church history there existed no single biblical or theological anthropology. Rather, the church developed a series of anthropological issues deriving, on the one hand, from ancient philosophy (e.g., body and soul, freedom of the will and the sovereignty of God’s grace, immortality, and the problem of evil), and on the other hand, from authentic biblical tradition (the image of God, sin, the original human state, forgiveness, repentance, penitence, etc.).⁷

Yet, in classical theology the question of the human soul dominated the field that we now call anthropology, though the anthropological question embraces much more. Seventh-day Adventists have often tended to restrict the anthropological discussion to the issue of the mortality or immortality of the soul. But there are more things involved in biblical anthropology than that.

Hence, I have chosen to focus on some important representatives and influential positions that have shaped Christian theology and its understanding of human nature to a significant degree. I will also highlight some recent representatives that appear to reshape in significant new directions our (theological) understanding of who human beings are.

Theological Issues Related to Anthropology

In studying the topic of anthropology in the Christian tradition it becomes obvious that it is interwoven with a number of other theological

⁵ Graham McFarlane, Review of *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, *Science and Christian Belief* 14/1 (April 2002): 94, 95.

⁶ Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ix.

⁷ Cf. Dietrich Ritschl, “Theological Anthropology” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999–2003), 74.

issues. It is significantly interconnected with soteriological questions, i.e., what happens to human beings when they die? The issue of the continuation of our existence after death in hell, purgatory, or heaven comes to view. But no less significant are questions about free will and God's grace as well as the consequences of sin for our human nature. Thus, the understanding of who we are encompasses more than the question of the relationship between body and soul and the issue of an immortal soul. The question of our sinful nature and original sin and the role of the human will also play an important role in anthropological discussions throughout church history.

Furthermore, recently the question has been raised with new vigor whether human beings can be reduced to purely natural factors and whether we came into existence through purely immanent naturalistic factors by means of evolution. There are other issues that are interwoven with our understanding of anthropology, such as the relationship of man and woman and the role of the sexes as well as the recent debate about gender and gender mainstreaming.

What makes our topic even more complex is the diverse understanding of leading Christian theologians on various aspects of human nature. Thus, we find proponents who teach the existence of an immortal soul but also defend free will in human beings, while others support the dominance of divine grace over the human will and equally maintain the belief in an immortal soul.

In view of this complexity, it will be helpful for us to have a brief overview of the understanding of anthropology in Christian theology, beginning with some influential perspectives of the early church fathers.

The Early Church Fathers

With the early church fathers we do not find a systematic presentation of their anthropological understanding of human nature. Their main interest lay in the field of theology and Christology. Purely anthropological questions are only touched on, and statements about human nature are made only in passing, usually in connection with other questions, such as the nature of Christ, the question of soteriology, or the soul and its relation to the body. H. D. McDonald has said about the Apostolic Fathers that "the very practical purpose of their writings precludes any form of dogmatic anthropology."⁸ When we find early discussions relating to anthropology, they were often influenced and shaped by questions arising from (Greek) philosophy.

⁸ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 47.

The Apostolic Fathers

It seems that many of the early church fathers took for granted that human beings were created by God, that they were created male and female, and that they enjoyed the freedom to decide on matters of salvation. While most of the so-called Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, *The Didache* [Palestine], Barnabas of Alexandria, Hermas [Rome], and Polycarp of Smyrna) seem to set forth the view of conditional immortality and the eternal death of the wicked,⁹ we also find some Christian writers, already in the second century, who promote the concept of an immortal soul.¹⁰ Some Christian thought leaders in the early church apparently found the answer to the question “What makes a human being genuinely human?” in the idea of a soul distinguishable from the body. One of the earliest Christian references to an “immortal soul” can be found in the *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* (ca. AD 130).¹¹ Here one finds statements such as the following: “the soul lives in the body, but it does not belong to the body”; “the soul, which is invisible, is put under guard in the visible body”; and “the soul is imprisoned in the body, but it sustains the body.”¹²

While most of the Apostolic Fathers do not seem to support this view, as Froom has demonstrated in his monumental study, more second-century voices than Froom acknowledges raise similar ideas. In the story of *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, a young woman who was martyred with other Christians in Carthage, North Africa, around AD 203, reports several recorded visions that seem to promote the belief in a transitional state after death and a transitional state that can be affected by intercessory prayers.¹³ Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred ca. AD 155–156, also seems

⁹ See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), 1:758, 759 for an overview and 1:757–802 for a more extensive discussion of their views. Froom also lists the *Epistle to Diognetus* in the same category, even though Froom admits that the author is the first to use the expression “immortal soul” in Christian writings (1:798). According to Froom, he used it in a *conditional sense*, otherwise it would be in conflict with other clear statements in the same treatise (1:798, 800).

¹⁰ According to Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), 259, the Apostolic Fathers “did not reflect on the intermediate state” but took over “the common opinion of their day [that] the pious at death immediately inherit the heavenly glory prepared for them, and the wicked at once suffer the punishment of hell.”

¹¹ According to Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:796, some place it in the early third century.

¹² *Epistle to Diognetus*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2:143, as quoted in Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 19.

¹³ See Terrence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 56, 57.

to have believed that he would be delivered into heaven immediately upon his death and that the soul also survived after death.¹⁴

Beginning already in the second century, apparently under the influence of Platonic philosophy, the origin of the soul is debated among Christian theologians.¹⁵ According to Froom, Justin Martyr (AD 105–165) continues to champion apostolic conditionalism.¹⁶ Indeed, Justin, commenting upon the statement that “according to some who are termed Platonist” the soul is immortal,¹⁷ responds: “I pay no regard to Plato.” He then proceeds to argue against Plato’s conception of immortality that the soul “lives not as being itself life, but as the partaking of life,” because “God wills it to live, and hence it will cease to live whenever he may please that it shall live no longer, for it is not the property of the soul to have life in itself as it is the property of God.”¹⁸ While Justin did not propagate the notion of an

¹⁴ Ibid., 57; contrast Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:791–796, who lists Polycarp among the proponents of conditional immortality. Polycarp spoke of the “resurrection to eternal life, of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit, among whom I may be received in thy presence *this day* as a rich and acceptable sacrifice” (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14.2 in Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* [New York: Macmillan, 1979], 154, as quoted in Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 57). The same quotation is listed by Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:795, who ends the quotation after the words “Holy Ghost” and does not quote the last part of the sentence, where Polycarp seems to express his desire to be in the presence of God *this day*. Froom, in his monumental work, does not give the complete quotation, apparently being driven at times more by an apologetic mission to defend conditional immortality than by the aim to provide a fair and comprehensive presentation and discussion of all sources.

¹⁵ For Plato, immortality belonged to the soul by nature, which is seated in the human body like a bird in a cage (further, see Clinton Wahlen, “Greek Philosophy, Judaism, and Biblical Anthropology,” in this volume). In the Bible, immortality belongs to God Himself and is conferred to the saved at the resurrection. According to Harvard professor Harry A. Wolfson, “this distinction between the Platonic and the scriptural conception is constantly stressed by the Fathers” (Harry A. Wolfson, “Immortality and the Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers” (The Ingersoll Lecture, 1956), in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 57.

¹⁶ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:807–815.

¹⁷ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 5, as quoted in Wolfson, “Immortality and the Resurrection,” 57.

¹⁸ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 6, as quoted in Wolfson, “Immortality and the Resurrection,” 57 (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 5; ANF 1:197, as quoted in Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 58). Wolfson’s perspective is supportive of Froom’s assessment of Justin Martyr, contra Terrence Nichols and John W. Cooper. According to Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 58, Justin “clearly teaches that the soul survives bodily death and the body is resurrected.” In more general terms, Cooper asserts that “virtually all Christians seem to have agreed that persons both survive physical death and are resurrected to some form of bodily existence. Implicit in this belief that persons can survive organic decease is the idea that human beings are so constituted that they can ‘come apart’ at death. When the body dies the person retains her existence and most likely some kind of consciousness as well. A separation or rending of that which was so intimately joined in life occurs at death. The person or self or soul or spirit survives the death of the body” (John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul*

immortal soul, there are already with Justin Martyr some statements that are at least ambiguous or even contradictory where he speaks about an everlasting punishment that is proportional to sin.¹⁹ Another important anthropological concern of his was to safeguard the freedom of the will. He wanted to secure man's responsibility for his wrongdoing and guilt. For Justin, sin is derived not from an inherited corruption of nature but is a consequence of each individual's own act of self-determination. This view became especially characteristic of the anthropology of the theologians of the Eastern church.²⁰

Joel B. Green, in his otherwise remarkable book *Body, Soul and Human Life*, seems to overstate the point when he concludes that “as early as the second century of the Christian era it was nonetheless clear to *most* theologians” that the soul is an entity separate from the body and imprisoned in the body.²¹ In a similar manner the respected church historian J. N. D. Kelly has stated that the Apologists’ “general view of human nature is dichotomist, i.e. they consider it to be composed of two elements, body (*sōma* σῶμα) and soul (*psychē* ψυχή or *pneuma* πνεῦμα). And they are unanimous that man is endowed with free-will.”²² While it is true that they widely supported the notion of free will, the early testimony on the immortality of the soul is not as predominant as these statements suggest.

The successors to these early voices in Christian theology are characterized by the attempt to solve the biblical question of anthropology by means of Greek-philosophical categories of thinking.²³ Thus, a more definitive doctrine of human nature begins to take shape. Froom has stated that in the new ante-Nicean period (ca. AD 150–325), the phrases of neo-Platonic dogma such as “immortal soul,” “eternal spirit,” or “eternal suffering” increasingly appear.²⁴ In light of the fact that Greek thought on human nature was more diverse than just espousing a dualistic view of man,²⁵ it

and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989], 8).

¹⁹ Cf. the detailed discussion in Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:816–833.

²⁰ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 49.

²¹ Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life*, 18, 19 (emphasis supplied).

²² J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper, 1978), 166.

²³ Volker Gäckle, “Mensch, theologiegeschichtlich,” in *Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde*, ed. Helmut Burkhardt and Uwe Swarat, 3 vols., 2d ed. (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1998), 2:1322.

²⁴ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:803.

²⁵ Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 23, has point-

remains a mystery how Plato became the single most influential philosopher for Christian theology. Perhaps he exercised a greater influence than others through his writings, which were used in schools to train future generations of thinkers. But Greek philosophical thought on human nature cannot be reduced to a single viewpoint and is much more diverse than we often assume.²⁶

Apparently, Athenagoras, who was influenced by Platonic philosophy, seems to have been the first Christian theologian to embrace the immortal soul postulate publicly.²⁷ Yet it was Tertullian who gave great impetus to this perspective, leading us briefly to consider his views.

Tertullian²⁸

Tertullian was the first theologian in the early church who wrote in Latin rather than Greek, and thus he exercised great influence on the Latin church. His *Treatise on the Soul* is perhaps the first extended Christian writing on the subject. For him “the entire man consists of the union of two substances,” namely, body and soul.²⁹ Tertullian rejected the idea of the soul’s preexistence as we find it in Plato. If the soul does not preexist, it must come into being at the time of birth of the human being.³⁰ For Tertullian, this meant that the soul of man is drawn out into physical progeny from Adam. Adam held within him the seed of all humankind, and he is the one root from which every propagating branch or “layer” (*tradux* so Traducianism) is derived.³¹ The soul has its origin by the mediated activity of God through human parents and is propagated together with the body. This leads Tertullian to his famous dictum: “the propagation of the soul is the propagation of sin” (*Tradux animae, tradux peccati*).³² Kelly has pointed out that it is only “a short step from this psychology to the doctrine of

ed out that “the dichotomy ‘Greek dualism versus Hebraic holism’ is an oversimplification.” According to Murphy, the philosophers of Greece and Rome were not at all united on these issues (*ibid.*, 2). Similarly, Joel B. Green, “Bodies—That Is, Human Lives: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* 159–161.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 159–161. See also Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature,” 2–4, 23.

²⁷ See the discussion in Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:928–946.

²⁸ On Tertullian see Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:959–968.

²⁹ Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, 14, as quoted in McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 51. See also Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, 35, as quoted in Wolfson, “Immortality and the Resurrection,” 58.

³⁰ Cf. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 72.

³¹ See the discussion in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 197–199.

³² As quoted in McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 73.

original sin.”³³ Indeed, Tertullian is more explicit and outspoken about the sinful bias of human beings than previous theologians.³⁴ Yet, original sin for Tertullian has not quite annulled free will. The first act of sin was itself an exercise of free will, but since the soul, even in its fallen state, retains a measure of its original goodness, the ability to choose between good and evil continues with man.³⁵ Thus, Tertullian is a firm believer in free will.³⁶

Tertullian also introduced another influential concept into Christian thought; namely, that good deeds accumulate merit with God, while bad deeds demand satisfaction.³⁷ This led him to propose the endless torment of the wicked. According to Froom, “Tertullian’s description of the eternal anguish of the damned surpassed any and all predecessors.”³⁸

Tertullian was a dichotomist par excellence. His dichotomous understanding of man won wide acceptance³⁹ and later was implicitly approved by Augustine.⁴⁰ Augustine also further developed his understanding of original sin. Before turning to Augustine and his anthropology, we will look briefly at some influential Eastern theologians.

Eastern Theologians

For the Alexandrian theologians, the physical solidarity with Adam and thus our human participation in his sinful act was largely absent from their thinking.⁴¹ Both Clement and Origen placed great emphasis upon free will.⁴² According to them, the free will of man enables him to turn to the good and to accept the salvation that is offered in Jesus Christ. While God offers salvation, man has the power to accept it.⁴³

³³ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 175. Similarly Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 64, summarizes Tertullian’s position as saying “that evil became, as it were, a natural element in man, present from birth, and that this condition passes over through generation upon the whole human race. This is the first trace of the doctrine of original sin.”

³⁴ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 176.

³⁵ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 52.

³⁶ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 175. Cf. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 5–7, 9, 10.

³⁷ E.g., Tertullian, *Repentance*, 5, 6; idem, *Exhortation to Chastity*, 1; idem, *Antidote for the Scorpion’s Sting*, 6, as quoted in Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 177.

³⁸ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:961.

³⁹ According to Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 63, Tertullian “influenced Western theology more than any of the” other anti-Gnostic Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus.

⁴⁰ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 77.

⁴¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 178, 179.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 179, 180.

⁴³ Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 74.

In contrast to the Western church, which was inclined toward dichotomy, Eastern theologians such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, tended to see human nature as tripartite.⁴⁴ “They are called ‘trichotomists’ since they divide human nature into three components. Spirit is the essential human self which relates to God. Soul is that dimension of persons which mediates and conjoins the spirit with the material body.”⁴⁵ While according to Kelly many theologians from East and West took it “for granted that man is a composite being, made up out of body and soul,”⁴⁶ this was not the only existing view.

Origen

With Origen we encounter another aspect of anthropology that is somewhat out of the ordinary. Origen is a firm proponent of the theory of the preexistence of all individual souls. In this Origen continues in the tradition of Platonic and neoplatonic ideas about the immortality of the soul.⁴⁷ But for Origen God created a fixed number of rational essences, all of them co-equal as well as co-eternal and all of them endowed with free will. The present condition of humanity presupposes a preexisting fall from holiness into sin, which was the occasion for the creation of this material world. The fallen spirits now were joined on earth to material bodies. Matter was called into being for the purpose of supplying an abode and as a place of training and purgation for these fallen spirits.⁴⁸ Human beings are sinners, according to Origen, not because of Adam’s transgression but because of their prior choice of evil in the pretemporal world.⁴⁹ Humans exist as a punishment for the evil chosen in the pretemporal realm.

Because he sees all of life and history as a movement back to God and a recovery of the state of original union, Origen thinks that in the end

⁴⁴ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 75–77. See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 191, 192.

⁴⁵ Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 9.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 344.

⁴⁷ On the Platonic influence on Origen, see Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:997, 998; J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), 84, 87, 88; Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 1:146–148. Adolf von Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 145, calls Origen a keen idealistic philosopher.

⁴⁸ Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 73; McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 69; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 180–183.

⁴⁹ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 69. The Bible knows nothing of an apostasy of humanity before the transgression of Adam. The preexistence teaching of Origen stands in contradiction to the biblical view of the creation of man as reported in Genesis (cf. *ibid.*, 70).

all persons might be saved. Even those who have left the primal state of blessedness have not been removed irrecoverably, but may be restored to their condition of happiness. His universalism or teaching of *apokatastasis*, where God’s work of redemption will not cease until all things are restored to their original state, is one of the most controversial aspects of his theology.⁵⁰ This restoration of all things will even include Satan and his demons.⁵¹

It has been said that “it was in the fourth and fifth centuries that the doctrine of human nature became an issue of prime importance in the Church.”⁵² It seems that anthropological questions surfaced particularly in connection with soteriological questions, such as the depravity and original sin of man and the issue of free will. A key theologian in this discussion was Augustine and his rebuttal to Pelagius, to which debate we now turn.

Augustine

With regard to the understanding of the soul, Augustine’s anthropology is a two-substance dualism influenced by Platonic thought.⁵³ According to Froom, Augustine, even before he became a Christian, had written a book giving sixteen reasons for the immortality of the soul.⁵⁴ For him the immaterial soul is superior to the body because it alone bears the image and knowledge of God. The body tends to divert the soul from spiritual things and tempts it with sinful desires. The soul is superior, because it is immortal and survives bodily death.⁵⁵ Augustine became the most powerful and influential exponent of the immortality and indestructibility of the human soul.⁵⁶ Augustine also stated that some will go to heaven after a period of purgation.⁵⁷ He believed that the intercession of members of the church for the dead cannot be in vain. This thought became the basis for the Western belief in purgatory that is still held in Catholicism but was rejected by Luther and other Protestants.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ See the discussion in Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:1021–1023.

⁵¹ Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 75.

⁵² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 344.

⁵³ Cf. Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), 95–104.

⁵⁴ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:1072, 1073. Froom does not mention the name of this book nor does he give any reference.

⁵⁵ On Augustine see the discussion in Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 10, 11.

⁵⁶ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:1071.

⁵⁷ According to Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine*, 295, Augustine is the first of the church fathers who precisely formulated the teaching on purgatory, a concept only hinted at in the earlier fathers.

⁵⁸ Cf. Augustine, *The City of God*, 21, 13, as quoted in Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 65.

Augustine's view of human nature is much more pessimistic than many of the Apologists or Eastern church fathers (Origen, Gregory of Nyssa). For him all human beings are under the sin of Adam. Man is born a sinner because the taint of sin was propagated from parent to child in the physical act of procreation.⁵⁹ Even newborn babies are affected by original sin.⁶⁰ While Augustine admits that nothing is more difficult to understand than the nature of the ancient sin,⁶¹ he goes beyond Tertullian in speaking not only of original sin but of original guilt. Hence, everyone will go to hell unless they are converted to Christ. Since Adam's sin was not his alone but every man's act in him, each person is guilty for it as soon as he exists as an individual.⁶² This idea helped strengthen the practice of infant baptism, because the sacrament of baptism was designed to remove the guilt of sin.⁶³

Since for Augustine the soul is immortal and does not die, the souls of the damned suffer apart from God for eternity. In his famous book *City of God*, Augustine discusses at length the state of the damned in hell, where they are burned with everlasting fire. He confuses, as Froom has aptly phrased it, "eternal loss of life" with an "eternal life of loss."⁶⁴ Augustine vigorously rejects Origen's view that all might be saved. The Western church has basically followed Augustine and his perspective of eternal punishment in hell ever since.⁶⁵ Only occasional and sporadic voices of dissent have been heard.⁶⁶

Perhaps the most important questions in the debate between Augustine and Pelagius were those of free will and original sin. Pelagius was primarily a moralist, concerned for right conduct.⁶⁷ According to Pelagius, man is born into the world without any inherited bias to sin and with the natural ability to obey God.⁶⁸ Sin did not injure the human race but only Adam

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 363, with sources from Augustine.

⁶⁰ Cf. Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence*, 1.24, 27, as quoted in McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 61.

⁶¹ Augustine, *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church*, 1.40, as quoted in Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 363.

⁶² McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 61.

⁶³ Augustine, *Against Julian*, 6.49, 50, as quoted in Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 364.

⁶⁴ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:1072.

⁶⁵ Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 64.

⁶⁶ So Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:1075.

⁶⁷ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357.

⁶⁸ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 58.

himself.⁶⁹ The universality of sin results from imitation.⁷⁰ Since man ought to refrain from sinning, he must be free not to sin. Hence, the idea of unconditional free will and responsibility is the keystone of Pelagius’s system.⁷¹

Augustine, in contrast to Pelagius, has a much bleaker view of human nature, stressing our solidarity with Adam. Every human being is deprived, disabled, and condemned because of Adam’s sin, which brought guilt and corruption upon all his descendants.⁷² As a by-product of our fall in Adam, human beings have lost the liberty he enjoyed, i.e., the ability to avoid sin and to do good. While for Augustine the will still has a certain natural freedom and is capable of acts that are civilly good, he also maintains that separated from God, burdened with guilt, and under the dominion of evil, man cannot will that which is good in the sight of God.⁷³ Augustine’s view of grace follows logically from his contention that the will is enslaved because of original sin.⁷⁴ He acknowledges that God’s omnipotent will, operating on our wills by grace, is irresistible. Since divine grace takes the initiative, and apart from it all men are condemned, it is for God to determine who shall receive grace and who not. This God has done from all eternity, and the number of the elect is strictly limited.⁷⁵ Augustine so magnified the grace of God that it left nothing in man upon which that grace could lay hold and operate. H. D. McDonald has raised the question: “If belief in Christ is altogether God’s own act, what room is there, then, for anything human or natural?”⁷⁶ “Augustine’s doctrine of sin and grace was adopted

⁶⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁷¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357; McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 62: “The Council of Carthage in 417 singled out and rejected the main propositions of Pelagius. Condemned were the statements that Adam was created mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not; that Adam’s sin injured himself alone and not the human race; that there were men without sin before the coming of Christ; that new-born infants are in the same condition as Adam before the Fall; that not through death or the Fall the whole race dies, nor through the resurrection of Christ does it live again.”

⁷² Ibid., 59, 60; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 364.

⁷³ Cf. Ibid., 366, 367; Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 134–136.

⁷⁴ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 63.

⁷⁵ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 368. Augustine has to twist the text in 1 Timothy 2:4, where Paul states that God wills all men to be saved, to mean that God wills the salvation of all the elect (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 368, 369).

⁷⁶ McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 64. There was some opposition to Augustine’s views in Gaul. Leading theologians, including John Cassian, Vincent of Lerin, Hilary of Arles, Fastus of Riez, and Cannadius of Marseilles, agreed with Augustine that sin has its effects on man and that without grace man is wholly incapable of good. But they dissented from him in their allowing man to have an active part in salvation. Because they were centered in Marseilles their teaching

as the anthropology of the Western Church.”⁷⁷ His ideas have significantly dominated and influenced most of subsequent Christian theology, including Protestant theology, even up to our time. This will become evident as we now notice briefly some developments during the Middle Ages and the Protestant Reformation.

The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages Christian anthropology remained within Greek philosophical presuppositions. Medieval thinkers took over their understanding of the relationship of body and soul and the soul’s immortality from the earlier fathers of the church.⁷⁸ While Bonaventure, following Platonic dualism, understood the body to be the decaying shell of an immortal soul, Thomas Aquinas followed Aristotelian thought and emphasized the unity of human nature by making the soul the primary organizing principle of the body, without which it would disintegrate. While the matter in a person’s body is constantly being replaced, it is the soul that gives individuals their continuity and identity.⁷⁹ According to Cooper, he nevertheless agrees with Augustine in affirming that the soul is a distinct substance that can survive biological death.⁸⁰

Under the influence of Aristotelian thought, Aquinas also insists that the soul is capable of understanding and is therefore rational.⁸¹ Along these lines he saw the image of God in man in his rational abilities. Others, such as Bernhard of Clairveaux and William of Ockham, stressed freedom of the will as a sign of the image of God.⁸²

The Reformation and the Council of Trent

Among the Protestant Reformers there were several who, on a fresh and unbiased reading of Scripture, supported a conditionalist understanding of man’s nature, such as Wycliffe, Tyndale, and others.⁸³

was first called Massilianism (McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, 64).

⁷⁷ Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 138.

⁷⁸ Gäckle, “Mensch,” 1323.

⁷⁹ Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 67.

⁸⁰ *Summa Theologica*, 1.76.1, as quoted in Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 12. Cf. also the discussion in *ibid.*, 11–13, on Aquinas.

⁸¹ Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, 67.

⁸² Gäckle, “Mensch,” 1323.

⁸³ Cf. the graphic chart in Fromm, *Conditionalist Faith*, 2:6–9, and the more detailed discussion *passim*.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther is championed by Froom as reviving conditionalist thinking.⁸⁴ Yet, Luther was still a dichotomist. It is true that Luther opposed the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory and the related practice of selling indulgences. He also lamented the idea of the soul being immortal as a monstrous opinion coming from the Roman dunghill of decretals.⁸⁵ At some point he even speaks about death as a “deep, strong, sweet sleep.”⁸⁶

While this might sound more conditionalist with regard to anthropology, in other areas Luther was following Augustine in ways that significantly impacted his understanding of human nature. With Augustine, he believed that as a result of Adam’s fall the human race became totally depraved and corrupted. He followed Augustine in postulating human beings not just in a state of sin but a state of original sin. For Luther, original sin meant that guilt, depravity, and condemnation were transmitted to the human race. According to Luther, the sinner is bent on sin and has no free will in spiritual matters. In fact, Luther asserted that the person who maintains “that man’s free-will is able to do or work anything in spiritual cases be they ever so small, denies Christ.”⁸⁷ In spiritual things, or in things pertaining unto salvation or damnation, man has no free will; he is a captive, slave either to the will of God or to the will of Satan.⁸⁸ Lutheran theology also strongly affirms original sin, in which it is believed that the guilt of Adam is transmitted to his posterity.⁸⁹ These soteriological formulations are much more prominent in Luther’s theology than his few statements on soul sleep.

Calvin

For Calvin, traditional Augustinian Platonism is maintained.⁹⁰ Calvin is convinced that Plato “has rightly affirmed its [the soul’s] immortal substance. . . . Hence Plato’s opinion is more correct, because he considers the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 2:64–87.

⁸⁵ As quoted in Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 2:73.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 2:77.

⁸⁷ Martin Luther, *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 90, as quoted in Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 192.

⁸⁸ Luther, *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, 88, as quoted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 508, n. 42.

⁸⁹ Cf. Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis, MO, 1946), 269, and Chr. E. Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik* (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1914), 175, among many others.

⁹⁰ Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.xv.6.

image of God in the soul.”⁹¹ Calvin thinks that the soul is an “incorporeal substance” that “is not spatially limited, still, set in the body, it dwells there as in a house.”⁹² Calvin not only defends an intermediate state where the souls of believers enjoy fellowship with Christ, he attacks the idea of soul-sleep in his tract *Psychopannychia*.⁹³

Furthermore, for Calvin the depravity of the human being is so great that sin has corrupted every part of the person. Consequently, he affirms that the human will is so affected by (original) sin that, although free in everyday matters, it is not able to respond positively to God. The baneful consequences of original sin are already experienced by infants. Thus, salvation is by God’s grace alone, who has predestined the elect as well as the reprobate.

Calvin’s understanding of human nature, the bondage of the will in spiritual matters, and his view of the afterlife remained a guidepost for subsequent Reformed theology and continues to shape the thinking of millions of Christians to this day.⁹⁴

Both Luther and Calvin differ significantly from Adventist theology on these points, and we must ask ourselves whether we are truly heirs of the Reformation or whether we are not more in line with the Anabaptists and Christians in the Arminian tradition, who have not won such widespread admiration and support in the theological world. Our Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the nature of man is markedly different from the understanding of human nature in Luther and Calvin, and this has repercussions on our understanding of salvation as well.

Wesley

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, held that “we were all born with a sinful, devilish nature”;⁹⁵ that is, every human being inher-

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ So Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 14.

⁹⁴ Calvin’s ideas on original sin and the immortality of the soul find their echo in various reformed confessions, such as the Belgic Confession (art. XV), the French Confession of Faith (art. XI), the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 3, Q. & A., 7), the Second Helvetic Confession (chap. 8); and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (art. IX). Related is reiteration of the bondage of the will in spiritual matters by the Westminster Confession (chap. 9). See also the French Confession of Faith (art. IX), the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. & A., 8, 9), and the Second Helvetic Confession (chap. 9), as cited in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 193.

⁹⁵ Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Childs, eds., *A Compend of Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1954), 114, as quoted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 187.

its a polluted, depraved, and sin-infected nature from Adam.⁹⁶ But inherited guilt is canceled by God's prevenient grace, which frees the human will and enables all persons to repent and exercise faith toward God.⁹⁷ While Wesley is more appreciative of human free will than are Luther and Calvin with regard to the physical aspects of human nature, Wesley "was influenced by the early Greeks in his concept of the components of man's physical being" and proposes a position that is "not greatly different from that of the 'pluralistic' Greek philosophers, especially the Pythagoreans."⁹⁸ Thus, for Wesley, death "is properly the separation of the soul from the body."⁹⁹

It appears that in the time of Protestant orthodoxy, after the death of the prominent Reformers, who were under the influence of Greek (Aristotelian) thought, the idea of an immortal soul was set in stone for centuries as being the orthodox theological position. This is true for both Reformed theology and for Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Only occasional voices, from a fresh study of the Bible, would come to new insights and more biblically based conclusions.¹⁰⁰ New developments in biblical studies, where traditional *dicta probantia* (proof texts for the traditional Christian dogmas) would be increasingly questioned by voices who approached the Bible more critically and independently, brought new perspectives on the biblical understanding of human nature.

Tridentine Response

In the Tridentine response to the positions of the Magisterial Reformers, the Protestant teaching regarding the radical nature of sin and the complete destruction of the *imago Dei* in man is rejected.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the Council of Trent stated that in spiritual matters free will is weakened but not lost.¹⁰² The bondage of the will is rejected. While sin has seriously damaged the *imago Dei* in human beings, it is not completely destroyed. The

⁹⁶ *A Compend of Wesley's Theology*, 120, as quoted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 187.

⁹⁷ *A Compend of Wesley's Theology*, 148, as quoted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 187.

⁹⁸ Charles W. Carter, "Anthropology," in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, ed. Charles W. Carter, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Asbury, 1983), 1:221.

⁹⁹ John Wesley, *Works*, 7:228, as quoted in Carter, 1:223.

¹⁰⁰ This was the case even before Luther, when Wycliffe and Tyndale challenged some ideas regarding an immortal soul. See Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 2:49, 59, 88–96, and passim.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–1984), 279.

¹⁰² "If anyone saith that, since Adam's sin, the free-will of man is lost and extinguished; . . . let him be anathema" (*The Canons and Decrees of Trent*, Session VI, canon 5, as quoted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 186).

remaining capabilities such as reason and willpower make it possible for the person, together with divine grace, to perform works that count toward our salvation.¹⁰³

Modern Challenges to a Dualistic Anthropology

Whereas the early church and most of the theologians throughout the Middle Ages and the period of the Reformation were constructing their anthropological understanding in response to (Greek) philosophical questions, in the modern era we encounter new questions and anthropological proposals. Significant challenges to a dualistic anthropology have arisen from biblical scholarship, new scientific discoveries, evolutionary thought, and from the social sciences, bringing new anthropological understandings along with them. Let us look briefly at some of those alternatives to the traditional dualistic understanding of human nature from biblical scholarship before we turn to the scientific challenges that have been raised.

Recent Biblical Scholarship

Long before modern critical scholarship, the Bible was scrutinized with open minds that challenged the predominantly dualistic view of human nature. However, with the rise of the historical-critical method and its critical stance toward ecclesiastical tradition, by the beginning of the twentieth century, skepticism toward a dualistic understanding of human nature became more and more prominent among biblical scholars. Since many in-depth treatments of the modern period are available, our focus will be on some important developments in the second half of the twentieth century up to the present.¹⁰⁴

Writing in 1964, Roman Catholic scholar Ansgar Ahlbrecht stated that a large proportion of Protestant theologians in his day had repudiated the immortality of the soul.¹⁰⁵ Already in 1959 a leading and representative German Protestant dictionary, *Das Evangelische Kirchenlexikon*, categorically stated that the idea of immortality is to be rejected.¹⁰⁶ While this did not mean that the idea of an immortal soul had vanished from Protestant and evangelical theology, we do find an increasing number of biblical scholars

¹⁰³ Gäckle, "Mensch," 1324.

¹⁰⁴ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, vol. 2, has covered much of the discussion up to the middle of the twentieth century.

¹⁰⁵ Ansgar Ahlbrecht, *Tod und Unsterblichkeit in der Evangelischen Theologie der Gegenwart* (Paderborn: Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1964), 7.

¹⁰⁶ H. Engelland, "Unsterblichkeit," in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, ed. Heinz Brunotte and Otto Weber, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 1579.

and theologians who questioned the traditional dualistic understanding of human nature.

Already in 1911, well-known biblical scholar H. Wheeler Robinson, in his book *The Christian Doctrine of Man*,¹⁰⁷ pointed out that an unbiased analysis of the biblical text itself, especially the Old Testament, reveals that “soul” and “spirit” (Heb. *nefesh* and *ruakh*, and Gr. *psychē* and *pneuma*, respectively) have quite different meanings than they do in Platonic circles. They are used of animals and humans alike and do not refer to an immortal existence after death.¹⁰⁸

In the 1950s two significant scholarly treatments of anthropology by biblical scholars appeared: one study of the Old Testament and one of the New. In 1953, Claude Tresmontand (1925–1997) published his remarkable book, which was subsequently translated into German, *Essay sur la Pensée Hébraïque*.¹⁰⁹ Amazingly, although Tresmontand is a Roman Catholic biblical scholar, he points out that the biblical anthropology of the Old Testament is very different from the traditional Hellenistic dualism that dominated Christian theology for centuries. According to Tresmontand, there is no body-soul dualism in the Old Testament.

Around the same time, a well-known New Testament scholar, Oscar Cullmann, gave the Ingersol Lecture at Harvard University in 1955 on the topic “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament.”¹¹⁰ In it Cullmann masterfully compared the radical difference between the fates of Socrates and Jesus, showing that the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body were originally mutually exclusive and that the New Testament does not support a dualistic understanding of human nature. Cullmann was stunned by the vehement criticism he received on this particular lecture, accusing him of betraying a vital cornerstone of traditional Christianity.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911), as quoted in Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 21, 69, as quoted in Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 23.

¹⁰⁹ Claude Tresmontand, *Essay sur la Pensée Hébraïque* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1953); idem, *Biblisches Denken und Hellenische Überlieferung: Ein Versuch* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1956).

¹¹⁰ Oscar Cullmann, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament,” in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 9–53. Cullmann’s important lecture was translated into various languages and received wide attention across denominational boundaries.

¹¹¹ Cf. Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 413.

Despite such opposition to biblical findings, more and more evangelical biblical scholars have come to similar conclusions and advanced the discussion in new areas such as the understanding of hell and eternal punishment, especially in Great Britain.¹¹² Noted British evangelical John Wenham, then vice principal of Tyndale Hall, Bristol, called for a reconsideration of the traditional doctrine of hell because he found the doctrine of an everlasting hell to be unacceptable and unbelievable.¹¹³ According to Wenham, “unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God. . . . It is a doctrine which makes the Inquisition look reasonable.”¹¹⁴ By 1991 Wenham emerged as a proponent of conditional immortality, stating “that God created man only potentially immortal.”¹¹⁵

One of the most important British evangelical writers of the twentieth century, John Stott quickly became an even more well-known proponent of conditionalism in the debate over hell and annihilationism. In his famous debate with liberal Anglican theologian David Edwards, Stott was challenged by Edwards on the traditional Christian view of hell, which presents God as the eternal torturer. Stott responded that he found the traditional doctrine of hell emotionally intolerable.¹¹⁶ For Stott, the biblical texts speak about an utter destruction or annihilation of the wicked rather than an everlasting punishment of them.¹¹⁷ While acknowledging the biblical “lake of fire,” into which the wicked will be thrown, he insists that they will be annihilated and cease to exist eternally.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Further, see Jiří Moskala, “Eternal Punishment in Hell and the Immortality of the Soul: Overview of the Current Debate,” in this volume; cf. also David J. Powys, “Hell”: *A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell,” in *Hell Under Fire*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 15–41, and, more recently, Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, eds., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

¹¹³ John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 27, 33, 37, 38.

¹¹⁴ John Wenham, *Facing Hell: An Autobiography* (London: Paternoster, 1998), 256.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* The 1991 date refers to a presentation Wenham delivered to an audience at Rutherford House, Edinburgh, in that year.

¹¹⁶ David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 314.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹¹⁸ John R. W. Stott, “The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 (January 1994): 34. Stott also claimed that renowned New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce considered annihilationism an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages (cf. Mohler, “The Disappearance of Hell,” 31).

Another prominent evangelical theologian who questioned the traditional doctrine of hell on moral grounds was Clark Pinnock. He wrote:

I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any moral standards, and by the gospel itself.¹¹⁹

It seems that such moral concerns about the character of God and His justice were the driving force behind many evangelical hesitations about hell.

By the mid-1980s more and more evangelical scholars began raising questions about the traditional view of hell and the corresponding anthropology. Edward W. Fudge, with his widely read book *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, comes to mind.¹²⁰ But the number of evangelical scholars promoting annihilationism had reached such proportions that Anglican evangelical theologian Peter Toon stated: “In conservative circles there is a seeming reluctance to espouse publicly a doctrine of hell, and where it is held there is a seeming tendency toward a doctrine of hell as annihilation.”¹²¹ In 2011, Alister McGrath noted that since “the 1980s, a growing internal debate has developed within Evangelicalism concerning a network of eschatological issues, centering on the issue of immortality.” He expects the debate to continue “and perhaps extend further into the Christian community.”¹²² Some even claimed that “the doctrine of eternal punishment is the watershed between Evangelical and non-Evangelical thought.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1990): 246, 247.

¹²⁰ Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982). An updated, revised, and expanded edition was published in 2011. See also Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), and Edward W. Fudge, *Hell: A Final Word. The Surprising Truths I Found in the Bible* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2012).

¹²¹ Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1986), 174.

¹²² Alister MacGrath, *Christian Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 458, 459. Among recent evangelicals who have debated the issue of immortality see Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*; William Crockett and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

¹²³ John Ankerberg with John Welden, “Response to J. I. Packer,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed.

In a significant way, modern biblical scholarship may provide a greater threat to a dualistic anthropology in the Christian tradition than the findings of science and the conclusions of evolutionary thought, to which we will turn in a moment. In dealing with the Bible, modern scholarship is opening up the content of God's Word. While some biblical scholarship was produced by individuals who denied the infallibility of the Bible and worked from historical-critical premises, fundamentally they still referred to the Bible itself as a witness against traditional orthodoxy with regard to the nature of human beings,¹²⁴ a conclusion that is hard to resist. Beyond these biblical and moral concerns there were still more challenges to other anthropological aspects from new scientific discoveries and from developments in social thought.

New Scientific Discoveries and Evolutionary Thought

Under the expanding influence of the theory of evolution, a totally new account of human origins emerged. This new paradigm changed, among other things, our understanding of the dignity, worth, and sanctity of human life and had significant implications for ethics and other theological concepts. A naturalistic and evolutionary understanding of humanity leaves no place for a supernatural origin of human life. It also poses a problem for the idea of an immortal soul. If humans evolve gradually from primitive ancestors, at what point does the soul come into existence? If more complex forms of life evolved from primitive forms of life, the mental capacities of humans gradually emerged from organisms that were virtually unconscious. Thus, "there was no longer a need to postulate a spirit or immaterial substance to account for the psychological and intellectual capacities of human beings. At every level of evolution, mental capacities are a function of the operations of the neuro-cerebral system."¹²⁵ With such a materialistic understanding of human life, where does sin occur and, in its wake, death? If there is no fall, there is no need for God's salvation, and consequently there is no need for Jesus to come to this earth and die a substitutionary death for us. There is no need for a resurrection and hence no need for a second coming of Christ to create a new earth without sin and suffering. Too little attention has been given in theology to the significant dogmatic consequences of evolutionary thought.¹²⁶

Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 140, as quoted in Mohler, "The Disappearance of Hell," 32.

¹²⁴ This has perceptively been stated by Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 24.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁶ On this, see the excellent dissertation by Reinhard Junker, *Leben durch Sterben? Schöpfung*,

Evolutionary thought has become *the* pervasive influence in our society and even in theology. It is amazing to see how some evangelical scholars and theologians who affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and sign their affirmation every year show an amazing flexibility and incongruence in their theology when it comes to making accommodations to evolutionary explanations for the origin of life on earth. This is not consistent. We may sometimes wonder how Platonism could have such a pervasive influence on Christian theology and why it became so influential. I am inclined to think that what Platonism and neoplatonism were to the thinking world and the Christian church in the first centuries, evolutionary thought has become for us today.¹²⁷ We should be exceedingly careful not to marry ourselves to the latest scientific attraction, because whoever enters into such a covenant will soon be a widower. Or, in the words of Malcolm Jeeves, professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland: “It also happens that theologians can be found tilting at scientific windmills long since dismantled and, perhaps what is worse, some are found modifying their doctrines to fit the supposed contours of what they perceive to be the current scientific landscape while, unbeknown to them, it has changed yet again.”¹²⁸

The influence of Platonism in the early church has done Christianity no service and has significantly distorted biblical teachings. Nancey Murphy of Fuller Theological Seminary has succinctly stated that “at great risk of oversimplification, I am suggesting that the adoption of a dualist anthropology in the early centuries of the church was largely responsible for changing Christians’ conception of what Christianity is basically all about.”¹²⁹ In a similar manner, the present writer is convinced that the adoption of evolutionary thought, no matter how powerful and attractive it might appear, will have a similar effect upon Christian theology, including Seventh-day Adventist theology, and will distort the message and mission of the church.¹³⁰

Heilsgeschichte und Evolution (Neuhausen: Hänssler, 1994).

¹²⁷ For a recent attempt to adapt the biblical understanding of creation to evolutionary ideas, see Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012).

¹²⁸ Malcolm Jeeves, “Human Nature: An Integrated Picture” in *What About the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 172.

¹²⁹ Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 28.

¹³⁰ When there is no soul to survive bodily death, what are we to do with those teachings of church tradition that specify that the dead enjoy a conscious relation to God prior to the general resurrection? This teaching was made official for Catholicism by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513, and Calvin’s subsequent statement in 1542 has settled this issue for many Protestants (see

Another recent challenge that has impacted our understanding of human nature lies in the area of neuroscience. Brain scientists and others have noticed the direct causal influence of cerebral functioning on states of consciousness. Mental capacities such as thought, memory, understanding, and self-awareness were found to correlate to specific areas of the brain. The scientific evidence seems to point in one direction. Consciousness, mental capacities, and personality characteristics are rooted in the brain and the organism, not in some immaterial substance or unobservable entity called the soul.¹³¹

From an evolutionary perspective there is no longer a need to postulate a spirit or immaterial substance to account for the psychological and intellectual capacities of human beings. At every level of evolution, mental capacities are a function of the operations of the neurocerebral system.¹³² In many cases these findings are interpreted in a purely naturalistic way, and so it is no surprise that the notion of a separate soul in the human being becomes superfluous. We might applaud these new scientific findings, because the traditional view of the soul, and particularly the idea of an immortal soul, is being discredited.¹³³ But if everything in human beings is reduced to purely naturalistic and materialistic causes, the freedom of the human will is also affected, because human thought becomes little more than organic reactions, placing in doubt whether the soul and the will even exist. In this context, the following statement written in 1869 shows profound insight: “The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man and affect his inmost life.”¹³⁴

This glimpse of the sublime workings of God in human beings encourages us to see man as a unity, a wholistic being, where both physical (i.e., bodily) and spiritual dimensions interact and influence each other. It also opens up a completely new understanding of human nature, where the

Murphy, “Human Nature,” 23).

¹³¹ Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 21, 22.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³³ Thomas Metzinger, “Introduction: Consciousness Research at the End of the Twentieth Century,” in *Neural Correlates of Consciousness: Empirical and Conceptual Questions*, ed. Thomas Metzinger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 6, aptly observes that “implicit in all these new data on the genetic, evolutionary, or neuro-computational roots of conscious human existence is a radically new understanding of what it *means* to be human” (as quoted in Joel B. Green, “What Does It Mean to Be Human? Another Chapter in the Ongoing Interaction of Science and Scripture” in *From Cells to Souls—and Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Malcolm Jeeves [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004], 179, emphasis not attributed).

¹³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1954), 347.

bodily reality and physical dimension of our human existence is taken seriously. Taking bodily life seriously, we come to realize and appreciate that the human being never exists apart from the body. Even our resurrection is a bodily resurrection.¹³⁵ It is not just some form of mental remembrance in the minds of the believers, as liberal scholarship had suggested. The Easter joy of the early disciples is expressed in Luke 24:34 when they say: “The Lord has *really* risen” (NASB). The Greek word used here is a form of the Greek word *ontos*. The resurrection of Jesus provides a new ontology, a new reality of human existence, which is foundational for our new spiritual life in the body. This is precisely why the bodily resurrection is so decisive for our faith and Christian life.

Returning to the subject of human bodily existence, we can say that one function of the mind, working precisely in and through our body and its bodily functions, is to develop character. Character is not restricted to the mind and thinking alone but becomes visible in appropriate action, which is a bodily manifestation. Thus, our character is connected with our bodily existence and is a distinctive mark of our human individuality. And it is character alone that can be taken to heaven. Character has to do with restoring the image of God in us, of making us more like Him.

Related to this is our understanding of health. The integration of health and anthropology is unique to Seventh-day Adventists. Our “health message” implies something much broader than merely what we eat and drink; it includes exercise, work and rest, sunshine and water, forgiveness, peace of heart and mind, how we dress—in short, how we live as bodily creatures. We do all these things not because we want to live a few years longer than the average person and live healthier and, hopefully, happier lives. We practice such a life-changing lifestyle because we are convinced that our body will be more receptive to spiritual things, to God’s communication with us through the nerves of our brain, so that we will be closer to God and understand His will more fully. This is a beautiful insight for which we need not apologize. The health message is indeed the “right arm” of our message as Seventh-day Adventists. Separate the health message from this spiritual insight, from our understanding of human nature, and it becomes a mere fitness program, with man as the center of attention rather than the God who wants to communicate with us and be in fellowship with us in the best possible way.

Our understanding of human nature has many practical consequences in other areas of theology too. Good systematic theology is good biblical

¹³⁵ Cf. Jon Paulien, “The Resurrection and the Old Testament: A Fresh Look in Light of Recent Research,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 24/1 (2013): 3–24.

theology, which will always foster and bring forth good practical theology. It is rarely the other way round.

Gender Mainstreaming

There is yet another recent development that has far-reaching consequences and implications for our understanding of human nature and biblical anthropology. In the past, human beings have been understood to be the special creation of God. Since the nineteenth century, a naturalistic understanding of the origin of life through evolutionary processes has arisen and captured the attention of the masses. But despite these significant and diametrically opposed differences over the origin of life, human beings have been seen as persons with a given sexual identity, born with a particular gender. Interestingly, this also is an identity that has distinctive bodily connotations: human beings are born either male or female.

However, in 1949 Simone de Beauvoir published her influential treatise *The Second Sex*, in which she offered a detailed analysis of the oppression of women and laid out ideas foundational for contemporary feminism. Beauvoir was a companion of Jean-Paul Sartre and an influential existentialist thinker in her own right. As such, she believed that existence precedes essence; hence, her famous dictum: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”¹³⁶ She held that the social construction of what it means to be a woman has been the foundation for the oppression of women.¹³⁷ In 1955, sexologist John Money introduced a terminological distinction between sex as biological and gender as role.¹³⁸ Since then others have advanced the gender discussion to various political and legislative levels.¹³⁹ It is in this political context that the term “gender mainstreaming” has arisen. First proposed in 1985 at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, it has since been further developed through the efforts of the United Nations, which describes a

¹³⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1970), originally published in French: *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

¹³⁷ See “Simone de Beauvoir,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir (accessed February 13, 2013). Social aspects and aspects of equality and justice need to be taken seriously. There should be no disadvantage and discrimination between men and women. Biblically speaking, they are both equally valuable in God’s sight. They are both equally human. There is no superiority or inferiority between men and women, biblically speaking. Both men and women need to be redeemed and both have equal access to God’s unmerited salvation.

¹³⁸ See “Gender,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender> (accessed February 13, 2013).

¹³⁹ See Dale O’Leary, *The Gender Agenda: Redefining Equality* (Lafayette: Vital Issues Press, 1997). For an overview that focuses on European legislative steps in the gender mainstreaming debate see Barbara Rosenkranz, *MenschInnen: Gender Mainstreaming—auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen* (Graz: Ares, 2008) and, more recently, Gabriele Kuby, *Die globale sexuelle Revolution: Zerstörung der Freiheit im Namen der Freiheit* (Kisslegg: Fe-Medien, 2012).

process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.¹⁴⁰

From a biblical perspective there is full equality between men and women. Equally clear is the biblical teaching, affirmed by Jesus, that God created human beings as male and female, with only two distinct sexes. Any attempt to introduce gender as distinct from one's biological sex, as something not biological, not given at birth, but rather something that is only socially conditioned and constructed is subversive to a biblical anthropology.¹⁴¹ In the present gender mainstreaming debate, the very categories of "man" and "woman," of male and female, are being questioned. So it should come as no surprise that some now advocate the possibility of changing one's gender identity and that it is possible to have more than just two genders. There is also discussion of transgender.¹⁴²

Taking into consideration all of the above-mentioned aspects, Thomas Metzinger is certainly correct in his observation that "there is a new image of man emerging, an image that will dramatically contradict almost all traditional images man has made of himself in the course of his cultural history."¹⁴³ Yes indeed, we are experiencing significant and far-reaching attempts to change our perspective of what it means to be human. The de-

¹⁴⁰ United Nations, "Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997" (A/52/3), September 18, 1997, chap. 4, under "Agreed conclusions" (section I.A), <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-3.htm> (accessed May 11, 2015). See also "Gender Mainstreaming," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_mainstreaming (accessed December 21, 2014).

¹⁴¹ It has even been pointed out that "contemporary critical gender theory has moved beyond the early feminist critique of the construction of gender to a realization that the dimorphic paradigm of sex itself is socially constructed" (Terry S. Kogan, "Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, Class, Gender & Sexual Orientation: Transsexuals and Critical Gender Theory: The Possibility of a Restroom Labeled 'Other'" *Hastings Law Journal* 48 [1997]: 1248, 1249, as quoted in David Lee Mundy, "Die Auflösung von Geschlecht und die Dekonstruktion von Frausein und Mannsein," in *Bulletin* of the Deutsches Institute für Jugend und Gesellschaft, no. 13, vol. 7/1 [2007]: 36, <http://www.dijg.de/gender-mainstreaming/aufloesung-geschlecht-dekonstruktion> [accessed February 13, 2013]).

¹⁴² See Christl R. Vonholdt, "Gendermainstreaming: ein Programm zur Gestaltung von Zukunftslosigkeit?" <http://www.dijg.de/gender-mainstreaming/begriff-definition> (accessed June 18, 2012).

¹⁴³ Thomas Metzinger, as quoted in Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 17.

bate is not just limited to the issue of the mortality or immortality of the soul and the state of the dead. At a much more comprehensive level many other aspects of our human nature are affected, such as our understanding of human sexuality and our human sexual identity, including how we see homosexuality and the roles male and female members of the church have in God's creation.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Having briefly traced the understanding of human nature throughout Christian history, we conclude with a brief prospect for the future. To assist Adventist study of systematic theology and church history a decisive effort on the part of Adventist scholars and church leadership is needed to enable constructive work and to fund original research in the area of anthropology. I would wish us to publish more on this topic and make it available to a wider readership, as was the case with Froom's works. Since Froom, no similarly vast and comprehensive Adventist investigation into anthropology has been done. While the work of Froom is not without its deficiencies, it has shaped the thinking of many for decades, even beyond the boundaries of the Adventist Church. Theologically sound scholarship at the highest scientific level as well as publication on the popular level is needed.

We should be at the head of such scholarship, rather than trailing behind. Seventh-day Adventist scholars are needed who can make serious contributions and add credibility to the discussion—scholarship free of apologetic overtones and that is thorough, solid, and, most of all, faithful to the Bible and fair in how we deal with those who hold different views. This is how we would like others to treat our expositions of faith, and so they deserve the same respect and tact. Such foundational studies will defend our faith in the long-term far more effectively than less careful apologetic attempts.

¹⁴⁴ Further, see *Sexuality: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Aspects* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, forthcoming); Roy E. Gane et al., eds., *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012).