

STONE-CAMPBELL JOURNAL CONFERENCE

IMPERFECT HAPPINESS:

THE COLLISION OF *THEOSIS* AND *TELOS* WITHIN THE VIRTUE THEORY

BY

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APRIL 18, 2020

## Abstract

Augustine contends that humans will achieve perfect happiness in heaven by fully knowing God and possessing complete goodness. Paul Wadell roots this idea of happiness within the virtue theory. The Orthodox idea of *theosis* challenges the achievement of perfect happiness in new creation. *Theosis* is our path towards *telos*. If our happiness grows as we are approaching our *telos*, then our happiness will never reach completeness because *theosis* is never complete. Although our context will change from present creation to new creation, our *telos* will not. The gift of new creation is not perfect happiness, but unhindered growth towards happiness.

## Introduction

This paper uses as a starting place the pre-enlightenment morality construct of virtue theory which understands moral imperatives (virtues) as moving the untutored-human-nature towards human-nature-if-it-achieved-its-*telos*.<sup>1</sup> It is within this framework that Paul Wadell sets up a relationship between happiness and a moral life.<sup>2</sup> He claims that “Aristotle and Aquinas shape their accounts of the moral life around the claim that everyone wants to be happy.”<sup>3</sup> This claim centers happiness in the living out of a moral life which leads to *telos*.

Basing ethics in a Christian framework, our happiness is found only in God because God provides our *telos*. It is through the living out of the Christian virtues that one arrives at the *telos*, the end goal, God has given humanity. Along with the ideas of Aristotle and Aquinas, Wadell uses Augustine to lay the foundation for his argument. To aid his argument, Wadell states that Augustine believes “happiness is a *way of life* characterized by loving and enjoying what is supremely good for human beings. As a Christian, Augustine finds that consummate goodness in God.”<sup>4</sup> Happiness is the Christian way of life, demonstrated in the life of Jesus and empowered by the Spirit, which moves us towards God’s *telos* for our lives.

We grow in happiness by deepening our knowledge of God and God’s love, and then by reflecting God in, and showing God’s love to, the world. But the imperfection and mortality of humanity causes a problem in the achievement of a perfect, fulfilled happiness. Wadell works off the following notion of Augustine’s belief of happiness:

Because we can neither know nor love God perfectly in this life,  
our happiness will always be incomplete...there is a continuity

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<sup>1</sup> Brad J. Kallenberg, “The Master Argument of MacIntyre’s After Virtue,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Theissen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 11.

between the happiness we enjoy now and the happiness we will have in heaven, but there is also an important difference. Our happiness in this world is real and should not be doubted. It is real because, like the *perfect happiness of heaven*, it comes from sharing in the love and goodness of God.<sup>5</sup> (italics added)

Wadell paints Augustine's claim of happiness as containing a difference between earthly and heavenly happiness where earthly happiness is imperfect and heavenly happiness is perfect. The idea that earthly happiness is imperfect/incomplete because we are limited in our ability to know and love God perfectly/fully on earth shows a belief that, in the new heaven and new earth, humanity will fully and perfectly know and love God. This is one of the aspects of Augustine's belief that Wadell uses to argue that perfect happiness is achieved in heaven. This idea falls into the larger discussion of imperfect happiness and how we can frame suffering and trials in this life. For Augustine and Wadell, it is bearable that our happiness is lacking on earth, it is even bearable that we experience suffering and trails, because our happiness will come to perfect fruition in heaven.

Godly happiness is oftentimes hard to believe in when we experience times of grief and pain. Wadell uses Augustine's idea of heavenly happiness to help us persevere through times of earthly anguish. "The happiness we enjoy now points to and hopes for the fullness of happiness in heaven, that celestial happiness that nothing can threaten and that can never be lost."<sup>6</sup>

But what if we can never fully nor perfectly know or love God? Would this mean that it is impossible for perfect happiness to be achieved? Wadell remains inconsistent in his discussion of growth in goodness and happiness in heaven. Christian happiness "is a happiness that must always be pursued, but never fully possessed, not only because it is ultimately found not in the world but in heaven, but also because it requires the ongoing transformation of ourselves in the

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<sup>5</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 12.

goodness of God, and at no point is that conversion complete.”<sup>7</sup> Wadell talks about happiness never being fully possessed because human transformation in the goodness of God is never complete, but Wadell seems unable to let go of the idea of a perfect happiness being found ultimately in heaven. Does an imperfect happiness in the new heaven and new earth affect our ability to hope for a future heavenly happiness while we are suffering on earth? These tensions and questions arise when the eastern idea of *theosis* is brought fully into the equation.

### *Theosis*

The Eastern Orthodox church’s theology includes “the possibility of a direct or mystical union between man and God – what the Greek Fathers term the *theosis* of man, his ‘deification.’”<sup>8</sup> To be clear, *theosis* is not the process of becoming God. “Although ‘ingodded’ or ‘deified’, the saints do not become additional members of the Trinity. God remains God, and man remains man.”<sup>9</sup> *Theosis* is the process of growing in the likeness of God.

The understanding of *theosis* is rooted in the Genesis 1 creation account of man. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”<sup>10</sup> Humanity was created in the image of God and shares a likeness with God. When humanity sinned, humanity distanced themselves from the likeness of God instead of growing deeper into the likeness of God. *Theosis* is part of humanity’s original vocation and present-future salvation.

*Theosis* as part of humanity’s original vocation is seen in God’s command for Adam to work and take care of the Garden of Eden<sup>11</sup> combined with humanity’s free will. God gave

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<sup>7</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Gen 1:27 – The NIV is used for all Scripture unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> Gen 2:15

Adam and Eve ways to live more deeply into their likeness of God (i.e. being fruitful by multiplying and filling the earth; helping creation flourish).<sup>12</sup> But, as seen in humanity's failure to follow God's commands,<sup>13</sup> humanity is not forced to live into the likeness of God. It is God's desire and plan for us to live into our likeness of God, but it is ultimately our choice to do so or not. As Karen Baker-Fletcher puts it:

God desires all of creation to participate in God's aim for the harmony or well-being of all creation in freedom... We are always experiencing the divine initial aim whether preconsciously or consciously. When our experience of this aim becomes conscious and we take it into our conscious being and becoming as our own, it becomes our subjective aim.<sup>14</sup>

Although she does not label it as so, this is a good description of how to live into original-vocation-*theosis*. God desires all of creation to participate in the movement of creation towards *telos*. Humanity has a special role because it images the divine. God's *telos* becoming our *telos* is an essential aspect of the process of *theosis*.

When humanity sinned, and every time we sin as individuals, it not only backtracked on the path of *theosis*, it also tarnished its likeness of God. Sinful living engages us in *de-theosis* because it constantly pulls us and others further away from the likeness of God. The further we are from the likeness of God, the harder it is for us to recognize the ways and glory of God, thus making it harder for us to engage in the process of *theosis*. Unchecked, sin places us in an endless cycle of *de-theosis* with the goal of having us reject the likeness of God all together. The incarnation of the Word allows for present-future-salvation-*theosis* empowered by the Spirit.

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<sup>12</sup> Gen 1:28; 2:15

<sup>13</sup> Gen 3

<sup>14</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 83.

“Through and in [Jesus] we are one with God, and the Father’s glory becomes our glory. God’s Incarnation opens the way to man’s deification.”<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament, God meets Israel where they are in order to bring them closer to God. In the incarnation, God does the same thing for all of humanity.<sup>16</sup> God takes on flesh in order to meet humanity where it is with the goal of leading humanity closer to God. God takes on the nature of humanity to help humanity better take on the likeness of God. Vladimir Lossky put it this way:

The descent (*katabasis*) of the divine person of Christ makes human persons capable of an ascent (*anabasis*) in the Holy Spirit. It was necessary that the voluntary humiliation, the redemptive self-emptying (*kenosis*) of the Son of God should take place, so that fallen men might accomplish their vocation of *theosis*, the deification of created beings by uncreated grace. Thus the redeeming work of Christ – or rather, more generally speaking, the Incarnation of the Word – is seen as directly related to the ultimate goal of creatures: to know union with God.<sup>17</sup>

This is Lossky’s description of the common Orthodox phrase: God made Himself man, that man might become God. The incarnation of the Word has given humanity a model for the path of *theosis*. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”<sup>18</sup> Jesus being the perfect union of divine and human nature exemplifies how to live in engagement with the process of *theosis*. Through the power of the Spirit we are unified with the life, death, and

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<sup>15</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 74.

<sup>16</sup> To be clear, this is only a single aspect of the incarnation.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Lossky, “Vladimir Lossky on Redemption as Deification,” in *The Christian Theology Reader*, 5th ed., ed. Alister E. McGrath (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 319.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Pet 1:3-4

resurrection of Jesus. When lived into properly, this unification supports our travel down the path of *theosis*.

It is important to introduce here the idea that pure mimicry of Jesus' life is not proper engagement of *theosis*. It is true that "Jesus is the human face of God, the hermeneutical key to understanding God's life and love for the world and God's vision for human flourishing,"<sup>19</sup> but the idea of Jesus as the hermeneutical key must be understood properly. Jesus' life on earth happened in a specific time and place that is not, and cannot be, replicated again. How Jesus lived faithful to God's *telos* is different than how any other human would live towards *telos*.

An individual's process of *theosis* is unique. Each individual's image of God is a unique likeness, or expression, of the infinite God. "God's translation of the Word into an embodied life in Jesus Christ within the cultural situation of first-century Palestine is the prelude to an ongoing pattern of translation into every time and place in every culture in the world."<sup>20</sup> The earthly life of Jesus was an example of how a life aligned with the righteous ways of God should be lived in a particular context. Jesus' life is a model, not a mold. Each individual, and community, must allow the Spirit to translate the life of Jesus into their unique context.

Rooted in the idea of *theosis* is an understanding that the process is never completed. If *theosis* is the process of growing in the image/likeness of God, then we can never reach the end of *theosis*. In order to fully image God one would need to be God, but as made clear above, in deification, "man becomes god by grace, but not God in essence. The distinction between Creator and creature still continues: it is bridged by mutual love but not abolished."<sup>21</sup> An

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<sup>19</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, 39.

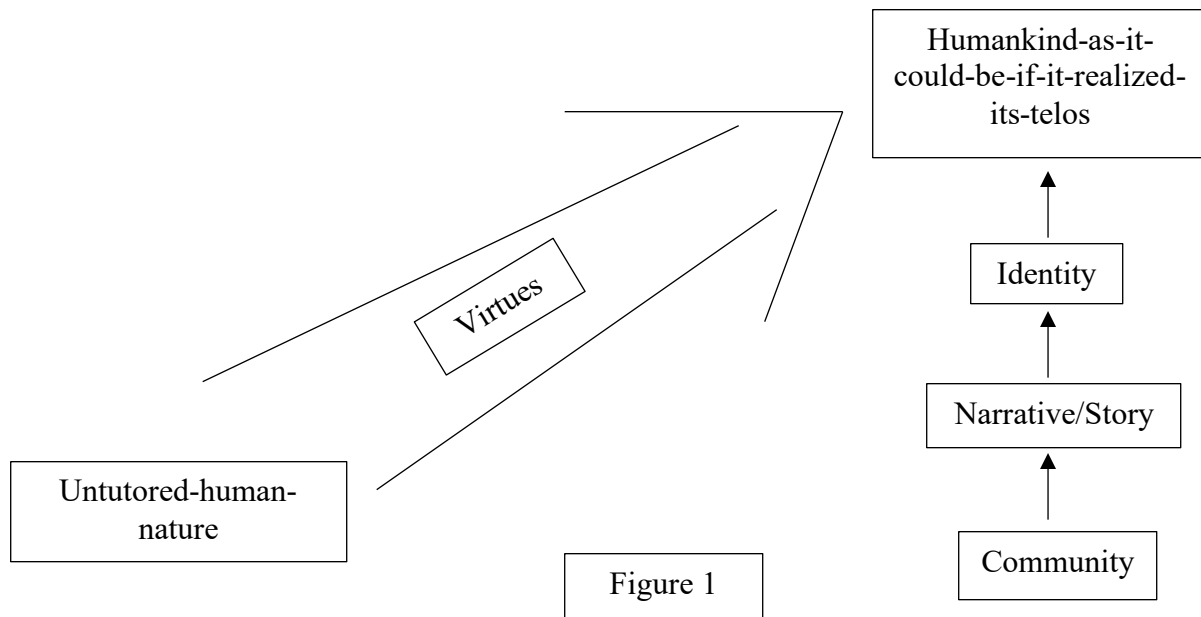
<sup>21</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 125.



understanding of *theosis* in which the human becomes the full image of God moves into heresy. *Theosis* must be understood as a never-ending process of growing in the image/likeness of God.

### A Moral Framework for Life

In a class lecture, professor Lee Camp lays out the following pre-enlightenment framework of virtue theory that lays out humanity's path towards *telos*.<sup>22</sup>



Virtue theory understands the virtues as what leads humanity from its untutored nature to *telos*. “Why do we need the virtues? Because through them we move from simply being oriented or disposed to the good (the natural law) to consistently embodying and doing the good, even flourishing in the good.”<sup>23</sup> Virtues are not mere instruments for us to use in our journey towards *telos*, virtues are constitutive of *telos*. It is by living out the virtues that humanity moves towards the completion of *telos*, and the closer humanity moves towards *telos*, the easier it becomes to

<sup>22</sup> Lee Camp, “Pre-Enlightenment Moral Philosophy” (GB 5873-01 lecture, Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN, 24 August 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 53.

live out the virtues. The virtues derive from *telos* and, when lived out properly, the virtues flow into *telos*.

The exact understanding of humanity's *telos* is debated. In figure 1, Camp has diagrammed how one's community informs the narrative/story that one lives into. This narrative/story structures one's identity which then impacts one's understanding of humanity's *telos*. Wadell notes that Aristotle's secular identity led him to the understanding that "the virtuous life constitutes happiness because it is through the virtues that men and women become good."<sup>24</sup> For Aristotle, humanity's *telos* is becoming good which is achieved through a virtuous life. Aquinas' Christian identity led him to understand goodness slightly differently. "For Aquinas, a Christian, happiness is found in friendship with God – and with all God loves – because it is in being conformed to the supreme goodness of God that we achieve our distinctive fulfillment as human beings."<sup>25</sup> *Telos* for Aquinas is understood in not just becoming good, but becoming a good that is conformed to God's good.

From Aristotle and Aquinas, we see how different identities affect one's understanding of *telos*. Stanley Hauerwas notes that what distinguishes Christians from non-Christians "is their willingness to belong to a community that embodies the stories and the rituals of the faith, to belong to other people committed to worshipping God truthfully."<sup>26</sup> It is precisely the dedication to live into a specific narrative/story that defines a Christian's identity over against another identity.

Even within the shared narrative/story and identity of Christianity, one's community affects one's understanding of *telos*. The Christian understanding of *telos* can range from unity

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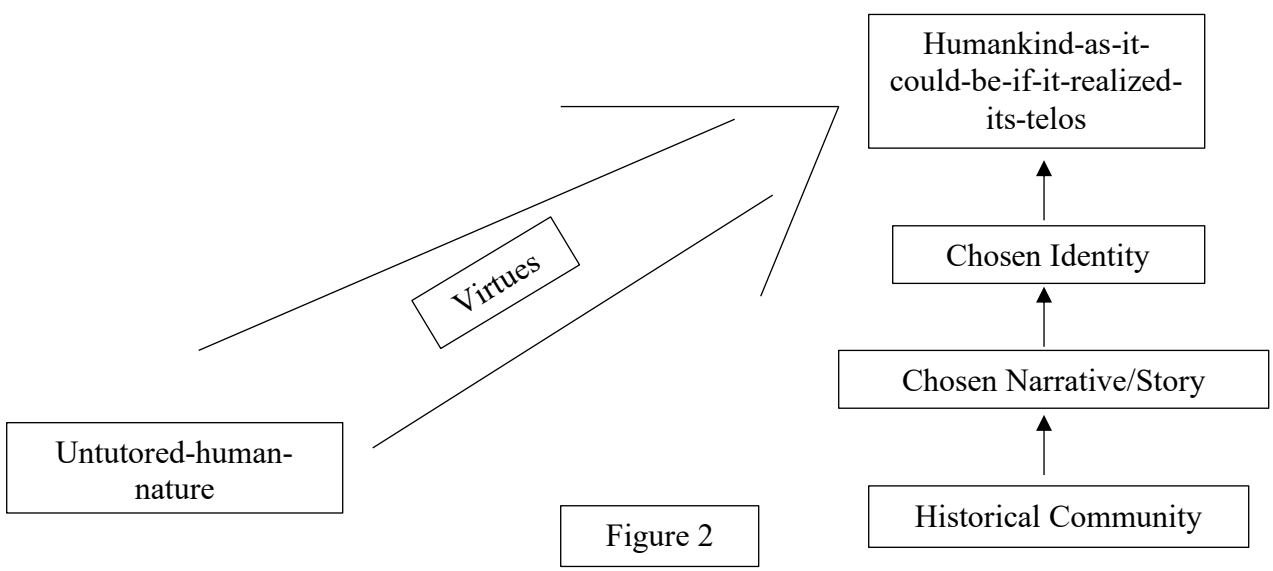
<sup>24</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, xiv.

<sup>25</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, xiv.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological (1983)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 73.

with God to reaching heaven to living out the commands found in Gen 1:28 and 2:15 to perfectly following Jesus’ example. The Christian community one finds itself in (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, etc.) impacts one’s understanding of *telos*.

It is here that this paper makes the first adjustments to Camp’s diagram. It is not enough to say that one’s community develops one’s narrative/story which develops one’s identity which informs one’s *telos*. The community which informs *telos* is best understood as a historical community. A person’s *telos*, narrative/story, and identity are chosen based off of the historical community they choose to follow after.



In his discussion of Markan ethics, Richard Hays gives an example of how in one’s choosing of a narrative, the individual also chooses their own identity to live into. “To be Jesus’ disciple means to allow one’s own identity to be stamped by the identity of the one who died forsaken on the cross. When we embrace Mark’s answer to the question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ we are not just making a theological affirmation about Jesus’ identity; we are choosing our own identity as well.”<sup>27</sup> A particular historical view of the narrative of Scripture drives one’s

<sup>27</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1996), 79.

identity if they choose to place themselves within that narrative as well. Specifically, in the gospel of Mark, understanding Jesus as the crucified Messiah and placing oneself as a disciple of Jesus prompts an individual to seek self-giving over the accumulation of power.

Here, Hays makes the argument that if we choose to accept the particular narrative/story of a historical community, we are choosing to live into the identity which that community calls for. The acceptance of the biblical narrative means we are choosing to participate in the story of the historical community by living out that story in our own lives. Thus, who we are and how we relate to the world is framed by how we choose to understand the narrative/story of the historical community that we find compelling.

One's base understanding of *telos* derives more from one's historical community than one's current community. It is important to make the caveat that we are first chosen by/assigned to a specific story and community based on the context we are born into. We do not have control of where or when we are born and thus cannot choose the ideas we are first exposed to. In that sense, the start of our life is determined by our current community. As we grow, we choose whether or not we will consent to the historical community and beliefs that have been described to us. If we reject them, we then choose a different historical community to belong to. Thus, one's understanding of *telos* ultimately derives not from the community one is born into, but from the historical community one decides to commit to. While it is true that former narratives one has lived into bleed into one's current identity even while they live into a new narrative, discussion of these nuances are beyond the scope of this paper. The point that this paper is making is that every person is subscribing to a historical community and that historical community defines one's identity.

Specifically, the Christian *telos* is derived from the historical Judeo-Christian history and community as recorded in Scripture and passed down through tradition. The *telos* one lives into is not a novel idea from the individual, it is an understanding which comes from many generations of this historical community. If one agrees with the understandings of this historical community, one then chooses to live into the narrative/story which flows out of the history of that community. In the same way, that person is choosing to take on the identity which comes from the chosen narrative/story which flows from the historical community. This means that the individual is not inventing or discovering a new *telos* but choosing to live towards a previously determined *telos*.

### ***Telos and How to Get There***

This paper takes on the understanding that a Christian's *telos* is to properly and faithfully bear our unique and communal images of God. This understanding of *telos* derives from the Jewish community's telling of the creation account and is enriched by both the Jewish community's writings of the Tanakh and the Christian community's writings found in the New Testament. Specifically, this *telos* comes from Gen 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Humans were, and are, created as image-bearers of God. This is the core of humanity's identity. Although all of creation is made to glorify God, "the image of God in man denotes everything that distinguishes man from the animals, that makes him in the full and true sense a

person – a moral agent capable of right and wrong, a spiritual subject endowed with inward freedom.”<sup>28</sup> The identity as images of God creates a uniqueness in humanity.

It is this unique identity which informs everything humans are created to do; all of humanity’s purpose flows from humanity’s identity as images of God. “Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven.”<sup>29</sup> Ware sees this identity fulfilled in seeking for a loving, harmonious relationship among humans and between humanity and creation.

In his discussion of witnessing the gospel, David Gustafson says that “the initial decision to believe in Jesus Christ is not the final goal but the beginning of a life of fellowship and covenant obedience to him. The goal is a mature disciple who follows the way of Jesus, loving God and neighbor and making new disciples.”<sup>30</sup> While Gustafson is focusing on disciple-making, it is clear that he expects a fuller understanding of Christian goals. A merely intellectual faith is not the intent. Christians should be expected to mature into people who are conformed to the image of Jesus.

Terry Briley says that “for God to create humanity in his image (i.e. to reflect him) and to entrust humanity with dominion over creation means that he intends human beings to share his rule, to carry out his will within the creation.”<sup>31</sup> Briley sees this identity fulfilled by humanity’s partnership with God in taking care of creation all the while reflecting God’s “goodness throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 51

<sup>29</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> David M. Gustafson, *Gospel Witness: Evangelism in Word & Deed*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2019), 213.

<sup>31</sup> Terry Briley, *Delighting in the Lord: The Story of Israel and Christian Faith*, (Nashville, TN: Lipscomb University College of Bible & Ministry, 2015), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Briley, *Delighting in the Lord: The Story of Israel and Christian Faith*, 25.

This identity as images of God puts all of humanity's actions into perspective. The living out of humanity's blessing of dominion looks different depending on what *telos* one is living into. A *telos* that is not concerned with fully developing and expressing the image of God allows an individual to act selfishly and cause harm to others and the rest of creation as long as the individual is benefiting themselves. A *telos* that rests solely in human nature allows for the destruction of creation and even other humans. Briley shows how a *telos* rooted in humans as the image-bearers of God changes the permissible actions of humans:

What distinguishes human beings is the blessing of dominion. It is a blessing because, when exercised properly, it enacts God's loving care for the creation and vindicates God's confidence in humanity. The practice of such rule does not selfishly claim divine right; it freely serves a divine purpose. To rule in this way requires discernment and creativity because it attempts to discover and develop the vast potential God embedded in humanity and the creation as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

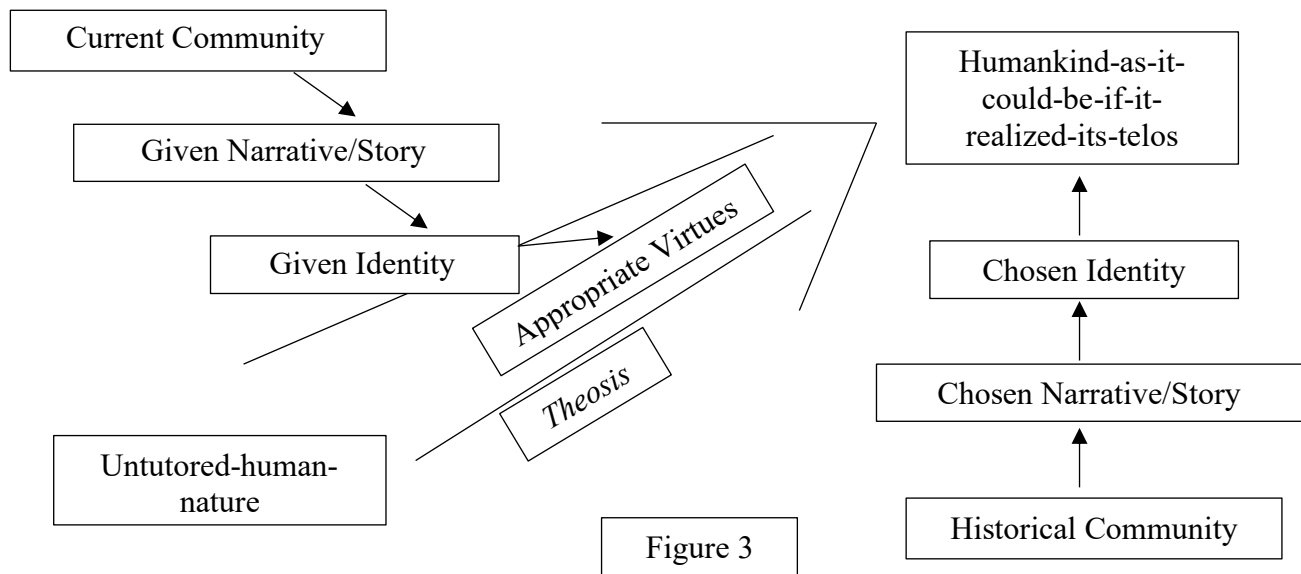
Living into the image-bearers-of-God-*telos* informs the direction of every action in one's life; every action in one's life either moves that individual towards *telos* or away from *telos*. This creates a cyclical momentum in human living. Righteous living (virtues) moves an individual, or community, closer to *telos* (a life which properly and faithfully bears our unique image of God). The closer we are to *telos*, the more we are imaging God. The more we are imaging God, the more righteously we are living. Thus, the path virtues provide is the process of *theosis*, *theosis* becomes the path to *telos*, and the closer we are to *telos* the easier we travel the path of *theosis*.

Unrighteous living (vices) moves an individual, or community, away from *telos* (a life which properly and faithfully bears our unique image of God). The further we are from *telos*, the less we are imaging God. The less we are imaging God, the more unrighteously we are living. Thus, the path vices provide is the process of *de-theosis*.

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<sup>33</sup> Briley, *Delighting in the Lord: The Story of Israel and Christian Faith*, 26.

It is within this context that this paper places the second adjustment to Camp's diagram.



Similar to how community, narrative/story, and identity determine our understanding of *telos*, they also determine how we travel down the path of *theosis*. In humanity's *telos* to properly and faithfully bear God's image, it is important to understand the concept of uniqueness. Wadell puts it well when he says:

Each one of us articulates something of God; each one of us brings something of God to life in the world. And that there are so many differences among us—physical differences, racial and ethnic differences, cultural and religious differences—means that no one of us alone can adequately express God.<sup>34</sup>

Humanity's *telos* is not for every individual to perfectly image every aspect of God. That would make them God. Humanity's *telos* is for each individual to perfectly image the aspects of God created in them. Each person has a different combination of passions and gifts and skills which point to different aspects of God. For an individual to try to live out the image of God that was created in someone else would actually lead that individual away from *telos*. An individual

<sup>34</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 112.



moves towards *telos* when they follow their unique path of *theosis*. Thus, it is through the individual paths of *theosis* that a community comes together to image God in a way that is deeper and fuller than any individual could image God alone.

The given identity found in the passions, gifts, and skills the God creates a person with is not the only factor that influences how one moves towards *telos*. Just as historical communities provide a person their *telos*, so current communities determine how one moves towards that *telos*.

It is important to note here that current communities will never be exact duplications of the historical community an individual has chosen to derive identity from. Although one might find themselves, by chance or by design, in a current community that is the latest iteration of one's chosen historical community, the context of this historical and current iteration will differ. For a person to move properly towards *telos*, they must live out of the context of the present community; they must address the struggles, needs, and failings unique to the community and context which surrounds them instead of those unique to the historical community that was living towards *telos* in their specific context.

“In the incarnation God both embraces and critically engages culture.”<sup>35</sup> The infinite, immortal God taking on the finiteness and mortality of humanity displays the impact current community has on living well into the image of God. The incarnation shows that Christianity “involves a relativizing of culture at the same time that it embraces particularity of culture as the very means by which God reveals Godself to us in Christ.”<sup>36</sup> God physically becomes contextualized the moment Jesus is born because from that moment on, Jesus' divine nature is being lived out in a particular time, location, and culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, 39.

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Just as Jesus using cellphones in a parable to the Israelites would have been inappropriate, so would Jesus using plows in a parable to many urban communities if Jesus incarnated in America today. The incarnation of Jesus “disallows the premise that it is possible to have a pure, unadulterated, culture-free gospel. Because the gospel is an enfleshed Word, the gospel is by nature always embodied in cultural particularity.”<sup>37</sup> Just as the time, location, and culture Jesus entered into provided specific and unique ways to live out his divine nature, so the time, location, and culture every individual finds themselves in provides specific and unique ways to travel down the path of *theosis*.

Although part of an individual’s narrative/story and identity are chosen based on the historical community they choose to derive their *telos* from, part of one’s narrative/story and identity are also given to them by the current community they find themselves a part of. Someone living in America finds themselves part of a different narrative than someone living in Egypt or China. This unique narrative/story determines which virtues are appropriate and how best to develop them.

It is clear that a difference in *telos* leads to a difference in developed virtues. Someone with an individual *telos* will want to develop the virtues of greed and selfishness so that they can better themselves. Someone with a more communal *telos* will want to develop the virtues of justice and compassion.

A shared *telos* in different current communities requires the same virtues to be developed in different ways. Looking at the Christian *telos*, if Person A lives in a community that has complete racial equality but does not have economic equality, then how they live out the virtue of justice must reflect that. If Person B lives in a community that has complete economic

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<sup>37</sup> Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, 39.

equality but does not have racial equality, then they cannot live out the same expression of justice as Person A. For Person B to try and duplicate the justice Person A expresses would disrupt *theosis* for Person B because it would not be moving them towards *telos*. Because of the community they find themselves in, the only way for justice to move Person B towards *telos* is if it focuses on racial equality. In this way, the given narrative/story of a current community gives individuals guidelines for how to go about *theosis*.

What happens if Person A and Person B live in the same society and that society lacks racial equality? In this case, a person's given identity narrows the guidelines given by the narrative/story of that current community. Here, each person must develop Christian virtues in a way that brings to life their unique images of God. If Person A has a passion for helping children, then they can develop the virtues of justice and compassion by working at an afterschool day care for children of the oppressed population. If Person B has a talent for writing, they can develop the virtues of justice and courage by writing articles that give the oppressed population a voice. In this way, the given identity of an individual provides them with guidelines for how to go about *theosis* in their current community.

This ambiguity is reflected in the New Testament's partial, not comprehensive, imperatives. Matthew's sermon on the mount shows how Jesus teaches using succinct examples instead of a compressive ethical system. The introduction of "the counterintuitive paradoxes of the Beatitudes alert us to the fact that Jesus' new community is a contrast society, out of synch with the 'normal' order of the world."<sup>38</sup> The system that the world, and even the leaders of the current religious community (the Pharisees), lives by is not properly moving humanity towards *telos*.

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<sup>38</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 97.

The purpose of this new community which Jesus is instituting is to be an example to the rest of the world about what a life of proper *theosis* looks like in their current context. This new community is to be the salt of the earth, a city on a hill, a light that shines to humanity.<sup>39</sup> Jesus claims that by being such an example, the rest of humanity will “see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”<sup>40</sup> This mirrors Moses’ description of the Law, “observe [the decrees and laws of the Lord] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations ... what other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?”<sup>41</sup> But unlike Moses, Jesus does not follow with a set of rules. Hays comments on this saying:

Matthew’s rigorous summons to moral perfection cannot be rightly understood as a call to obey a comprehensive system of rules. Despite his emphasis on the church’s commission to teach obedience to Jesus’ commandments, Matthew sees such teaching as instrumental to a deep goal: the transformation of character and of the heart.<sup>42</sup>

The goal of the sermon is to provide examples of what transformation towards the righteous ways of God looks like. Knowing that context changes the living out of the image of God, Jesus fulfills the law by removing the context and proving a way of understanding it that can be translated into all contexts. While the specific righteous actions of humanity will change from context to context, the intentions of humanity are always to remain oriented to *telos*. This is why Jesus introduces the sermon with the beatitudes, which demonstrate that “to be trained for the kingdom is to be trained to see the world from the perspective of God’s future.”<sup>43</sup> For

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew 5:13-16

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 5: 16b

<sup>41</sup> Deut 4:6a, 7

<sup>42</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 98.

<sup>43</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 98.

Matthew, it is by orienting one's intentions towards God's future *telos* that one can show obedience to Jesus' teachings now by acting in a way that brings themselves and their community towards *telos*.

This is why the process of *theosis* is both a means to, and constitutive of, *telos*. Matthew writes about how "action flows from character, but character is not so much a matter of innate disposition as of training in the ways of righteousness."<sup>44</sup> By training oneself to match personal desires to the desires of God (training oneself in the ways of righteousness), one is able to naturally live out righteous actions as the given context calls for. This is why Matthew writes that "every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit,"<sup>45</sup> and that "what comes out of [a person's mouth], that is what makes [them] 'unclean.'"<sup>46</sup> Just as "the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart,"<sup>47</sup> so one's actions come from their character. The further one's image of God is developed, the closer one's character is to the character of God, then the more righteous one's actions will be in their given context.

Matthew's hesitancy for creating a Christian system of rules reflects Paul's same hesitancy. For Paul, "the ethical norm, then, is not given in the form of a predetermined rule or set of rules for conduct; rather, the right action must be *discerned* on the basis of a christological paradigm, with a view to the need of the community."<sup>48</sup> We see this in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians when he addresses the eating of food sacrificed to idols. While, knowing that idols are nothing since there is only one God, the community has the freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols, Paul gives them a warning to "be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does

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<sup>44</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Matt 7:17, also see Matt 12:33

<sup>46</sup> Matt 15:11b

<sup>47</sup> Matt 15:18a

<sup>48</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 43.

not become a stumbling block to the weak.”<sup>49</sup> Paul does not determine the eating of such food as right or wrong; instead, he declares that the right action is the one that builds the community.

The historical community and chosen *telos* provide a list of virtues to develop while the current community and given identity provides guidelines on how an individual develops and lives out each virtue. In Paul’s discussion of sacrificed food, the virtue of unity is provided by the historical community and chosen *telos*, and the example Paul gives of never eating meat again<sup>50</sup> is an option of the proper living out of that virtue in the current community and given identity of the Corinthians.

If a happy life is one that is aligned with and moving toward *telos*, then happiness, while sharing similarities, will look different for each and every person.

### **Avoiding Costly Mistakes**

When the wrong community is used to define *telos* and outline *theosis*, the mistake can become costly. Merely using one’s current community to define *telos* removes oneself from tradition and history. Human history is moving in a direction commissioned by God the Creator and guided by God the Spirit. This direction has already been laid by God and witnessed to in Scripture; thus, *telos* is revealed by the Spirit in the witness of the historical community.

Although individuals, communities, and humanity as a whole might lose sight of *telos* from time to time, the Spirit works to realign the community over time. This means that current communities are never working to redefine *telos*; they are working to rediscover *telos* through discernment with the Spirit.

The opposite is true with a current community’s understanding of *theosis*. While *telos* is predetermined through all of time – including both present and new creation – and will not

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Cor 8:9

<sup>50</sup> 1 Cor 8:13

change, the process of living towards that *telos* – *theosis* – is constantly changing. Current communities are not trying to rediscover the *theosis* of a previous community, they are working with the Spirit to redefine (or translate) *theosis* in the midst of their current context.

In his chapter titled “American Hope Is a Bastard,”<sup>51</sup> Lee Camp uses America as an example to vividly describe the consequences of allowing one’s current community to redefine *telos*. “When America forces himself into an intimate, consummating relationship with the Christian eschatological vision, we are left with an illegitimate form of Christian hope.”<sup>52</sup> This bastardized understanding of *telos* and hope creates a trajectory that is different from the one God created for humanity and thus limits individual and communal growth in the image of God and, by extension, growth in happiness.

Camp uses the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan as an example of rhetoric often used by both spectrums of American politics. Reagan redefined Christian *telos* to fit his context of the American community. *Telos* became creating America as the city on a hill described in Matthew 5:14. This redefinition changed how Reagan and his community live into *telos*. “For Reagan, the biblical task entrusted to the church of Jesus has been transferred to the United States.”<sup>53</sup> While the effects of this bastardized *telos* can be seen throughout many aspects of *theosis*, the virtue of unity is a clear demonstration of the havoc caused. The virtue of unity is distorted in two major ways. First, successful unity is now seen as unity between different groups within the United States instead of between all the nations of the world. Second, unity is achieved not through the Spirit of God but through *Pax America*.

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<sup>51</sup> Lee Camp, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), 33-45.

<sup>52</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians*, 36.

America has become a shining example of how defining *telos* by one's current community distorts the correct understanding of *telos* and can lead a community to living in a way that opposes God's intended *telos* even as they believe they are properly living into it. America's current community formed *telos* cripples the virtue of unity. When we look specifically at the unity between humans and other humans, this false *telos* leaves the members of society stuck in individualism, tribalism, or at best nationalism.

This is contrary to what is seen in Judeo-Christian Scriptures; God "chooses a particular family, Abraham and Sarah. This family grows first into a clan and later into a nation (Israel), called to bless all nations."<sup>54</sup> Like America, the nation of Israel was tempted to define their *telos* from their current community, and at times they gave into that temptation. When God called Abraham, Abraham had the option to distort *telos* so that *theosis* was experienced through individualism. As Abraham and Sarah birthed a clan, they had the option to distort *telos* so that *theosis* was experienced through individualism or tribalism. When that clan became the nation of Israel, they had the option to distort *telos* so that *theosis* was experienced through individualism, tribalism, or nationalism.

To fall into any of these 'isms' is to misunderstand the image of God and thus misunderstand *telos*. God is sovereign over all creation and thus expects that God's "name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun,"<sup>55</sup> and that "the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles."<sup>56</sup> This not only displays the glory of God, but the unity that derives from that glory. A *theosis* steeped in individualism, tribalism,

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<sup>54</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, "A Missional Theology of Spiritual Formation," in *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, ed. Dwight J. Zscheile (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 7.

<sup>55</sup> Mal 1:11a

<sup>56</sup> Zech 14:16



or nationalism falls short of imaging this glory and unity of God. The Judeo-Christian historical community formed *telos* provides the proper lens for the living out of glory and unity in *theosis*: universalism.<sup>57</sup> Current community formed *telos* changes the goal away from imaging God thus setting individuals and communities on faulty paths of happiness.

Historically formed *theosis* can be just as costly. *Theosis* must be reevaluated by every individual and community based on their geographical and temporal context. As mentioned before, Jesus' life was a model, not a mold, of what a life oriented towards proper *telos* looks like. To revert to historical examples of *theosis* is to under-contextualize *theosis*. "The gospel has within it the potential of being good news in every context; but to be so, it must be expressed in terms that make sense to those who are hearing it."<sup>58</sup> This potential is averted when we force a community to live into a context that is not their own. The gospel is working to imagine a new reality within the midst of each person's, and community's, context, not removing people from the context they are in.

Because contexts change from place to place and from time to time, how one properly lives towards *telos* is constantly changing. Unwillingness to let go of a historical framework of *theosis* can lead to missing the spiritual zeitgeist one finds themselves in. This can be seen properly reflected in the change of how Israel is called to live missionally. Israel's promised land was situated at a major trade intersection. Being right outside Egypt, the largest nation of the time, most nations north and east of Egypt had to pass through Israel to trade with, and pay tribute to, Egypt. This allowed Israel to take on a centripetal missional identity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Universalism here describes unity among all nations of the world, not the salvation of all humans regardless of actions and beliefs.

<sup>58</sup> Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> The missional aspect of Israel is debated among scholars. Understanding of Israel's mission is tied to the understanding of Israel as a priestly nation. Some scholars (cf. John Goldingay, Alec Motyer) are reluctant to see Israel's priestly identity referring to a missional relationship to other nations. Other scholars (cf. Cardoza-Orlandi and Justo Gonzalez) accept a missional understanding of Israel's identity but limit the extent to which Israel was

“It is not a matter of Israel going to all nations, preaching the message of salvation, but it is rather that all the nations of the world will find in Israel their salvation.”<sup>60</sup> It is by living as a nation that images God that other nations will pass through Israel and notice that something is different. “Obedience to the covenant was not a condition of *salvation* but a condition of their *mission*.”<sup>61</sup> The poor are being taken care of. The slaves are being treated as human beings. The people understand the importance of rest and this benefits them and the land. The Israelite society is flourishing because they are living into *telos*, the nations see this as they pass through Israel, and as a result the nations come to learn more about God because of how Israel lives, at least that was the intent for Israel.

Israel’s context in the New Testament differs from Israel’s context in the Old Testament. When God steps into the world through Jesus, Israel is no longer in a position to live missionally in a centripetal way. Israel is controlled and governed by the pagan Roman empire. Nations coming to Israel cannot be missionally engaged in the way they could in the Old Testament. Understanding Israel’s mission in light of their new context, Jesus calls the Israelites to live their mission centrifugally; “go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>62</sup> Waiting for nations to come to them is no longer fruitful for Israel in their new context. If Israel wants to continue living into the image of God in a missional way, they must adjust their missional practice so that they are going to the nations. A failure to adjust becomes a costly mistake in Israel’s living into *telos*.

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called to live out mission. Still other scholars (cf. Christopher Wright, Walter Vogels) argue for a more practical application of Israel’s missional identity.

<sup>60</sup> Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, and Justo L. Gonzalez, *To All Nations from All Nations*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 333.

<sup>62</sup> Matt 28:19a, 20a

Although Israel's missional living out of *theosis* changes as a result of contextual changes, consistency is found not just in their *telos*, but also in tenets of their *theosis*. "Priestly nation" describes Israel's call to missional living; "holy nation" describes Israel's call to distinctive living.<sup>63</sup> Core to Israel's ability to correctly live out a centripetal mission is their call to be a holy nation. "Israel's distinctiveness from the nations was an essential component of *God's mission* for them in the world."<sup>64</sup> This call for distinctive living contributes to Israel's *theosis* by assisting them in the correct living out of their centrifugal mission.

The virtues of mission and holiness (distinctiveness) remain constant through contextual change, it is the living out of those virtues that change. The importance of mission, Israel's priestly identity, is seen in instances such as Jesus' 'great commission' as mentioned above, the sending out of the twelve and the seventy-two, the Samaritan woman at the well, and Paul's many travels as recorded in the book of Acts. Distinctiveness, Israel's holy identity, is displayed over and over in the teachings of Jesus and the saints.

A blatant example of the consistency of virtues mixed with a change in how those virtues are lived out can be seen by comparing Israel's Old Testament emphasis on centripetal missional holiness and Peter's advice for centrifugal missional holiness; "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits."<sup>65</sup> Peter clearly understands that the Israelites he is writing to are no longer participating in a 'come and see' ministry, but instead find themselves in the midst of the pagans as they live out a 'go and be' ministry. This change in context and living out of mission holds on to the necessity of distinctive living.

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<sup>63</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 331-333.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 333.

<sup>65</sup> 1 Pet 2:12

### **Earthly and Heavenly Imperfect Happiness**

Happiness is achieved by the process of *theosis*. Aquinas and Augustine both believed that “happiness and goodness are one; therefore, in order to be happy we must become good.”<sup>66</sup> This paper has already discussed that Aquinas and Augustine connect this goodness with God’s goodness; thus, we can state that for one to be perfectly happy, one must be good as God is good. Our level of happiness is dependent upon the relationship of our goodness to God’s goodness. This is why *theosis* is the path of happiness. As we more properly and faithfully bear our unique images of God, we grow in our living out of God’s goodness which results in a growth in happiness.

This brings into focus Augustine’s idea of earthly imperfect happiness versus heavenly perfect happiness. “In this life we will never be perfectly happy, but we will advance in happiness to the degree that we advance in goodness.”<sup>67</sup> Within this argument lies the understanding that on earth we cannot achieve a perfect living out of God’s goodness, but in the new heaven and new earth we can. *Theosis* agrees with the first part of this understanding, but not the second. It is true that we cannot perfectly live out God’s goodness in present creation. It is also true that we cannot perfectly live out God’s goodness in new creation.

To perfectly live out God’s goodness, one must, first, have a complete knowledge of and unity with God and, second, be God. Without complete knowledge of and unity with God, one cannot know what God deems as good in every single situation. Even if one did have this knowledge and unity, one could not do the perfectly good thing without being God and possessing the power of God.

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<sup>66</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 5.

This is why the process of *theosis* is never complete. To finish *theosis* would require becoming God. Instead, the process of *theosis* is like a mathematical infinite limit. An infinite limit is a function that approaches yet never attains infinity. Likewise, in the process of *theosis*, we grow in the image of God without ever becoming God.

This comes into conflict with Augustine's teachings on happiness. "Human love, goodness, and happiness are sacraments pointing to and anticipating the perfect love, goodness, and happiness that we will know with God and the saints in heaven." But since we cannot live out God's perfect goodness in new creation, perfect happiness will not be obtained there.

Wadell uses Augustine's idea of perfect heavenly happiness to provide a light at the end of the tunnel of human suffering. "Like Augustine, knowing that perfect happiness is in loving and being loved by God may change the way we live in the world, but it does not take us out of the world. The happiness we enjoy now points to and hopes for the fullness of happiness in heaven."<sup>68</sup> Does removing the incentive of perfect heavenly happiness discourage humanity's desire for the happiness God provides? No.

The inability to reach a perfect happiness should not dissuade us in our quest for happiness. It is acceptable that we will not reach perfect happiness in new creation because, in new creation, God gifts us with unhindered growth in happiness.

In his discussion of the importance of history and the hope Christianity provides by describing the direction of human history, Camp says, "historic Christianity insists precisely this: that history is headed toward a glorious re-creation the likes of which only poets can begin to voice."<sup>69</sup> This glorious re-creation is the Christian hope of *eschaton*; the glorious hope of the 'end of times' is the continuing of time via a resurrected and restored life in new creation.

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<sup>68</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians*, 14.

Human history does not point to a perfect *eschaton* because human history has never been in a state of perfection. Human history has experienced two states of growth in happiness: unhindered and hindered growth. Sin's disruption of the state of shalom that was found in Genesis 1 and 2 reduced, or hindered, humanity's process of *theosis* and thus hindered humanity's growth in happiness.

The main problem with earthly happiness is that humans do not move flawlessly through the process of *theosis*. "Vices impair, and ultimately prevent, happiness and fulfillment because cultivating them not only turns us away from the good, but also forms us into persons who can no longer recognize, much less enjoy, what is genuinely good for us."<sup>70</sup> This aspect of human nature prevents us from achieving perfect happiness in present creation.

Paul states it well when he says, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing."<sup>71</sup> Sin, actions and a way of life that are contrary to the righteous ways of God, uses vices to stunt and reverse our happiness.

It is the brokenness caused by sin that makes true the statement that "we are bodily creatures whose happiness is hindered by suffering and sorrow, by physical, emotional, and psychological anguish, and by the inescapable vulnerability of love."<sup>72</sup> This is part of the curse of sin.

What makes the promise of re-creation glorious is God's promise; "Behold, I am making all things new."<sup>73</sup> In new creation, "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,

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<sup>70</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 54.

<sup>71</sup> Romans 6:18b-19

<sup>72</sup> Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> Rev 21:5b, ESV

for the old order of things has passed away.”<sup>74</sup> In this glorious re-creation we regain access to the tree of life which has leaves that “are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.”<sup>75</sup> The curse of sin is removed and the brokenness sin created is healed. Sin no longer creates anguish in our lives to take away our happiness. Sin no longer tempts us with vices to reverse our *theosis*. In the presence of God we get to eternally grow in our happiness without anything working to slow, stop, or reverse it.

### **Continuity of *Theosis* and Happiness Between Present Creation and New Creation**

The tree of life linking Genesis 1 and 2 to the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 and 22 creates continuity between present creation *theosis* and happiness and new creation *theosis* and happiness. While perfect happiness does not necessitate discontinuity, it does tempt us into believing that there is discontinuity between life now and life in the new creation. If perfect happiness is gifted to us as soon as we enter into life-after-death, then our growth in happiness in this life has no substantial meaning or importance. This life is like a vapor,<sup>76</sup> a drop in an ocean, compared to the eternal aspect of life in the new creation. If perfect happiness is granted upon entrance into the new creation, then the infinitesimal amount of time spent unhappy in this life plays no real role in the larger picture. Camp suggests that when we allow discontinuity between present creation and the glorious re-creation we misrepresent the hope of new creation.

The hope of heaven, in other words, too easily becomes an ahistorical hope, a hope that cares nothing for the unfolding of the human drama, except perhaps to hope that sufficient religious or moral choices are rightly made so that the soul can sweep through the Pearly Gates.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Rev 21:4b

<sup>75</sup> Rev 22:2b-3a

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Ps 39:5, 102:3, 144:4; Jas 4:14

<sup>77</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness*, 16.

This faulty understanding reduces the need to grow in the image of God. Living into this false understanding of hope hinders our process of *theosis* because it reduces the need to live out virtues in the present creation. Camp warns that the discontinuity between present creation and new creation can morph Christianity from a politic concerned with how people live into a spirituality that is concerned merely with saving souls. This spirituality claims that “temporal things do not matter, for only eternal things matter.”<sup>78</sup> Virtues require the temporal. If the temporal does not matter, then virtues such as courage, temperance, and generosity do not matter because heaven cancels out present creation.

This discontinuity is often encouraged by those who are already well off. The wealthy and powerful have less immediate need for the living out of virtues because they are experiencing lower levels of present suffering. On the other hand, the poor, marginalized, and oppressed who are well acquainted with present suffering understand the need for a continuity between present and new creation that prompts the proper imaging of God and living out of virtues now. While a discontinuity between present and new creation does not necessitate a spiritualizing of Christianity that reduces the need for living out the virtues, the two easily become comorbid.

In contrast, imperfect happiness invites us into a belief in continuity between present creation and new creation.

Moses did not come to [the Israelites] to admonish them to be patient until the coming of the ‘sweet-by-and-by.’ Moses did not say, ‘Yes, life’s a bitch, but get right with the Lord, and when you die, you’ll get your eternal reward in heaven.’ No, he most certainly did not. Instead, Moses went to pharaoh. The prophet went to the powermonger and said in no uncertain terms, ‘Let my people go.’<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Camp, *Scandalous Witness*, 7.



The Exodus story exemplifies how the importance of continuity between present creation and new creation spawns action. Imaging God requires us to actively live out virtues in the present creation. Craig Van Gelder discusses how the Spirit of God is “involved with the continued well-being of the world...[and] is involved in bringing back to right relationship with God that which is fallen.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, to image God requires that we be concerned with the well-being and reconciliation of creation now instead of waiting for new creation. God’s concern for the Israelites required action in the present creation which became a foretaste of the new creation. This continuity uses the living out of virtues as a connection point between the present creation and the new creation.

If *theosis* is an eternal process that begins at birth in this life and continues in resurrected life, then *theosis* in new creation builds off of *theosis* in present creation. How we live in this life matters because the results, in part, carry into our life in new creation. The happiness we create in our life now, and in the lives of those around us, matters because that happiness becomes the starting point for our continuing growth in happiness in new creation. Our growth in the image of God in new creation builds off of how well we imaged God in present creation.

The continuity between present creation and new creation allows the understanding of *theosis* in our current community to affect our understanding of how we will continue to move towards *telos* in new creation community. In the new heaven and new earth, our *telos* does not change; we are still called to grow in the proper and faithful bearing of our unique image of God. It is the appropriate virtues provided by our current community that change.

Hays calls the translation of Scripture into our current community “an *integrative act of the imagination*,” and states that “the form of this imaginative integration of the text and

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<sup>80</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 26.

situation can never be exactly specified a priori.”<sup>81</sup> Since the living out of *theosis* cannot be determined *a priori*, the details of new creation *theosis* are a matter of speculation. Even though the specific living out of new creation *theosis* cannot be fully understood in the present creation, an understanding of present creation *theosis* gives clues to imagining the framework of new creation *theosis*.

God the Trinity provides the foundation for understanding and imagining the continuity between present creation and new creation *theosis* and happiness. Present creation unity with God the Trinity comes from God the Spirit. Our sin broke our communication with God the Creator and it is through the power of the Spirit that we communicate with God the Creator through prayer.<sup>82</sup> In the incarnation, God the Word took on the human limitations of time and space, but through God the Spirit Jesus lives in us.<sup>83</sup> It is this unity with the Spirit that empowers present creation *theosis*. Jesus told his disciples the following about the Spirit:

When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.<sup>84</sup>

Van Gelder comments that “the Spirit’s agency is related to the works of the Father and the Son and as such is intended to bring to light their presence and activities in the world.”<sup>85</sup> God the Spirit reveals to us aspects, both essence and actions, of the mystery of God the Trinity. In

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<sup>81</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Rom 8:26-27

<sup>83</sup> Phil 2:7, John 20:27, Acts 1:9-11; Rom 8:9-11, John 17:15-21

<sup>84</sup> John 15:13-15

<sup>85</sup> Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 25.

doing so, God the Spirit assists us along the path of *theosis*. The more God the Spirit reveals to us God the Trinity, the better we are able to properly and faithfully image God the Trinity.

God the Spirit guides us down the path of *theosis* by helping us properly translate the example of Jesus into our specific contexts. We see in the book of Acts that “the Spirit leads that community, the church, into cross-cultural witness,” and that attests to the fact that “the Spirit leads the church to embody Jesus’ witness as the body of Christ within diverse contexts, contexts that are always undergoing some level of change.”<sup>86</sup> The Spirit is the guiding force of both the universal and denominational Church, as well as the individual Christian.

God the Spirit empowers us to live out the image of God in our lives. When Jesus sent out the twelve, he told them, “but when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”<sup>87</sup> Jesus speaks frankly about God the Spirit empowering the twelve to act in a way which brings them, and others, closer to *telos*.

In describing God the Spirit’s main agency in creation post-fall and pre-new-creation, Van Gelder says that “this fallenness leads to the necessity of redemption within the story line, where the Spirit is introduced as the agent of this re-creation”<sup>88</sup> One of the ways that God the Spirit plays its part in the redemption of creation is through revealing God the Trinity and guiding and empowering humanity. In these redemptive movements, God the Spirit creates “an intersection between heaven and earth. It brings into play the dynamics of the intent of creation with the possibilities of redemption.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Matt 10:19-20

<sup>88</sup> Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 26.

<sup>89</sup> Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 27.

In this redemptive intersection between heaven and earth, heaven here referring to the current realm filled with God's presence as referred to in Matthew 6:9-10, *theosis* is seen as both a process of formation into the image of God and a process of redemption, or re-creation, out of the fallen state of humanity. Since humanity exists within a fallen state that breaks unity with God the Trinity, God the Spirit works as an intersection between fallen and holy in order to provide a limited degree of unity between humanity and God the Trinity. God the Spirit is always at work to widen that intersection through acts of redemption which aid in the *theosis* of humanity both communally and individually.

In the new heaven and new earth, God the Spirit's job of redemption is complete, but the job of formation continues. The completion of redemption is seen in the fact that unity with God the Trinity is no longer found through God the Spirit creating an intersection, it is now found in residing in the presence of all the persons of God the Trinity. Of the new heaven and new earth, God says that "the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."<sup>90</sup> In new creation, the restrictions that sin places on our unity with God are removed and we are given unbridled access to God the Trinity. This increase in unity is part of the unhindered growth in happiness that we will experience in the new heaven and new earth.

Increased unity with God the Trinity in the new heaven and new earth does not mean that God the Trinity does not currently work to grow our present creation happiness. In our life before new creation, God the Creator provides for us our *telos*. In giving us purpose, God the Creator allows us to grow in happiness. God the Word, through the incarnation, embodied and exemplified an earthly path towards *telos* in the context he entered into. God the Spirit assists,

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<sup>90</sup> Rev 22:3b-4

guides, and empowers our journey towards *telos*. In other words, the Creator gave us a *telos*, Jesus taught virtues and demonstrated the path of *theosis* in his specific context, and the Spirit helps us properly live out the virtues and move along the path of *theosis* in our specific contexts. In these ways, the whole Trinity helps us in our journey towards *telos*.

Our greater unity with God the Trinity in the new heaven and new earth allows for greater growth towards *telos*. God the Creator will righten our understanding of *telos*. Although the thousands of years of history behind our chosen *telos* provides some assurance of the accuracy of this *telos*, humanity is plagued by sin and we must assume there is some level of errancy in our understanding of *telos*. In the new heaven and new earth, God the Creator, who gave us our *telos*, will righten our understanding of *telos* so that we are not unknowingly straying from the path of *theosis*. God the Word will now walk along side of us instead of walking before us. God the Spirit will more fully assist, guide, and empower our journey towards *telos*. In other words, the Creator will provide a clearer and more direct path to *telos*, Jesus will join us in our personal contexts as we journey towards *telos*, and the Spirit will continue to help us move towards *telos*. In these ways, our fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth comes not from a perfectly attained happiness, but from moving, unhindered, towards happiness empowered by unity with God in new creation.

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