

The Ultimate Gift: The Transformative Indwelling of Christ and the Christian

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All those *ἵνα* and *ut* clauses should have given it away. As a patrologist with a special interest in the soteriology of Christian deification, I had always seen that the Church Fathers depicted the descent of Christ in terms of a purpose and a plan. His *kenosis* demanded our *theosis*, for he did not intend to visit in vain. The more modern understanding of God's descent into humanity and the consequent gift of divinizing grace as an event that required absolutely nothing in return, therefore, never quite squared with how I was interacting with these ancient texts. Instead, what I was encountering on those pages insisted that "this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: *so that* man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God."¹ We see the same construction of purpose clauses in Clement and Origen and throughout the Cappadocians, as well as at the heart at the most legendary and lapidary formula, the Athanasian dictum that "God became human *so that* humans could become gods."² Obviously this was no disinterested descent.

Surely the Incarnation was effected in order to achieve some end, an exhortatory truth not limited to the ancient world, but seen throughout the best of Christian thought. Take St. Thomas Aquinas, for example,

¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* 3.19.1 (PG, 7/1:939), as quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §460.

² Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54.3 (PG, 25:192B), quoted in CCC, §460. For more on such statements, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

whose lengthy meditations on the grace of the Incarnation led him to teach that “the only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, *so that* he, made man, might make men gods.”³ From Athanasius to Aquinas, the greatest Christian minds have understood that the gift of the Son’s human nature was so that humans could come to partake of the divine nature.

Yet, in many strands of modern Christianity, such an expectation would be piously disregarded as some merit- or work-based soteriology wherein God does something only in order to have something in return. There is (rightful) caution that the old pagan adage and the crux of their civil creed, *do ut des*, would erase the agapic covenant in favor of a commutative contract. But how does one speak of the utter gratuity of God without making his gift an undemanding frill or a favor so void of power that it refuses a return on its investment? Perhaps that is what every fallen soul, however, desires—a God who only gives but wants nothing really in return?

In his inimitable way, C. S. Lewis realized this when he teasingly wrote that no one really wants a Father-God who makes demands on those brought into his household, but rather a cognitively diminished deity who simply provides us with what we need to have fun and then apparently turns in early:

By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His lovingness; and in this we may be right. And by Love, in this context, most of us mean kindness—the desire to see others than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy. What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, liked to see young people enjoying themselves, and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all.’ . . . I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don’t, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.⁴

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum* 57, lec.1–4 (On the Feast of Corpus Christi), quoted in *CCC*, §460.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 1986 [originally 1940]), 31–32.

Lewis rightly sees that the modern notion of love is in need of correction, especially as regards whether it is congruent with any language of reciprocity, expectation, or bidding.

The most recent contribution by the biblical theologian John Barclay sets out to rectify not so much our modern understanding of God's love, but that of God's grace.⁵ Accordingly, the present article explores how Paul's understanding of grace, as Barclay reads it, opens up for us a more robust theology of the Mystical Body, arguing that Paul expects the *kenosis* of the Son to result in the *theosis* of many adopted sons and daughters now gathered into one body, the Body of Christ.

To do this, we shall first extrapolate those parts of Barclay's study that help us understand this expectation of the Incarnation. Barclay very adroitly draws out six characteristics of "gift" from Paul's world, proving very illuminating to us today when asking "why?" God became flesh. A second section of the present article examines Paul's theology of the Mystical Body and its possible roots and sources. Among all the New Testament books, the Pauline epistles exhort the Christian people into a unity unknown outside the ecclesia to which they are invited. The third and final section moves with Barclay more explicitly to Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians in order to read anew the Apostle's theology of deification.

John M. G. Barclay's *Paul & The Gift*

This most recent *Nova et Vetera* symposium has chosen to focus on Durham University's biblical theologian John Barclay's wonderful *Paul & the Gift*, as he offers both a confirmation and a rectification of modern readings of Paul on the crucial concept of grace. Biblical scholars have recognized Barclay's work and have rightly received it as a very welcomed study, as it attempts to reconcile the so-called recent "new perspectives on Paul" with a more historically steeped reading of Paul's cultural and intellectual milieu. In so gathering his study and focusing his interest on the history and theology of *gratia*, Professor Barclay inevitably brings into dialogue some of the positions and readings of Paul advanced by such scholars as James D. G. Dunn (who coined the term "new perspective"), E. P. Sanders, and of course, N. T. Wright. A deepening of Paul's theology will always need to be done, and *Paul & the Gift* proves a definite way forward, as Barclay both highlights the surprisingly rich pre-Christian roots of grace and shows how we should read Paul rightly today.

For the past 2000 years, the majority of Christian thinkers have held

⁵ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). This work will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

a robust theology of the Mystical Body as the key to understanding one's new life in Christ, having drawn mainly from the imagery in John's Gospel and Paul's theology of grace. Thus, this would prove to be an illuminating lens through which we study the key insights of *Paul & the Gift*. In so doing, we just might come to see a more pervasive and far-reaching appreciation for how this soteriological tenet is found throughout the Pauline epistles. Such a lens also allows us to see both how Barclay understands such deification and perhaps where this ancient Christian doctrine could be even more effective in the analysis offered here.

Barclay opens his study by canvassing various theories of what constitutes a gift, how it is different from, say, a loan or an investment. While he canvasses many modern thinkers, the real fruit comes when he turns to those Second Temple texts that surely constituted the intellectual world in which Saul of Tarsus lived and studied. Here Barclay highlights six crucial components to the classical notion of gift or grace.

The first is *superabundance*. A true gift in antiquity was marked by a sense of permanence and magnitude. While one category may be temporal (a gift was never transient or ephemeral) and the other ontological (a sense of boundlessness and inexhaustibility), they converge in the idea of an opulence that could hardly be demanded by the beneficiary, a most fitting description of the interaction between the divine and the mortal.

The second tenet is *singularity*. Sheer benevolence marks a gift in the ancient world, described by Barclay in terms of an unparalleled solicitude with which the gift is given. Here, motivation and intent not only define the obvious gratuity of the gift but also determine the giver's purity and purpose of intention as well.

Third of the tenets is *priority*. As the name suggests, timing also factored into the beauty of a gift. Here, factors of initiation, preference, and prerogative come to light. By definition, a gift is the origin and not the consummation of personal interaction: favor originates in the giver and is the means by which those gifted are enabled to enjoy something otherwise unavailable to them.

Fourth is *incongruity*. As prodigal as a gift may seem, it is always given with a certain discrimination and selectivity. The incongruity here is not between giver and gifted, but between all those to whom the giver could have potentially given. Qualifications and criteria do matter, as benefactors would never bestow blindly, but instead gladly on those whom they have intentionally chosen.

Fifth is *efficacy*. Although freely given, a gift is expected to achieve some purpose. Food was widely distributed to satiate hunger, games were financed to provide entertainment to citizens, and so on. Benefactors are

rarely described as wholly selfless individuals, but rather calculate their gifts in such a way that either a personal or a social outcome they desire may (or may not be) realized. Those with gifts to give are generally those who know how the world “works,” and they do not scatter their largesse indiscriminately or without an eye to some ameliorative upturn.

Finally, the sixth tenet is *noncircularity*. Whereas the post-Enlightenment concept of gift is marked primarily by a sense of “purity,” with absolutely no strings attached to the content of the giving, here we come to see how favor in antiquity did expect some effect to occur. Of course, the “value” of the beneficence could not be matched or returned *in toto*, but that did not necessarily negate any expectation of honor or some sign of gratitude. Of course, a gift might never be “returned” in the slightest (Barclay explores this raw possibility through the adverb *δωρεάν* as at Gal 2:21, meaning “to no effect” or “for nought”), but nonetheless, gifts were given and favors were bestowed in order to establish relationship and to accomplish some recognized results (70–75).

After laying out the mechanics of a gift in the time of Second Temple Judaism, Barclay makes sure the reader understands that there was no one monolithic understanding of grace during these years. A gift may exhibit but one of these characteristics only; one or more of these may be more or less intense depending on the nature of the benefactor, the favor involved, or the status of the recipient(s). Some systems and societies stressed, say, efficacy over incongruity, or any one of the other characteristics analyzed here. It becomes clear that there was no inflexible and static conception of grace and how it had to operate. Barclay then applies these criteria to reading of Pauline grace as found throughout Galatians and Romans (one hopes he will do the same in the future for the remaining epistles), and a new light is cast on many classical texts employed when trying to understand how the apostle understands the new favor available in Christ.

This towering convert and apostolic authority has been described as the first Christian teacher to be “motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One.”⁶ According to Margaret Mitchell, for instance, the entire point of Paul’s theologizing was to foster concord and unity within an otherwise disparate and divergent demographic.⁷ For, the reigning philosophies of Paul’s time all tended in this direction, tending to equate that which was

⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 181.

⁷ Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Compositions of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), esp. 20–64.

real with that which was one. The concept of *henosis* or *unitas* became the distinguishing characteristic of that which had meaning, value, and reality. St. Paul's exhortations toward unity played out most manifestly and missiologically in his many calls for ecclesial harmony as an extension and emblem of Christ's own life. Paul wanted his interlocutors to understand that the essence of their newly embraced Christian faith was not a matter of law, not measured by the good works accomplished, but neither could it be reduced to a discardable ornament that made no demands on their bodies and minds.

The gift Paul longed to share with the first generations of Jesus's followers was a theology of mutual indwelling: to live this new life in Christ is ultimately to be conformed to Christ as mortal creatures surrendering to the organic unity offered and effected only in Christ's own body, the Church. Alongside John the Evangelist, the Apostle Paul was the source from which most Church Fathers and medieval Doctors drew when explaining the indwelling that transformed a Christian into another Christ (perhaps telling in this regard is that Paul is the opening citation in Pope Pius XII's 1943 classic *Mystici Corporis*, Col 1:24). This trajectory reveals an unbroken reliance on Paul: from the foundational centuries of Christian theology through the tumultuous times of modernity, it is Paul on whom the Church has most often depended when explaining the Christian life in terms of incorporation into Christ. And Barclay knows this, analyzing Paul's theology of grace in the thought of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and significant twentieth-century Protestant figures. Yet an even richer study comes into view when Barclay's own tools are used to focus more precisely on the Pauline understanding of the deifying body of Christ.

Most important in this study into the transforming and deifying union of Paul's understanding of the Mystical Body is Barclay's emphasis that grace is at once both a gift and a reward that seeks to achieve its implicit expectation:

There is no antithesis here between gift and merit; grace and recompense stand in conjunction, not opposition. This is not to make the gift any less a gift or something akin to "pay." Those who deserve the gifts are still the recipients of gifts, given voluntarily and without legal requirement. They do not *cause* the gift to be given (that is always a matter of the benefactor's will), but they prove themselves to be its suitable recipients and thus provide the *condition* for its proper distribution. We must insist, against our instincts, that the ancients knew, and had reason to celebrate, a form of divine grace that rewarded those who were fitting recipients of its free and lavish beneficence. (316)

Reading Barclay on these many excellent points reminded me of much of the work Peter Brown has done as of late, not on Augustine (as Barclay cites), but on euergetism in late antiquity. Gifts were freely given out of a benefactor's largesse to those whom such a donor chose to trust with his or her wealth. People who knew the world well enough to work (or, perhaps more often, inherit) their way to the proverbial top were not careless spendthrifts or irresponsible do-gooders. They were savvy men and women enjoying a respectful social stratum and whose beneficence was meant to accomplish something noble and beautiful for those who drew near to their care.⁸

Both Brown and Barclay are sensitive enough to the ancient sources available to realize how the nature of gift and covenant in Judaism and in the Hellenic Roman world worked. Writing particularly about the book of Wisdom, but applicable to the overall point here, Barclay notes how Solomon obviates the worldview that God's goodness will always be futile with humanity's depravity, and so "might is right." For instance, for all posterity to hear, Solomon appeals to an undeserved yet efficacious wisdom: "God's generosity toward all of humanity is celebrated throughout this text, but its emphasis on a just and non-arbitrary cosmos requires that God's gifts are fairly distributed to those 'worthy' to receive them. Wisdom is a gift freely offered to those who desire and seek her and, like all the good gifts, is fittingly given" (309). The active favor of the benefactor is to be met by the humble receptivity of the beneficiary. Only in this way is a unilateral enslavement eschewed. The fittingness of the gift thus allows those in need to realize their own dignity and free decision to respond accordingly.

Let us now turn to that free and fitting gift as evidenced in St. Paul's theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, where the followers of Jesus surrender to love, and thus become other Christs extending the Incarnation in their own human and participatory ways. In doing so, I do not wish to imply that this is the only way grace operates in Paul's letters, nor do I see this as a major part of *Paul & the Gift*. What I do see is how the work Barclay has achieved here helps open for us today the ways Paul uses the ancient imagery of the body's working in unison as a foundational metaphor for the Christian life.

⁸ See Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). See also my review essay, "Earthly Treasure, Spiritually Refined," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 4 (2015): 621–28. For a more recent and much shorter study, see Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

Paul's Theology of the Mystical Body

When taking up the Christian beginnings of the concept of the Mystical Body, the first voice we hear is fittingly that of the Lord himself as he instructs his listeners that whatever they do to the least of his brothers and sisters they inevitably do unto him as well. We hear, for example, the Gospels describe that relationship between Christ and these "least" as an organic unity between vine and branches (John 15) and as a union so intimate and unifying that it courses through one's very body (John 6). In Acts, we also hear Jesus cry from the heavens, "Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4; 22:7).⁹ For, it is the Lord himself who realizes how love unites and transforms lover and beloved. No longer Saul, the Apostle Paul translates this insight (and personal experience!) into language of head and body. Emile Mersch, S.J., observed in his classic on the Mystical Body: "What launched [Paul] on his apostolate and gave him a gospel to preach was the revelation that he had received that Christ is everything in the Church. . . . He sums up his entire gospel in this teaching, just as Christ sums up everything in Himself (Eph 1:10)."¹⁰ As one surely immersed in the culture and intellectual atmosphere of Hellenic Roman culture, Paul realized well how the body was the most apt metaphor in the pagan Mediterranean world by which to represent both civic cohesion and the intellectual ideals that bound otherwise disparate individuals into an organic whole.

This metaphor of the needed unities and sympathies of a body, stressing not only concord but also the needed hierarchy that ensures proper oversight and effectiveness, is found easily in Aesop's fable on *The Stomach and the Body*. This tale was originally intended as a cautionary warning against military brass abusing those below them, as well as a statement that foot soldiers stand in need of leadership from above. According to Aesop, every member of a body politic must listen to one another if any level of harmony, and thus survival, is to be realized:

The stomach and the feet were arguing over their strength. The feet constantly alleged that they were much superior in strength because they carried the stomach. To this the stomach replied: "But, my friends, if I don't provide you with nourishment, you won't be able to carry me."¹¹

⁹ All quotations of Scripture are taken from the NABRE.

¹⁰ Emile Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1951), 56.

¹¹ Fable no. 66 (no. 130 in Melvin Perry's standard numbering) in *Aesop's Fables*,

Such imagery abounded in other early writers, the best-known probably being in Plato's likening his city-state, the *Republic*, to the human soul. Plato held that, since the invisible soul was impossible to behold, it must be seen in magnification in the republic in which one lives. For Plato, governmental and societal structures are therefore nothing other than the magnifications of each of our own individual selves, the manifestation of our own priorities and ensuing desires. The body politic is a reflection of the values of each found within that body.

As insightful as Aesop and Plato were, by the time Paul developed his reflections on the Church as a body, the most common story on the body came from more contemporary authors like Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (d. ca. 7 BC) and Livy (d. AD 17). It recalls how a Roman consul in 503 BC, Menenius Agrippa, was sent to call the Roman army to greater harmony, as a great fissure had developed between a particular legion and its leaders. The senators who sent Menenius Agrippa, of course, stood in fear of conspiracies and assassination attempts by unruly and disgruntled military men. They therefore sent this eloquent statesman, and Menenius Agrippa relays this story:

In the days when man's members did not all agree amongst themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own ideas and a voice of its own, the other parts thought it unfair that they should have the worry and the trouble and the labor of providing everything for the belly, while the belly remained quietly in their midst with nothing to do but to enjoy the good things which they bestowed upon it; they therefore conspired together that the hands should carry no food to the mouth, nor the mouth accept anything that was given it, nor the teeth grind up what they received. While they sought in this angry spirit to starve the belly into submission, the members themselves and the whole body were reduced to the utmost weakness. . . . [And a bit later, Livy concludes] drawing a parallel from this to show how like was the internal dissension of the bodily members to the anger of the plebs against the Fathers, he prevailed upon the minds of his hearers.¹²

It is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to conceive how a story

trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

¹² As related in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 2.16.33, in *The Rise of Rome: Books One to Five*, trans. T. J. Luce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104. The same apologue is found in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.3.18, and Cicero, *De officiis* 3.5.22.

as old as Xenophon (d. 354 BC) and one kept alive in Cicero and Livy might have been readily known to a rabbinically trained scholar like Saul (Acts 22:3).

Of course, we cannot know for sure what Paul had read and had studied, but this classical speech finds a very similar tone in his warning against civic discord in 1 Corinthians, surely the most Hellenic and learned of all of his addresses:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. (1 Cor 12:12–20)

Many recent scholars have argued that Paul here translates the pre-Christian understanding of the civic body into the Mystical continuation of God's own Incarnation. Here, heavenly charity transforms Christian into Christ, and since the Christian has been originally created in the divine image and likeness (Gen 1:27), this is neither an obliteration nor an obfuscation of the human nature, but its only true consummation and perfection.

In his work on *Christ's Body in Corinth*, Yung Suk Kim, for instance, argues that the "space" of Christ's Body, his ecclesia on earth, was the only locus of incorporation where first-century Christians could know that they were no longer alone or without meaning or purpose. But just as importantly, they knew they were not being subsumed into a faceless hegemonic body. They were perfected as individuals precisely because they were being perfected as a body, what Professor Kim calls "the Christic body," where even the forgotten, sick, and enslaved, the abused and the downtrodden, found a meaningful participation because they were now

part of a lacerated yet eternally glorified body!¹³

Similarly, David Litwa, of the Australian Catholic University, grounds Paul's main soteriological message in his multivalent use of body metaphor:

The destiny of Paul's converts, in other words, is to be assimilated to the pneumatic/glorified body of Christ—a divine being regularly worshipped in Paul's churches. To bear this divine image is to be isomorphic with a divine being. Such strong assimilation to a divine being (believers become “the same image” as the divine Christ, 2 Cor 3:18) can fairly be recognized as a form of deification.¹⁴

Assimilation and imitation are the primary exhortations Paul uses to instruct his people on where their desires should lie: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Paul clearly commits himself to the position that the historical Messiah Jesus is also the Mystical Christ and that the years separating the birth and the death of the Savior from Paul's own time are traversed, and thus united, by grace of the sacraments: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death” (Rom 6:4), and the elect have been “crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin” (Rom 6:6). As God, the Palestinian Jew Jesus Christ is not constrained to any one place or time, but is now mystically and sacramentally available in a new body of which he alone is Head.

Such union and charity were synonymous for St. Paul. Sin shatters and death divides; love unites and enables true life. This is where the apostle's theology of the Mystical Body and his understanding of divinization coalesce: Love not only wants to be in union with the beloved, but actually wants to become like the beloved, and vice versa. Love is an exchange of selves, and that is why Paul can so confidently boast that, in Christ, he, this separated aloof sinner, is no longer alive, but it is Christ who now lives in him (Gal 2:20). *Eros* and ecstasy unite otherwise disparate individuals into the body of Christ, where his divine headship allows each within the body to become one with him and with others: “For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another” (Rom

¹³ Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth: The Politics of A Metaphor* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 93ff.

¹⁴ M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 163.

12:4–5). Or, as Augustine would preach so beautifully a few centuries later (Paschaltide, 407), in the end, there will be only one Christ loving himself (*et erit unus Christus amans se ipsum*).¹⁵ This view on transformative power of love forces everyone to ask, “what ought I love?” So that others might answer this question rightly, Paul sets out to teach all that we must clothe ourselves with Christ (Gal 3:27) if we would ever know the effect the great gift of God was always meant to have. While this putting on of Christ will receive different images throughout his epistles—a new building (Eph 2:20) or a new, developing body (Eph 4:13–16; Col 2:19) —the point Paul wants to make is that creatures are able to enjoy communion only in Christ and that, in his drawing near to each individual, Christ draws those individuals into each other. This is no extrinsic covering; the resurrected Christ envelops every person and every nation in a binding so tight that it renders dissimilar sinners into his own living Body (1 Cor 12:12–13). Each is now committed to the needs of every other as the pilgrim people of God begin to see themselves in their neighbor, to see the Christ in the least of their brothers and sisters.

This doctrine of the Mystical Body is wholly Pauline in nature, so it should not surprise us to see it throughout Romans and Galatians, the two epistles Barclay treats at length. These two missives are easily enlisted as showing the myriad ways Paul tries to explain the Christian life in terms of incorporation and imitation. Since these are the two works Barclay examines specifically, we should now take up his treatment of the concept of grace as he sees it in these two Pauline epistles.

Barclay on the Deifying Body in Galatians and Romans

What strikes Barclay about Galatians is its utter either–or schematic. Here there is no room for lukewarmness or indecision, as its “starkly antithetical rhetoric” demolishes any third option between self and God, between slavery and freedom, between a moribund Judaism and a Christocentric ecclesia. Between these two unalloyed alternatives, there is no natural progression and no healthy liminality. One is not allowed to stand and wait. When it comes to Paul’s preaching of Christ, it is all or nothing. So, whereas Paul’s two major concerns regarding his flock at Galatia—that the Abrahamic promise was originally meant for all the nations of the world and that the advent of Christ has inaugurated a radically new opportunity for these nations to realize the fullness of God’s promise—can be realized only by turning from the old ways to the good news, this can be done

¹⁵ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Commentary on the First Letter of John* 10.3 (*Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina* [Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 1953–], 36:216).

only as a people: “It is no accident that the superordinate authority of the Christ-event becomes clear in the context of communal activity. Peter’s alignment to this ‘truth’ is tested in commensality, the conditions of possibility for community and reciprocity in Christ” (368). A new community is now to be fostered: not the old political bodies of earthly rule, but a divine heavenly body that disregards any differences not essential to Christ’s presence (Gal 3:28). The truth of the Good News (Gal 2:14) is now the only valid demarcation.

It is at this point that Barclay highlights the logic of Paul’s use of “we” in Galatians 2:15–21, thus stressing the organic unity meant for both “Jew” and “Gentile.” What is at stake here is not mere table fellowship, but the worth one has in the eyes of the wider community. Such dignity is now reducible only to the basis of faith in Christ: “. . . not because this faith in itself establishes a kind of ‘worth,’ but because it is directed to the event in which was created, without regard to worth, a new source of life in relation to God (2:19)” (379). This, what Barclay labels a “genitive of quality,” points to a personal reconstitution by and in Christ that renders one now not just a new person in and of himself, but a desired and needed member of a new kind of communal body:

Paul has broken with the authority of the Torah not because of a willful decision on his part, but under the impact of the Christ-event, which has wholly reconstituted his existence. The crucifixion of Christ—not just a death, but a cursed and scandalous execution (3:13; 5:11)—marks a radical disjunction. The reference to the “Christ who lives in me” gestures to the resurrection (1:1), which founds a radically new existence . . . that collapses the distance between past and present. “Living to God” is not just a reorientation of the self, but a mode of existence founded on, and shaped by, the life of another, the life of “Christ in me.” The Christ-event therefore founds not only a change of vision and value, but a change of “self.” Out of that newness, every value is newly evaluated and every norm reassessed. (386)

Barclay’s insight here is key: in Christ, a new sense of self emerges and what is wholly radical is that my “self” was actually constituted to be an other-centered, covenantal ego. When Christ takes up life in the soul of a believer, that believer does not become two, but it is now, Paul knew, a Christ who lives in *me*. Because one has been made for the divine life (Gen 1:26–27), when that divine life finally takes root in one’s self, that self finally flourishes and is enabled to realize its only true vocation.

If Paul's great contribution is a call to communion in the body of Christ, this is a new sense of cohesion that actually begins with Christ living his life, extending his life, in each individual who comes to him in order to find the fullness of their life in the first place. Such a theological anthropology is not of interest to Barclay, but the historical and biblical principles he presents help those interested in the Mystical Body and the deifying transformation available there. The gift of Christ's own life demands a response, an eternally binding response. The priority of the gift is wholly the descent into humanity well preparing the ascent into divinity, but the efficacy is an all-or-nothing event. The human person is the only animal who has been given the vocation to become God (talk about "superabundance").¹⁶ Paul's interlocutors are therefore instructed repeatedly: do not try to straddle the old and the new, do not attempt to live in both worlds, for the former world is passing away and you have been made not for an enervating enslavement to some code, but for the freedom of the children of God.

This is why righteousness and identity, questions of worth and societal allegiance, are no longer defined by Torah and striving toward its fulfillment. What matters with Christ's coming is the incongruity of God coming into humanity, reflected by new societal relations between rich and poor and between keepers of the Law and the Gentile peoples. We are all made to become one in this divine body. The old divisions that once separated and discriminated horizontally are eradicated vertically as the Jewish and the Roman worlds discover that they are both in the line of the Abrahamic family brought into existence not for the Law, but for Love:

Paul traces a deep homology between the incongruity of divine grace and the incongruity of divine power. That God operates in the fashion here described is Paul's justification for his conduct of the Gentile mission, requiring neither circumcision nor submission to the Law. But it also grounds Paul's hope for the future of the world (Rom 8:18–39) and for the salvation of Israel (11:11–32). By tracing God's *creatio ex nihilo* in the story of Abraham, the starting point of election, Paul can place Israel, believers, and the world on a common trajectory, since nothing is impossible for the mercy of God (11:28–36). (489)

¹⁶ See Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 43 (Eulogy of Basil the Great), no. 48 (PG, 36:560).

It is surely not coincidental that Paul's appeal to corporate unity is more cosmic and more imperial in Rome than anywhere else. The unity God intended for all people everywhere and at all times through his offer of self begins not even in the Christ, but in the Abrahamic covenant. Aged like Abraham and barren like Sarah, pagan Rome stands in need of the only antidote that saves a people from decrepitude and death.

Barclay rightly acknowledges how this (what he calls a) mismatch between divine mercy and human error is greater in those addressed in Rome than in Galatia. Romans 9–11 accordingly shows how the incongruity of the gift softens these differences by calling both Gentile and Jewish believers to unity in Christ and among one another. Such a call demands response, exacts obedience, and calls forth a change in one's way of life. Henceforth, once one has encountered the Christ, one cannot stay as one was. Transformation is thus at the heart of Paul's entry into Rome, and there he draws from his earlier reliance on the new divine body of believers to tell those close to imperial power that they must surrender to divine rebirth:

Developing the body-motif from its earlier use in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, Paul imagines a community so interdependent that all are figured, individually as organs of one another (12:5): everyone is essential to everyone else. . . . By fostering this new communal life, oriented to God through Christ in service and worship (12:11; 15:6–13), bodily practice is reoriented and newly regulated in its post-baptismal form. "Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" (13:14) enlists every organ of the moribund body for a new allegiance, whose social shape reflects the capacity of the Christ-gift to question every norm. (510–11)

The message to the Romans outweighs that to the Galatians exactly in this incongruity of the gift: the undeserved gift is received by both rich and poor, by the powerful as well as the weak. All stand as debtors before God, with the consequence that all now stand before God in a new identity, as new creatures.

In Christ, incorporation is transformation. Only the gift who is the incarnate Son can perfect one's intended identity as a member of God's body, as only here can one grow in individual perfection as he or she grows in mutual intimacy with the rest (Rom 12:5: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ; and every one members of one another"). The Mystical Christ is humble enough to gather all and any, based not on their natural

merit, but on his own holy desire that all respond rightly to what has been offered them. From start to finish, all is gift, but what I have taken away from Barclay is that God lavishes gifts *in order that* societal relationships continue and peoples are formed anew, formed in him and—we dare say—as him.

Conclusion

As there was no one monolithic view of the nature and workings of grace in Paul's time, Paul himself emerges as one more view of how divine favor works. If anything, we close Barclay's monograph realizing just how much grace was very truly a multidimensional reality in antiquity. Yet, in the Jesus Christ of St. Paul's letters, the superabundance, priority, and incongruity of such a gift are utterly unmatched: there is nothing a sinful creature could do, no mortal voice strong enough, to demand membership in the Body of Christ and participation in the divine nature. Yet that is precisely why God created men and women, and that is exactly why the Son of God entered the human condition. No longer should status and subjugation form societies and bind peoples; no longer should individual worth be wholly reducible to works and wealth.

It is clear throughout Paul that, just as a corporeal body is one with various and diverse parts, the Mystical Body of Christ is also to be a unity in diversity. Accordingly, true Christians are those who forfeit a monadic, solipsistic life and allow Christ to live his own life in them, the blood of Christ now able to tear down all walls of enmity and division, thereby creating one new person in those who are organically bound together into a new type of body. Barclay's magisterial study helps us understand how a gift, classically conceived, had a particular expectation built into its giving. As is so refreshingly laid out at the beginning, the "pure gift" idea is a construct of the modern, and particularly Western, mind. Post-Enlightenment constructs of gift and favor became the lens through which most read Paul's unmatched emphasis on grace. But modern systems of eleemosynary activities are usually set up institutionally blind, reducing benefactor and recipient to anonymous accounts, allowing for no sense of second-person relationship or demands on those who stood in favor.

Of course, this is not to say that human response and obedience to the gracious gift of God are preconditions that must be made before divine favor comes. But Christ comes to every human soul *so that* each might know the true meaning of Israel: a people called to come to the living God, now incarnate, the one body where the Hebrew children and the Gentile races converge, as both originate in, are sustained by, and are oriented

toward the same divine favor. This is how the Christ event is no mere afterthought, nothing artificially external to the history of Israel: Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift the Father gives those made toward his image and likeness. Adam, as Paul knew, is the first form of the one to come (Rom 5:14). In this one who has come into the world, humanity and divinity commune and become one in the person and presence of Christ.

Now all the children of Adam and Eve can finally understand this journey of life, finally realize the purpose of their very existences. As far as this great gift, there was no other reason, but reason there was. This is the ultimate gift, that God becomes human so humans can become God. Christian baptism admits each to this life, and Paul makes it clear that the graces offered in that font would cost each one his or her own natural life. That is why all those instances of *in* and *ut* fill the best of theology, for the ancient and wise Doctors of the great Christian Tradition understood that, while Paul may have preached a grace freely given, such freedom would come with a cost.

N&V