

REFORMED DOGMATICS

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VOLUME TWO: ANTHROPOLOGY

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PREFACE

My thanks to the base translators of this volume, without whose work its appearance would not be possible, as well as to John Richard de Witt for some translation review. As with volume one, I have reviewed and revised their work and given the translation its final form. Again, thanks are due as well to the project manager, Justin Marr, and to the copy editors for their work.

Volume two sheds no light on a question raised in the preface to volume one concerning what Reformed theologians, contemporary or in the recent past, may have directly influenced Vos. What does come out clearly in a number of places, more so than in volume one, is Vos' impressive familiarity with the work of theologians, primarily Reformed, from the 17th century. With an eye to matters of continuing debate in Reformed theology, many readers will find particularly interesting his lengthy treatment of the covenant of grace in the final main section of this volume.

R. Gaffin, Jr.

November 2013



CHAPTER ONE

The Nature of Man

1. *According to Holy Scripture, of what does the nature of man consist?*

The Scripture teaches:

- a) That man consists of two parts, body and soul.
- b) That the soul is a substance.
- c) That it is a substance distinct from the body.

2. *How does Scripture teach these truths?*

Not so much explicitly as by assuming and presupposing them everywhere. More specifically:

- a) In places like Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7.
- b) In places that depict the body as clothing, a tabernacle (2 Cor 5:1).
- c) In all the places that teach that the soul exists and acts after death.

3. *What does God's Word teach concerning the relationship between soul and body?*

This is a mystery. The following, however, is certain beyond all doubt:

- a) The union between them is a life-unity. The organic life of the body and the life of the soul are not in parallel. Only on the presence of the soul in the body does the possibility rest that the organic bond of the latter is maintained.

- b) Certain conditions of the body are dependent on the self-conscious acting of the spirit; others are independent of this.
- c) Some functions of the soul are bound to the body; others can be done independently of the body.
- d) In antithesis to Materialism, Idealism, occasionalism, etc., one may call this realistic dualism. It is most closely connected with some of the principal doctrines of the Bible.

4. *What does one mean by trichotomy?*

The doctrine that man does not consist of two but of three specifically different parts, namely:

- a) πνεῦμα, *animus*, the principal and most noble part; “the spirit” to which the capacities of reason, will, and conscience belong.
- b) ψυχή, *anima*, the soul; the principle of animal, bodily life that ceases to exist with death. Animals also have a ψυχή.
- c) The body, σῶμα, considered solely as matter.

5. *What are the principal objections against this trichotomy?*

- a) It is philosophical in origin (Pythagoreans, Plato) and rests on a disparaging of the body and a one-sided elevation of the nonmaterial existence of man. Because one fails to appreciate the organic bond between body and soul, the functions with which the soul works within the body must be detached from the soul and viewed as a third, independent principle. This motif is completely unbiblical and anti-Christian. Christianity wants a redemption of the body as well as of the soul.
- b) Genesis 2:7 shows how God created man consisting of two parts: dust of the earth that was first inanimate, and spirit blown into it, through which man became a living soul.
- c) Scripture nowhere uses the terms רִיחַ and שָׁנִי, πνεῦμα and ψυχή arbitrarily, but where they are in contrast, that contrast is not the trichotomic one given above but an entirely different one. רִיחַ, πνεῦμα, “spirit” is the principle of life and movement in man, and is that insofar as it enlivens and moves the body. That, according to philosophical terminology, should be called ψυχή.

Hence, according to Scripture, the animals have that just as well as man. This, of course, in no way means that there is no specific difference between a human spirit and an animal soul but simply informs that by קִיָּר the principal feature is expressed that is the higher principle common to man and animals, namely the enlivening and moving of the body. To indicate the distinction between the animals and the human soul, the Scripture has used other words (“heart,” etc.). So one sees how Scripture and philosophical terminology are diametrically opposed to each other.

יִּשְׁרָאֵל , שֵׁנַי , on the other hand, is not the lower part of man but the principle of emotion, desiring, self-conscious life—the entity that comprises the multiplicity of impressions in the unity of consciousness. In this way the soul is the seat of emotion because all receptivity presupposes a receptive subject: In Scripture, I = my soul. The soul desires, hates, loves, wills (1 Sam 18:1, 3; Deut 13:7). Souls = persons in the Old Testament, as it still does according to our modern use of language (Gen 12:5). It is characteristic that a deceased person can still be called a soul—insofar as something personal and individual still always clings to the body—but, of course, never πνεῦμα , קִיָּר , spirit; that would be a *contradictio in adjecto*. Hence also the close connection there is between soul, blood, heart.

- d) Scripture mentions the soul in poetic language as the most precious thing someone can possess. It is called the “glory of man,” “his alone,” etc. (Gen 49:6; Psa 6:6).
- e) From a comparison of the places in which spirit and soul alternate, every appearance of a basis for a substantive distinction must vanish. The soul is spirit and the spirit is soul, depending on whether one considers it from one side or the other. Spirit refers to the life-power that sets the body in motion; however, it also has in view the capacity for motion of the soul itself. God is called “God of the spirits of all flesh” [Num 16:22; 27:16] on account of His immanence in the world of living beings.
- f) One should note that spirit has become a religious concept—or, stated more accurately, is so innately. That man consists of two parts, spirit and flesh, of which the one is dependent on the other

for its mobility and functioning, has the deeper meaning that it pictures the dependence of man on God. Just as our spirit breathes into our body in order to make it an organic instrument, so God's Spirit must breathe into the entire man in order to qualify him for spiritual good.

- g) The trichotomy does contain an element of truth that may not be overlooked. It is to be absolutely rejected as an ontological theory of three specific and different constituent parts in man. It only contains truth as a formula for the empirical discord there is between the sensual impulses and the higher capacities of the spirit in man. Through sin, that part of the soul that is related to the *sōma* [body] has obtained independence in opposition to the higher inspirations of the soul. That is to say, there is discord in the spiritual life of man himself: The more spiritual sinful dispositions clash with the more sensual inclinations. But that higher part is also sinful, and the lower part also belongs to the soul.
- h) The trichotomy conflicts with the testimony of our self-consciousness. No mortal man is aware of possessing a *psychē* in distinction from a *pneuma*. What the philosophers call *psychē* is simply the manifestation of the spiritual principle in relation to the material of the body.
- i) The places in scripture that seem to speak of a trichotomy may easily be explained differently. These are mainly 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. The truth is that through Platonic philosophy, trichotomic usage was brought into the vernacular and so became common usage. If one wanted to indicate the entire man, one spoke of body, soul, and spirit, without thereby intending to present himself as a supporter of Platonic philosophy. Scripture makes use of human language and so appropriates this common usage. When it does that through the mouth of Paul, that in no way indicates that Paul taught a trichotomy. The expression is nothing else than a rhetorical form of enumeration.

6. *What is Realism?*

The doctrine that every man is the manifestation of one human race in relation to a bodily organism. That is to say, all souls are not merely

individual but one and the same substance that can only be personal in relation to a body.

This great generic human soul is a reasonable, rational, volitional entity. When a man dies, the personal existence of the soul ends (at least according to consistent realists), and it returns to the generic substance of which it was an individuation.

This doctrine is advocated by many because it best explains, so it is thought, the imputation of Adam's guilt. We were one with him when he sinned, actually in him.

7. *What are the principal objections against this Realism?*

- a) It is a philosophic hypothesis, perhaps possible in itself but nothing more.
- b) It finds no support in Scripture. One could call it one of the many ways by which one has tried to explain some scriptural facts—for example, original sin. Of these ways, however, it is by no means the best or what is presented to us by Scripture itself.
- c) Our self-consciousness testifies against it, because it is a personal self-consciousness. The awareness that we possess a substantial soul is so interwoven with the consciousness of our personality, with our self-consciousness, that it is impossible for us to separate the two. From this it follows that we conclude that our soul can only exist as an individual and not generically.
- d) It conflicts with the express teaching of Scripture, which tells us that our soul continues to exist personally after separation from the body. It is the consequence of a pantheistic Realism when Schleiermacher asserts that all philosophy testifies against the doctrine of immortality.
- e) According to Realism, the entire human race was sinful as one substance. This substance Christ must have assumed when He became human, so that the man Christ became sinful. It is no wonder, then, when realists radically change the work of redemption. According to them, it occurs in Christ according to His human nature, not as a payment of debt by a surety but as an ethical purification process. Or, where one still wishes to retain the aspect of surety, one is forced to require justification as necessary

for the human nature of Christ because it, of course, is under guilt, just as ours is. Shedd, who among recent American theologians advocates Realism, says: "Theologians have confined their attention mainly to the sanctification of Christ's human nature, saying little about its justification. But a complete Christology must include the latter as well as the former. Any nature that requires sanctification requires justification, because sin is guilt as well as pollution. The *Logos* could not unite with a human nature taken from the virgin Mary and transmitted from Adam unless it had been previously delivered from both the condemnation and corruption of sin. The idea of redemption also includes both justification and sanctification, and it is conceded that that portion of human nature, which the *Logos* assumed into union with Himself, was redeemed. His own humanity was the 'first-fruits' of his redemptive work. Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's!"¹ This is an unequivocal explanation that shows where Realism in soteriology must lead. If Christ needed a justification for the human nature that He Himself possessed, then for us the consolation of His suretyship is gone. One should therefore be warned.

8. *How many theories exist with reference to the origin of human souls?*

Three: that of preexistence, traducianism, and creationism.

9. *Where, respectively, have the latter two theories been advocated?*

The Greek church has been creationist from the beginning. Tertullian, in the West, was traducianist. Jerome and Augustine were creationists. The latter, however, at the time of his conflict with Pelagius, held more to traducianism. The Latin church as a whole was creationist. That was so for the entire church of the Reformation up until the Formula of Concord. The Lutheran theologians of the 17th century first began to advocate traducianism. The Reformed maintained creationism. Most modern German theologians follow a middle course and teach that creationism is applicable to the soul and traducianism to bodily-animal life.

1 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Part 4, Chapter 1.

10. *What does the traducianist theory teach and on what grounds?*

That the entire person is generated by the parents, body and soul. Some even go so far as to assume the divisibility of the soul. Others speak in vaguer terms about the origin or derivation of one soul from the other. The grounds on which one appeals from a traducianist side are:

- a) That nothing is reported about a creation of Eve's soul. This is an *argumentum e silentio* [argument from silence] and lacks all force.
- b) God rested on the Sabbath from creating. The creation was, as we have seen, *ktisis*, and as such closed, without the continuing creation of single souls thereby becoming impossible.
- c) The transmission of Adam's sinful nature to his posterity. We will return to this later, only noting for now that traducianism does not offer the only nor the best solution for this fact.
- d) One points to Christ's miraculous conception and birth and reasons as follows: If the soul were created immediately by God, then it is not to be seen why an extraordinary working of the Holy Spirit would be necessary to keep it pure at birth from Mary. We will also return to this later, and only say now in general that it is unscriptural and wrong and in part a consequence of realist-traducianist tendencies when one places all the emphasis of the incarnation on the moment of purification. The Holy Spirit also had entirely different activities to perform with regard to the incarnation.
- e) Traducianists think their strongest ground is to be found in the transmission of ethical, national, familial, and other characteristics of spirit and character. In other words, traducianism is summoned to help explain the mystery of heredity. This, however, is an explanation that explains too much, for then the result would not only be partial but complete similarity between parent and child. Moreover, heredity is such a mysterious, and such a complicated, matter (one need only think of atavism = the reemergence of seemingly eliminated characteristics and dispositions in later generations) that one hardly can use an explanation as simple as traducianism.

There is another explanation that seems to us more likely. It leaves the empirical origin of heredity a mystery (what it will certainly always have to remain, as all reproduction is in its essence a mystery) but understands it to point to something better for the logical ground, namely the once-for-all established ordinance of God that like will originate from like. One has to concede to traducianists that all these phenomena cannot be accounted for by the influence of the body. Such an explanation sounds materialistic, and the traducianist explanation would be far more preferable.

11. *What is to be said in favor of creationism?*

- a) It is more in agreement with the overall ideas of Holy Scripture. In that it gives us a doctrine concerning the origin of man, it gives us creationism. Compare Ecclesiastes 12:7; Zechariah 12:1; Hebrews 12:9.
- b) It accords better with the nature of the soul. The difference between creationism and traducianism, as far as metaphysics and psychology are concerned, is as follows. It is either one or the other: Traducianism has to be explained in a realist sense or must seek help from creationism. That the soul is generated by the parents can mean only one of two things: that it separates from the soul of the parents (Realism), or that it is created by God in the *actus generationis* [act of generating]. If one chooses the former, one is saddled with all the objections to which Realism is subject, summarized above. If one chooses the latter, one is saddled with the impossible concept of a *creatio mediato*, a creation by means of the parents. This concept was already rejected earlier in considering the doctrine of creation. Moreover, it is no longer purely traducianist. And there is no escaping this dilemma. The substance of the individual soul is there in any case. If it was not there earlier, then it is created; if it was there earlier, then (according to the teaching of Realism) it had to separate from the soul of the parents. When many attempt to find a middle course between these two and speak about the origin of the soul of the child from the souls of the parents, as one flame is ignited by another, the entire explanation rests on a metaphor. In the case of the flame, nothing new results; the matter that burns, the

flammable material through which it burns, the elements into which it changes through burning—all these were there earlier. Only a new chemical combination results. One need only attempt to apply this to the soul and one will see immediately to what untenable positions it leads. Taken strictly, it is materialistic to speak in this way about the soul in its generation. Even Shedd falls into such doubtful ways of speaking: “It is as difficult to think of an invisible existence of the human body in Adam as it is to think of an existence of the human soul in him.” We reply: It is not only difficult but even impossible and entirely unnecessary to speak about an existence of our souls in Adam. Only in a very figurative sense can that be risked. If the material of our bodies already changes during our short span of life, our material parts were certainly not present in Adam.

- c) Also, traducianism is certainly not compatible with the dogma concerning the person and the natures of Christ. Like Realism, it makes His human nature sinful in the way it explains original sin. And one should certainly pay attention to this, that traducianism gives an explanation of original sin only when it adheres to Realism. If it goes its own way, it gives the empirical ground of the transmission of sin but not the legal ground that satisfactorily explains this empirical fact. Concerning this legal ground, it does not in any respect extend further than creationism does. In other words, it has no speculative but only empirical value.

12. *What, finally, should be observed concerning this question?*

- a) That we must not be wise beyond what is written.
- b) It is dangerous to say, as do some traducianists, that if traducianism falls, then the entire dogma of original sin falls. We have no right to hang the millstone of our philosophy around the neck of God’s truth in this manner.
- c) The argument that God does no creative work after the creation Sabbath leads to a deistic worldview. What, then, is regeneration? Is it not presented in Scripture as a new creation? It is certainly true that it is a higher, spiritual creation, but by its occurring it shows sufficiently that God can also act creatively after the

creation Sabbath. If He can do that in the higher sphere of grace, then surely also continuously in the sphere of nature.

- d) Creationism does not presume to remove all objections and to resolve all difficulties. It only intends to warn against the following false positions:
1. That the soul is divisible.
 2. That numerically all man are of the same entity.
 3. That numerically Christ assumed the same humanity that fell in Adam.

13. *What does one understand by the preexistence view?*

The doctrine that the human soul has existence as an individual soul already before its joining with the organic body. In that lies the difference between Realism and the preexistence view, for the former denies an individual preexistence.

14. *Who in theology has defended this doctrine of preexistence and from what motive?*

Origen held the preexistence view. He assumed that in the beginning of the world in which we exist, souls were created by God and that they now, in succession, each in its time, unite with a natural product of generation. In modern times, this theory is defended, in connection with Kant's teaching on intelligible nature, by Julius Müller in his work *The Christian Teaching of Sin*. He thinks he is able thereby to explain the empirical depravity (original sin) of man during this life. Individual souls sinned in an existence outside or above time, and for that they are punished by a phenomenal existence in time, full of sin and misery.

15. *What is to be said against this preexistence view?*

- a) If we attribute to the soul a prolonged existence outside the body (in time, according to Origen), then its joining with and appearance in the body becomes something accidental. The preexistence view stems from the same disparaging of the body on which trichotomy rests. The body belongs to man, and man cannot exist prior to his body. If, with Kant and Julius Müller, we assume an act of uncaused freedom outside time, then man, in conflict with

his own limitedness and destiny, is elevated above a form that, as far as we can judge, is inseparable from his life.

- b) The preexistence view is related to and gives rise to all kinds of doubtful mythological notions of the prior state of the soul; it is related to pagan teaching of the transmigration of the soul, etc. The early Christian church already sensed that this view was more pagan than Christian and therefore rejected it (as Origenism) at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553.

16. *In how many different ways has the expression “image and likeness of God” been understood?*

- a) Some taught that “image” referred to the body and “likeness” to the soul.
- b) Augustine said that “image” pointed to the intellectual and likeness to the “moral” capacities of the soul.
- c) Bellarmine held that “image” designated the natural and “likeness” the supernaturally added.
- d) Still others say that “image” expresses innate similarity to God, “likeness” similarity to God acquired by man.
- e) The truth seems to be that both expressions form a ἐν διὰ δύσιν [a hendiadys], that is, they serve to describe one and the same concept from two sides. Or, if one wishes to make a distinction, one can do so in the way given above (in the section on creation). “Image” then becomes the impression in man, “likeness” the archetypal knowledge of the image of His nature that God bears in His own consciousness.

17. *What conceptions have been formed concerning the scope and meaning of the image and likeness of God in man?*

- a) According to Reformed theologians, the image of God comprises both the intellectual and the moral nature of man.
- b) The Greek church, the Socinians, and the Remonstrants err by thinking exclusively of the intellectual capacities.

- c) Others (the Lutherans) err by entirely excluding these natural qualities and only take into consideration the moral qualities.
- d) The Reformed conception maintains a middle course when it distinguishes between:
 1. The essential and amissible image of God, namely the possession of intellectual capacities and capacities for making ethical distinctions.
 2. The accidental and losable image of God, namely the good moral quality of the capacities in view in 1.
- e) According to the general Protestant conception, “the image of God” and “original righteousness” (*justitia originalis*) are the same. The Roman Catholics, as we will see, dissociate them.

18. *Why is this doctrine of the image of God of such great importance for theology?*

It is self-evident that by “image of God” is expressed what is characteristic of man and his relation to God. That he is God’s image distinguishes him from animals and all other creatures. In the idea that one forms of the image is reflected one’s idea of the religious state of man and of the essence of religion itself.

- a) According to the Roman Catholic conception, as we saw, *imago*, “image,” has another meaning than *similitudo*, “likeness.” Man was created with the “image.” So by nature he is God’s image-bearer. Now we have already seen that with “image” is meant the metaphysical correspondence of the human spirit with God. According to Rome, the natural relationship to God exists in the fact that in this way he is similar to Him. There is no thought of a close relationship between man and God, of a similarity of communal endeavor by the human will being subject to God. For all this belongs to the *similitudo* [likeness], and this, otherwise called *justitia originalis*, “original righteousness,” is called an added gift, *donum superadditum*. Only by something that raises him above his created nature does man become a religious being, able to love, to enjoy his God, and to live in Him. Out of this follows entirely the externalist character of Roman Catholic religion. It becomes something added to man, that he has but is not identified with

him, does not enter into his essence. That man is like God in this natural sense is a purely deistic relationship. There is room for something else if with the *imago* the *similitudo* would also be added as naturally belonging to the conception of man.

- b) The Roman Catholic denial of the utter inability of man in his fallen state and its weakened conception of original sin is likewise connected to this teaching concerning the image of God. According to Rome, man can only lose what was not essential to him, namely the supernaturally added gifts, the *dona superaddita*. Because of his fall, these are lost. The essence of man, the *imago*, consisting in formal existence as spirit, in the *liberum arbitrium* [freedom of the will], remained. Because, however, there was no inner connection between the *similitudo* and the *imago*, the removal of the former cannot essentially change the latter. The *liberum arbitrium* might be weakened a little; in reality it is unharmed. In other words, by loosening the moral powers from the will, from the capacity of the will, and by denying that the former are natural in man, Rome has in principle appropriated the Pelagian conception of the will as *liberum arbitrium*. That capacity of free will has remained, and with that, the possibility that man, even after the fall, can do something good.
- c) In both respects mentioned, the Protestant—and more specifically the Reformed—doctrine of the image of God is different than the Roman Catholic doctrine. That man bears God's image means much more than that he is spirit and possesses understanding, will, etc. It means above all that he is disposed for communion with God, that all the capacities of his soul can act in a way that corresponds to their destiny only if they rest in God. This is the *nature* of man. That is to say, there is no sphere of life that lies outside his relationship to God and in which religion would not be the ruling principle. According to the Roman Catholic conception, there is a natural man who functions in the world, and that natural man adopts a religion that takes place beyond his nature. According to our conception, our entire nature should not be free from God at any point; the nature of man must be worship from beginning to end. According to the deeper Protestant conception, the image does not exist only in correspondence with God but in

being disposed toward God. God's nature is, as it were, the stamp; our nature is the impression made by this stamp. Both fit together.

- d) If then the image of God and original righteousness are to be identified, if life in communion with God belongs to the nature of man and can nowhere be excluded, and if now, by sin, this original righteousness is lost, then the consequences will be twofold:
1. By falling away from something to which he was wholly disposed, which constitutes his proper and highest destiny, man will be changed in the deepest depths of his being; a radical reversal will take place within him. What clings to us outwardly can be removed without making us different inwardly. On the other hand, what coheres with every part of our spiritual organism can, if it is withdrawn, only bring about a powerful revolution by which the organism itself becomes disorganized. The loss of original righteousness follows spiritual death, because death in its essence is disorganization, a process of dissolution. From this, one can assess most clearly the Protestant and Roman Catholic conceptions concerning the capability of man to do spiritual good in his fallen state. According to us, man is dead and therefore does no good toward God. According to Roman Catholics, he is weakened or ill but nonetheless still always capable with his free will to move himself to do good.
 2. The fact that original righteousness belongs to the nature of man has yet another consequence. Because the being of man was placed from the beginning in a necessary relation with God, because he is made in the image of God in the stricter sense and this image is his nature, sin therefore cannot be just a mere privation. This would mean that something that belongs to his nature can be removed and the rest left undamaged. This is impossible. Man has to be in relation with God in everything he is and does. So, if original righteousness falls away, unrighteousness replaces it as the natural state. That is, sin is a positive principle of enmity against God, as Paul taught us about the mind of the flesh. If the image of God, original righteousness, had not been the nature of man, perhaps he might have been able to remain in a neutral standpoint. Now,