

**The Ministry of Full Reconciliation:  
An Invitation to a More Edenic Life  
By  
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**Abstract**

Intrinsic to Western culture is the preconscious embrace of a Platonic dualism that bifurcates human life into two dimensions: the physical and the spiritual. Although pervasive in Western culture, this Greek dualism contrasts with the Hebraic anthropology of the Bible, which espouses a Spirit-animated and holistic integration of the physical and spiritual. This article presupposes that a fully integrated union of the physical and spiritual is the biblical anthropology of human life. Furthermore, only this integrated living provides a coherent Christian faith when viewed through the lens of Western culture. The following content will establish a biblical anthropology of a Spirit-animated, integrated human life on a biblical and theological foundation, with the hope that a contemporary movement toward integration and Gospel coherence will result through individual Christians and the collective Christian Church proclaiming the ministry of full reconciliation in Christ to the world.

**Keywords**

Reconciliation, Integration, Holistic Spirituality

**1. Introduction**

The divine spiritual and human physical nature of Jesus Christ proved a significant stumbling block for the early church.<sup>1</sup> Councils, such as Constantinople, Chalcedon, and particularly Nicaea, grappled with this theological problem.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in the contemporary age, Jesus Christ's

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1986), p. 723.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from Bible to the Present* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1982), pp. 28–38.

hypostatic spiritual and physical nature continues to confound us theologically and intellectually. However, more relevant is the confound of its everyday walking-around-life application, particularly in the West. As a result, Christians continue struggling to live integrated lives of applied hypostasis despite the theological and intellectual belief of many evangelicals who believe that their physical and spiritual natures were perfectly harmonious and compatible with the way original pre-fall humans were created.

A. W. Tozer summarizes the contemporary Christian's experiential dualistic dilemma accurately when he states:

One of the greatest hindrances to internal peace that Christians encounter is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas: the sacred and the secular. As these areas are conceived to exist apart from each other and to be morally and spiritually incompatible, and as we are compelled by the necessities of living to be always crossing back and forth from the one to the other, our inner lives tend to break up so that we live a divided instead of a unified life.<sup>3</sup>

How do post-fall Christians integrate the physical (secular) and spiritual (sacred) aspects to increasingly resemble the physical and spiritual harmony of pre-fall humans and the Savior living within them, whom they seek to imitate?

Furthermore, is there a realistic hope that Christians' physical and spiritual dimensions can be reconciled to resemble God's original design more thoroughly, as seen in the first Adam and later exemplified in Jesus Christ, the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45-58)?

This article presupposes an identifiable hope for reconciling the enduring physical and spiritual disconnect in practical Christian living. As this content demonstrates, Christians can be holistically and harmoniously reconciled to God, and God to everything in human life as originally intended at creation and later through the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the overarching presupposition of this article is that the ministry of complete reconciliation is how God saves and restores the world he loves. This reconciliation is accomplished by

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<sup>3</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1993), p. 111.

the agency of the Holy Spirit, who serves as the animating force of human life. The following sections will outline the article's presuppositions by addressing the biblical and theological foundations separately, concluding with practical implications for Christians and the Church of Christ.

## 2. A Biblical Foundation for a Full Ministry of Reconciliation

The biblical intertextual focus of this section is Acts 2.1–4, 2 Corinthians 5.17–21, and Genesis 2.7. Gen. 2.7 and Acts 2.1–4 are ontological, providing insight into the nature of the individual Christian and the Church as God's people. The principal exegetical focus on Gen. 2.7 establishes a solid Hebraic anthropology, albeit traditional, which describes the nature of God's original people. This discussion naturally leads to examining Acts 2.1–4, which represents God's new people, animated by the Spirit of life, and juxtaposes the individual and collective as a matter of inward and outward formation. Furthermore, 2 Cor. 5.17–21 provides a collective teleology for God's new people called the Church. 2 Cor. 5.17–21 indicates that God's goal for both individuals and the Church is complete reconciliation between the physical and spiritual, consistent with the created nature and role of humanity suggested by the traditional vision of Hebraic anthropology of Gen. 2.7 as found in Wolff.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, a neo-traditional or dynamic vision of Hebraic anthropology has been proposed. This codeveloping self-agency vision of individual human personhood in tension with Ancient Near Eastern sociocultural influences is not a refutation of the traditional Hebraic anthropology regarding the creation account, but a maturation of the traditional Hebraic vision of Genesis 1—2 as the human creation account. One example of this neo-traditional or dynamic vision is Carol Newsome's work, *The Spirit Within Me: Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism*.<sup>5</sup> However, for this article, the following vision of human

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (trans. M. Kohl, London, UK: SMC Press, 1974), pp. 5–10.

<sup>5</sup> Carol A. Newsome, *The Spirit Within Me: Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2021.

creation, identity, and flourishing filters through more traditional Hebraic anthropology.

## 2.1 *Genesis 2: The Design of God's Original People*

In Genesis, the creation of human beings is described as follows: "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2.7).<sup>6</sup> According to this verse, there is no separation between the physical and the spiritual natures; humanity is an integrated whole. I believe this original harmonious anthropology establishes the basis for what it means to be human. This perfect integration of humanity's physical and spiritual elements is the baseline focus of this article; therefore, special attention will be given to Gen. 2.7.

Two crucial phrases are found in Gen. 2.7: 'dust of the ground' and 'breath of life'. Eugene Klug emphasizes this point by stating that dust and breath reflect the physical and spiritual dimensions of human life.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the interplay of terms reveals humanity's God-designed essence as an integrated whole. The original creation reveals the physical and spiritual elements necessary for being fully human.

The word 'formed' precedes the term 'dust' in the creation account, emphasizing God's intimate involvement in human creation. This word 'formed' evokes the idea of God as an artisan, expressing both intimate hands-on skill and the sovereign authority of a personal Creator. This hands-on approach to creating human beings contrasts with the more hands-off approach to designing the Earth as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Although God appears to form animals as He did humans in Gen. 2.19, God positions humanity in authority over animals by speaking directly to humans from the same dust as animals. He affirms this authority by allowing humans to respond directly to him and further legitimizes human authority over

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<sup>6</sup> All verses quoted are from the *NRSV* unless noted.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene F. Klug, "The Doctrine of Man: Christian Anthropology" in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (48), 141–152.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Kidner, *Tyndale old Testament Commentaries: Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), Kindle loc. 1010.

his creation by giving humans the responsibility for naming the animals, albeit created from the same dust.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the dust of the ground, referenced in the Genesis creation account, indicates an inseparable bond between all creatures and the physical universe. Consequently, humans appear to come full circle physically after experiencing death as a consequence of their sinfulness. As Gen. 3.17–19 declares, humankind, represented by the Hebrew word ‘Adam,’ comes from – and returns to – the *adama*, the Hebrew word for ground.<sup>10</sup> This lexical interplay provides insight into the human origin and status in God's created hierarchy. The first three chapters of Genesis certainly have a clear, strategic, and intentional connection between the earth and its creatures. However, there is an equally clear distinction as well. The narrative directly distinguishes between humans and animals, not only through God's speech and the duties He assigns to humans but even more specifically via the phrase ‘breath of life’ in Gen. 2.7.

An integral part of human uniqueness is the very personal way in which God instilled his life-giving breath into the human being. In keeping with the intimate nature of the word ‘formed,’ the Genesis account of human creation differs from that of other created things. God spoke other elements, such as the sun and moon, into existence impersonally, as in Gen. 1.14. In contrast, God breathed personally into the formed human in Gen. 2.7, emphasizing personal intimacy. Furthermore, the critical nuance of making human creation distinct from all other creation is that God speaks *out* into space, commanding the sun and moon into existence. Humans, however, only live when God's breath is *in* them. Thus, it seems evident that the literary direction of the breath offers additional Hebraic anthropological insight into humans' unique composition and status in the creation account.

Here, a holistic creation narrative unfolds in the context of Gen. 2.7. Humans were created in God's image according to Gen. 1.27. They were

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis in the Interpretation Series* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> John H. Walton, “Creation,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 160.

intimately formed by God and animated with his breath in Gen. 2.7. God personally addressed humans in Gen. 2.16 and entrusted them with co-caretaking of his creative work in Gen. 1.28. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the human uniqueness found in the Genesis creation narrative context. Although both humans and animals are formed from the same physical dust, *'āpār* (Gen. 2.7, 19) and both possess the breath of life, *nephesh* (Gen. 2.7; 7.22), making them living creatures, *nepeš hayyâ* (Gen. 2.7), the narrative distinguishes between humans and animals sharply through their direct personal relationship to God and their respective roles in creation.<sup>11</sup> This unique relationship humans have with God and creation is linked in Gen. 2.7 by the narrative's integrative linguistic use of 'dust' and 'breath.' This lexical interplay between the physical and spiritual lends insight into humanness's essential and unique harmony. Therefore, anything less than full integration between the physical and spiritual would be less than human.

Through this Hebraic lens, we gain insight into the human life God originally intended. It can be experienced only when the physical and spiritual are entirely unified. This integrated perspective differs from the Platonic Greek duality, influencing much of the West's modern human anthropology and Christian theology.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, exegeting this verse through a Hebraic anthropological lens rather than a Platonic Christian lens is critical. The typical Platonic exegesis embraced by modern Christianity views the body as merely a container for the soul, thereby creating a less-than-human being, in contrast to the Hebraic anthropology of Gen. 1-2. The result perpetuates a sacred and secular divide, rendering the Hebrew creation story incoherent to people of the West steeped in Platonic anthropology.

I recognize that much could be said regarding the Hellenization of classic Old Testament Hebrew anthropology, even as it relates to anthropology in Paul.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26* in the New American Commentary vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), Kindle loc. 4474-4475.

<sup>12</sup> John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* [Kindle ed.] (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 560.

<sup>13</sup> J. Knox Chamberlin, "Psychology," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 765–775.

First, however, it is essential to acknowledge the contemporary tensions between a Platonic Greek and a Hebrew interpretation of this verse. An excellent example of this tension occurs in Gen. 2.7 when we attempt to interpret the final words in the verse of *nepesḥayyâ*, or ‘living soul.’ Platonic duality would understand *nepesḥayyâ* as much like a sheath housing a sword or a pitcher holding water.<sup>14</sup> The two items, sheath and sword, or pitcher and water, are separate and independent things with a distinct essence relationship, rather than a single, integrated essence. For the Greeks, the living soul of Gen. 2.7 is simply a container with contents or a physical body housing a spiritual soul.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, a person steeped in Hebraic theology and anthropology would recognize the living soul of Gen. 2.7 as being more akin to the confluence of two distinct source rivers into one. This confluence of physical dust and spiritual breath results in a distinctly new river, which the passage terms a living creature, *nepesḥayyâ*, in Gen. 2.7. Consequently, the Hebrews understood humanness as a confluence of one whole. With this foundational understanding, neither can exist apart from the other. To carry the analogy further, any separation of the waters now would mean that the newly formed river no longer exists.

In the same way, an ancient Hebrew would not have imagined that a human could continue to exist if the physical-spiritual integration were to disintegrate.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the ancient Hebrew understanding of the soul after disintegration or physical death, this discussion cannot be explored here due to the limitations of space. The ancient Hebrews would be gravely concerned about the fragmentation of the physical and spiritual, creating something altogether different in place of the formerly integrated human.

Therefore, in this holistic Hebraic sense, the human whole would no longer exist if the physical and spiritual aspects were separated, resulting in a new, less-than-human entity.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, a Hebraic reading of Gen. 2.7

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Peter W. Martens, “Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity: The Descent of the Soul in Plato and Origen” in *Harvard Theological Review* (108 4 (2015)), 596.

<sup>16</sup> John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 583.

<sup>17</sup> John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 580.

indicates that any separation between the dust and breath that represents the physical and spiritual would constitute death. Thus, delving further into a Hebraic anthropological reading of Gen. 2.7, sinfulness ultimately results in the death of what it means to be human and the formation of something less than human.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, as stated above, the primary biblical presupposition underlying this article is that humanity was initially created as a perfect integration of the physical and spiritual, serving as the unique nexus through which God's will is to be done on earth. The word dust represents earth and the physical in the Genesis text; breath represents heaven and the spiritual. Unfortunately, shortly after their creation, humans dehumanized their original human nature by sinning, divorcing the physical from the life-giving Spirit. The only way for dehumanized humanity to be re-humanized is to experience a re-creation of the original life God intended through the God-human Jesus Christ. Realizing this new quality of existence anticipates that people first be reconciled to their Creator by believing in Jesus Christ as the mediator between the creature and Creator. Secondly, this new life is perpetuated through intentional participation in an ongoing reconciliation of one's divided life, which allows the original human uniqueness in nature and role to be increasingly redeemed through the atoning and reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

Believing in Jesus Christ is forming new people who can experience in part what the original Edenic people experienced in full. The original Edenic experience was a perfectly integrated physical and spiritual life with God; therefore, Jesus' atonement may be considered an opportunity for a second genesis. God used Christ's atonement to create a new people for Himself. Furthermore, Acts 2 recounts this second genesis, in which God formed new people out of old, dead human dust, animating them with His breath (Spirit) much like he did in the original creation.

## **2.2    *Acts 2: The Description of God's New People***

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<sup>18</sup> Elmer A. Martens, "Sin, Guilt," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 772.

In Acts 2, God provides a tangible example of this second genesis through a reconciliation experience between the physical and spiritual realms when his Spirit animates the New Testament people of God on the Day of Pentecost, much like he animated the human being with His breath in Genesis 2. Acts 2.1–4 recalls the creation account in Genesis 2. It reads as follows:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly, from heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability.

Eckhard Schnabel emphasizes that, in both the Old and New Testament, human life does not result from merely animating a physical body with physical air but by animating it by the Spirit's breath of God.<sup>19</sup>

This reconciliation between the physical and spiritual is illustrated clearly on the Day of Pentecost, indicating that the people of God became living creatures only after God breathed the breath of life into them. Thus, the theophanic imagery connecting wind and fire with the day of Pentecost would not be lost on Jewish readers. Moreover, as F.F. Bruce points out, Jewish readers of the Acts 2 account would be familiar with the biblical intertextual evidence for such representations of God.<sup>20</sup> Ajith Fernando also points to the connection between Genesis 2 and Acts 2 by linking the animating breath of life in the Old Testament with the animating Spirit of life in the New Testament.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he juxtaposes examples of reanimation from both Testaments.

One of the intertextual references Fernando cites is Ezekiel 36—37. Here, the prophet sees a valley of dry bones as God again animates raw human material

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<sup>19</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts in The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts in The International Commentary of the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Acts in The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), p. 87.

through His breath. In a literary sense, the action of Ezekiel 36 describes God's people, Israel, as effectively dead. They were dead physically because they were disconnected from their external life source, represented by the Promised Land, through exile. Additionally, they were dead spiritually because their rebellion and negligence separated them from their inner life source, the Spirit-breath of God.<sup>22</sup>

Ezekiel expounds further on Israel's condition in chapter 37. He notes that while God's people are physically alive, they are spiritually dead because the Breath of Life departed due to their rebellion or apathy. Ezekiel then foretells a time when God will resurrect His people with the *Breath of Life*. God will restore them to the Promised Land and ultimately to himself. Therefore, Ezekiel's vision of the valley emphasizes the need for God's people to be reconciled to their original physical and spiritual integration, in much the same way Israel as a people needed to be reconciled to their life-giving land.

The exegetical connections between the physical and spiritual creation of God's people in Gen. 2.7, Acts 2.1–4 and the additional intertextual linkage with Ezekiel 37 allow us to infer a narrative of how God creates His people and expects them to live. This thematic Spirit-animated thread, woven through the Bible, says much about Christian identity and practice today. It ties together several important events, namely the initial creation of God's perfectly integrated people in Genesis 2, their subsequent disintegration in Genesis 3, the forecast of reconciliation and reintegration in Ezekiel, their ultimate reconciliation through Christ's atonement, and the climactic vivification of God's new people by the Spirit in Acts 2. David deSilva underscores this observation by explaining that in Acts 1 and 2, Luke describes the creation and animation of God's new people, the Church.<sup>23</sup>

Kidner also links the creation account of Genesis 2 to the Acts 2 re-creation account of God's new people through the animation of humans by the

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<sup>22</sup> Ian M. Duguid, *Ezekiel in The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011[Kindle Edition]), p. 370.

<sup>23</sup> David deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Information* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 359.

life-giving Spirit of God.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the nature and mission of the Church are rooted in this thread of Pneumatic, physical, and spiritual reconciliation. Consequently, a fuller understanding of the ministry of reconciliation emerges as we transition from the descriptive narrative of God's people in Genesis 2 and Acts 2 to a prescriptive narrative of God's new people in 2 Corinthians 5.

### **2.3    2 Corinthians 5: The Prescription for God's New People**

In the original creation, humans, by Divine design, were physically and spiritually integrated. However, human sin in Genesis 3 holistically disintegrated humans. In response to the disintegration death occurring in Genesis 3, Christ provided a new creative experience through his atonement, resulting in the creation of the new people of God in Acts 2, the Church. Therefore, as in the creation narrative for original humans, God's central mission for the Church is for people to do his will on earth as it is in heaven. With this understanding, we see that God's central mission serves all creation in pursuit of a complete reconciliation of — and operational harmony between — the physical and spiritual. In 2 Cor. 5.17–21, Paul indicates that the message of this full-spectrum reconciliation is the church's central mission.<sup>25</sup>

Paul describes the initial reconciliation between the Creator and creation at conversion in 2 Cor. 5.18, when he states that individuals have been reconciled through Christ. Generally, the passage suggests that Paul understands reconciliation to occur when the believer is reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5.17–21). Indeed, before reconciling physical things like eating, work, and money to the Spirit of God, the human soul must be legally reconciled to God through Christ's atonement; therefore, Paul's primary reconciliation focus is the legal and spiritual one between God and the person.<sup>26</sup> From the examples cited in Genesis, Ezekiel, and Acts, we see that before God's people could be what God created them to be

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<sup>24</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Kindle Loc. 1013-1014.

<sup>25</sup> French Arrington, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> David Garland, “2 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture,” in *The New American Commentary* vol. 29 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), Kindle Loc. 5688-5689.

and accomplish the mission for which they were made, it was first necessary to resurrect or Spirit-vitalize the physical with the spiritual. No other dimension of the ministry of reconciliation can be addressed before this initial reconciliation occurs between God and the person. R.P. Martin posits that before the rest of estranged creation can be reconciled to the Creator, the Spirit must raise humanity to new life.<sup>27</sup>

However, God intends this reconciliation between himself and humans to be far more comprehensive than mere cosmic legal reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while reconciliation is initiated by human repentance in response to the atoning work of Jesus Christ, it extends to all of human life, or as Paul declared in 2 Cor. 5.19, God was in Christ reconciling the world (everything in creation) to himself.

2 Cor. 5.19 parallels Col. 1.19–20. The reconciliation of the world found in 2 Cor. 5.19, and everything declared in Col. 1.20 is God pointing to the comprehensive reconciliation of all things in the world. Yet, it is also relevant to the more miniature world of the individual. As such, it extends to all areas of one's life.<sup>29</sup> Using phrases such as 'new person' in 2 Cor. 5.17, Paul states that the goal of the post-Pentecost Church is to renew creation, harkening back to Gen. 1.28, often identified as the Cultural Mandate. Therefore, the Church or the new Pentecostal Adamic race is formed from earthly dust and animated by the Spirit, referred to as the heavenly breath, much like the original Adamic race. He speaks of Pneumatically transforming people of dust and, by extension, the world into what God originally had in mind for Eden. This mission is the ongoing comprehensive reconciliation ministry of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, in 2 Cor. 5.19–20, Paul informs the Corinthians that God has called him to this ministry of reconciliation. He is an ambassador of the new covenant as inaugurated through the work of Christ in an age of 'new creation.'

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<sup>27</sup> Ralph P. Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph P. Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology," p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> Robert P. Meye, "Spirituality," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 913.

<sup>30</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *Second Corinthians* in *The NIV Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), p. 244.

However, Paul also asserts that every Christian is an ambassador of this new creation's good news. According to Scott Hafemann, Paul signals, 'The long-awaited restoration of His people is now beginning to take place corporately in and through the Church.'<sup>31</sup>

As a call to a corporate mission, 2 Cor. 5.17–20 corresponds to the Great Commission found in Matt. 28.18–20 and the missional directive in Acts 1.8 that the Church is Christ's witness worldwide. These missional passages demonstrate that Paul acknowledged he was not alone in proclaiming God's reconciliation in Christ to the Corinthian church. Instead, proclaiming the good news of God's reconciling work in Christ is the work of the Church. Telling the 'Good News' that God in Christ has reconciled humanity, and by extension, the whole of life and creation, to God's self is the Church's message as Christ's ambassadors. Paul models this ambassadorship to the Corinthians, as well as to the larger Church. The term ambassador does not refer to a political envoy, merely conveying his superiors' ideas or offerings; instead, Paul proclaims reconciliation and advocates for it. Paul is such a passionate advocate of this reconciliation that he begins begging the Corinthians to be reconciled to God in 2 Cor. 5.20. Implicitly, Paul invites those reconciled to God through Christ to join him as equally passionate ambassadors of this ministry of reconciliation. Moreover, as a prescription for today's Christians, God is still commissioning equally impassioned ambassadors to proclaim the same good news of the whole ministry of reconciliation.<sup>32</sup>

#### **2.4 *Summary of a Biblical Foundation for the Full Ministry of Reconciliation***

In summary, God tenderly and personally formed individuals from the dust of the earth and animated them with his life-giving breath to create a people for himself. By extension, the corporate people of God, once disintegrated by sin from God as their life source, represent the broader embodiment of God's

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<sup>31</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, p. 250.

<sup>32</sup> David Garland, "2 Corinthians," Kindle Loc. 5618-5619.

recreated people. This new creation is the good news that God in Christ is reconciling humanity and the world to himself. Indeed, the ministry of full reconciliation is ultimately about the physical and spiritual cosmos being restored to harmony with the Creator and its original nature.

Genesis 2 describes the nature and role of God's original people in creation. Acts 2 describes the nature and role of God's newly created people, the Church. 2 Corinthians 5 prescribes that the new people of God are to be ambassadors of the full reconciliation of humanity to God, so that the whole creation, following, can be reconciled to its Creator. We now focus on a theological foundation for the ministry of complete reconciliation.

### **3. A Theological Foundation for a Ministry of Full Reconciliation**

The theological foundation here builds upon biblical anthropology to affirm that God's purpose is to redeem the whole person, physically and spiritually. In this section, I will reflect on the human condition and God's teleological purpose originally, how it was, how it is now, and how it can be in the future. This reflection will lead to an expanded theology of the ministry of reconciliation.

#### **3.1 *God's Teleological Purpose: How it Was Originally***

Originally, the physical and spiritual realms were perfectly integrated and synergistic. The two were not mutually antagonistic, despite the arguments of Docetists, Gnostics, and Manichaeans.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, the spiritual and physical realms existed in complete and perfect harmony, with this holistic creation reaching its zenith in human design.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the ideal harmony between the physical and spiritual experiences in the original composition can be considered a manifestation of the perfect will of God on Earth as it is in heaven. Hence, God's teleological purpose is to redeem all aspects of life.

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p. 140.

<sup>34</sup> Herbert W. Wolff, *Anthology of the Old Testament*, p. 7.

As Millard Erickson posits, no segment of the original physical creation was devoid of spiritual significance, because God is responsible for both physical and spiritual creation.<sup>35</sup> Because of the spiritual and physical harmony in every aspect of God's original design, it is logical to infer that the first humans were also created with the same harmonious character. Sergei Bulgakov describes the pre-fall people of God as a 'divine-humanity.'<sup>36</sup> Chan agrees that original humanity was essentially the confluence of Heaven and Earth's best.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, creation embodied this synergistic integration and depended wholly upon the human-divine connection. Consequently, the biblical account of humanity's loss of connection to the Divine after the fall in Genesis 3 precipitated the instantaneous disintegration of the original creation as a holistic environment.

Because humanity is only fully alive as long as the Breath or Spirit of God indwells them, losing this integrated state would ripple throughout all creation. Therefore, disintegrated from God as their life source, humans died as God promised they would. They died because they violated the covenantal relationship of perfect integration implicit in their creation, and by association, the rest of creation died. Sin destroyed humanity's physical and spiritual integration, thus vitiating God's original creation schema. This unfortunate chain of events leads us to discuss what the human condition is like today.

### **3.2 *God's Teleological Purpose: How it is Now***

The current human condition is incompatible with God's original design. Indeed, according to the biblical creation account, any disintegration between the natural and the supernatural results in death from God's point of view. The biblical vision of creation provides no room for a natural-supernatural dichotomy.<sup>38</sup> For example, Henri de Lubac describes human nature as naturally

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<sup>35</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 371.

<sup>36</sup> Sergei Buglakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. B. Jakim, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002 [Kindle ed.]) Kindle Loc. 3935.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> James B. Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: falling in Love with the God Jesus Knew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009, [Kindle Edition]), p. 87.

oriented by the supernatural.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, he views the foundational human connection between the natural and supernatural as the essence of being human.

Therefore, God's original intention for humans can only be conceived of — and experienced — as physical-spiritual unity. Anything else connotes a dehumanized being at the very least, or, as it seems God sees it, death. Although humans understand death as a purely physical event, God views any departure from the original pristine Edenic integration between the physical and spiritual as death. Despite the presence of vital physical signs, from God's perspective, disintegrated humans are dead. When comparing integrated humanity pre-sin and disintegrated humanity post-sin, at the very least, logically, death implies something less than human. Therefore, the unreconciled human condition is indeed death, or, as N.T. Wright describes it as 'a disingenuous life'.<sup>40</sup> Wright further suggests that the entire goal of human life is to transform from a disingenuous — or counterfeit — human into a genuine or authentic human. These observations lead us to consider how the human condition can be fully reconciled with both the physical and spiritual realms.

### **3.3 *God's Teleological Purpose: How it Can Be in the Future***

How will God restore creation to its original condition, reconcile all things to himself, and save the world from death? The Christian's answer is Jesus Christ, God's reconciling agent.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Jesus Christ's spiritual and physical incarnation is God's plan to save the world. Thus, according to Colossians 1, all things are ultimately being reconciled and restored for God's possession and dominion through the God-human Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup>

How can we envision the future of creation and how it can be? We first need to recognize that Adam experienced a disintegration of the spiritual and

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<sup>39</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 130–137.

<sup>40</sup> N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2012), Kindle Loc. 495.

<sup>41</sup> N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2006), p. 217.

<sup>42</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1938), p. 330.

physical because of sin. Sin then affected all of creation. Nevertheless, in Christ, the second Adam (Rom. 5.12–21 & 1 Cor. 15.45–49), God has begun reintegrating the spiritual and physical elements of redeemed persons and, by extension, the whole of creation until all things are set to rights.

Hence, the Christology of this reasoning recognizes that in Jesus Christ, God has provided a second divine-human Adam to propagate God's newly reconciled and reanimated people. Understood this way, Jesus is unique compared to Adam. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. Yet, a parallel exists between Adam and Jesus in that both represent the perfect integration of the spiritual and physical. To save the whole human, Jesus must have assumed the whole of humanness.<sup>43</sup> This way, Jesus Christ functions as a second Adam, bringing forth a new, integrated people. The Apostle Paul recognized Him as the firstborn among many subsequent family members (Rom. 8.29). The second Adam's incarnation provided a new nexus between Heaven and Earth in God's plan to save the world. This new beginning reconciled the physical and spiritual in the Divine-human Jesus Christ. Consequently, the incarnation promise is that, through Jesus Christ and the full ministry of reconciliation, current disintegrated human life can be more like the original, Edenic, integrated human life.<sup>44</sup>

To anchor these thoughts in church tradition, Oden observes, church fathers and mothers understood Christ's reconciliation as more than forensic justification. He notes that Basil the Great, Athanasius, and Gregory of Nyssa understood that the reconciling work of Jesus was to include all of creation. Specifically, Oden points out that St. Basil the Great, in his *Homilies* 16.10, cites Colossians 1.20 as evidence that Christ will restore the corrupt creation and humanity equally. This restoration is primarily accomplished through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

Although early church fathers recognized that the atonement of Christ has provided for the reconciliation of all things, it is the Holy Spirit who actualizes

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<sup>43</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy." Retrieved from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3103a.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, pp. 393–415

<sup>45</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, p. 688.

reconciliation in the lives of believers. According to 1 Cor. 12.1–3, Paul declares that a person cannot confess that Jesus is Lord unless the Spirit is the empowering agent. Beyond confession, the Holy Spirit is sent to continue the reconciling work of Jesus in every area of life.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the Spirit of Jesus was the principal agent of original creation and the sustaining agent of human life and energy for the entire universe.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, modern evangelical theology and accompanying thrusts generally focus on justification but neglect the expansive ramifications of the Spirit's sanctifying work, which I understand as the ongoing holistic reconciliation of all human life.<sup>48</sup>

As indicated above, evangelical theologians, consciously or unconsciously steeped in Modernity, present an inadequate understanding of sanctification. For example, in his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem confines his treatment of sanctification to morality and little else.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Erickson's theology of sanctification emphasizes conformity to the likeness of Christ, primarily in moral behavior and character, while neglecting the reconciliation of one's broader life to Christ.<sup>50</sup> While morality is a significant concern, sanctification from a twentieth-century modern perspective focuses mainly on morality's more salient behavioral aspects, such as adultery, addiction, murder, stealing, and violence.

This understanding ignores less conspicuous moral issues such as environmental apathy, sexual manipulation within marriage, the need for physical exercise, racism, overeating, and poverty. Just as a modern theology of justification truncates the ministry of reconciliation by hyper-focusing on its forensic elements, so does a sanctification theology that focuses solely on easily identified moral issues. This truncated sanctification ignores the deeper causes of human immorality, namely the physical and spiritual disintegration, otherwise

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<sup>46</sup> Max B. Turner, "Holy Spirit," in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 349.

<sup>47</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012 [Kindle Edition]), p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Terrence P. Paige, "Holy Spirit," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 408–410.

<sup>49</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), pp. 746–758.

<sup>50</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 970–974.

known as the secular-sacred antithesis.<sup>51</sup>

I am advocating here a theology of sanctification, in which the work of the Holy Spirit is more consistent with Jinkins's understanding of holiness. Jinkins proposes that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is the primary process of making the Christian more like Christ. Jinkins avoids the common trap of emphasizing a moralistic understanding of sanctification and highlights the need for a more holistic approach to sanctification that involves the entire person.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Holy Spirit produces Christlikeness in Christians by crucifying a sinful alien nature and recreating the original synergy of the person's physical and spiritual being. Furthermore, a holistic theology of Christian sanctification must also extend beyond the individual Christian to the Christian Church in nature and mission.

#### **4. Redeeming the Original Mission as the People of God: Being Fruitful and Multiplying**

To understand God's purpose for the Church, one must understand God's original purpose in creation. As Chan observes, the chief purpose of the original design was to provide a context for God to have a relationship with people, not to fill a functional cosmic need.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the purpose of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis, reaffirmed in Pauline theology, was not merely to create people as beasts of burden.<sup>54</sup> On the contrary, as seen in chapters one and two of Genesis, God created a people in the sense of a community that perfectly and personally communed with their Creator, with each other, and with creation.

Therefore, before humanity's original sin corrupted the original synergy by cutting physical creation off from its spiritual life source in God, all humanity was the people of God. Humans existed in perfect harmony with God, nature, and one another. Only after the fall, nature and its human caretakers were relegated to live

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<sup>51</sup> Tozer, A. W.. *The Pursuit of God*, (Starbooks Classic Publishing, 2014 [Kindle Edition]), p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 203–206.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, pp. 161–165.

<sup>54</sup> John Painter, “Cosmology,” in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 979.

as part of a now-dead, unspiritual, or disintegrated creation. As the biblical narrative indicates in Romans 5.12, and specifically in Hosea 2.23 (NLT), the people of God became not the people of God when they were alienated by sin from the source of all life, namely the Spirit. However, God continued the creative process of forming a people for himself that would be animated with his Spirit's breath, as were the original humans, as seen in Acts 1-2.

It follows that God sovereignly anticipated the fallen human condition. Therefore, God needed to provide a mediator to reconcile dead humanity and creation to its original life condition by resuscitating humanity with the Spirit's breath. By God's redemptive providence, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, appeared to broker reconciliation between God and estranged humanity. According to the *euaggelion*, Jesus died as the second Adam to atone for the cosmic crime of the original Adam.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the way was paved for the reanimation of God's people and the restoration of creation.

Furthermore, Jesus entered into death as the second Adam and defeated it through the resurrection, thereby reconciling all things to Himself according to Rom. 5.17 and 2 Cor. 5.19. As the Nicene Creed states, after the resurrection, Jesus ascended and returned to God the Father.<sup>56</sup> He asked the Father to impart the animating breath of the Holy Spirit to empower those who believed in him to carry on the ministry of reconciliation as the fruitful and multiplying people of God, which is the Church (Jn. 14.15–17). This reconciliation accounts for the reformation of the current people of God as the Church. In other words, the Church is formed from the raw material of inanimate creation and animated by the Breath of Life, inaugurated as a Pentecostal life.

Therefore, the formation of a new people of God begins with individuals such as Adam, Abraham, or Paul, who are converted from death to life through the Spirit. Subsequently, the person of God now continues the original mission of being fruitful and multiplying. As God's new people, the Church reproduces itself

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<sup>55</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation," in *The Gifford Lectures* vol. 1 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 142–147.

<sup>56</sup> John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, p. 136.

through evangelism. This mission extends beyond any individual prayer of conversion so that all creation conforms to God's original purposes. As Bauckham posits, the missional relationship between the individual and the Church is essentially an ebb and flow, leading ultimately to a holistic, unified community.

In summary, the people of God comprise many distinct individuals who constitute a unified body. This body has been assigned the *missio Dei*, or the Divine mission, of reconciling all things to God in Christ. Furthermore, a body empowered by the Spirit's breath as energy to fulfill the original missional mandate (Gen. 1.28).

According to Jürgen Moltmann, the impetus for renewing theological ecclesiology is related to the mission.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Moltmann understands God's mission for the individual and the Church not as a human task but ontologically as God's ongoing grand scheme of redemption and reconciliation for all creation.<sup>58</sup> I agree with Moltmann that the *missio Dei* of the contemporary Church is a full, holistic reconciliation of creation and humanity to God. Proclamation of this fully reconciled life to the world is the essence of the Christian evangelistic mission.

This evangelistic mission is initially experienced through individual conversion. Consequently, the Church's priority must be personal evangelism, leading to legal reconciliation with God through Christ. In this way, those who were not previously considered God's people might now be regarded as such, as described in Hosea 1.10. However, as Moltmann is quick to point out, 'evangelism is the mission, but the mission is not merely evangelism.'<sup>59</sup>

The *missio Dei* of the Church must not stop with evangelistic conversion. Instead, the Church must press forward to recover the Edenic identity for individual Christians and the Church as a corporate body of God's people on earth. Thus, the Church needs to promote and teach the original synergy of creation beyond evangelistic outreach to discipleship in reach. Therefore,

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<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 10–11.

encouraging individual members of Christ's body to no longer conform to the ways of this disintegrated world. Instead, the Church's message should be to encourage its members to have their minds renewed by the Spirit so that they may even eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

The Pentecostal empowered full ministry of reconciliation must include a renewed, broad-spectrum, intentional, and strategic teaching for the people of God on the full extent of Christ's atoning work. This teaching of a complete atonement should include every aspect of a Christian's life, with no differentiation between the sacred and secular. When churches accommodate the disintegration of the sacred and secular by promoting a 'come-to-church' mindset rather than a 'be-the-Church' mentality, the church becomes part of the disintegration problem, not the reconciliation solution.<sup>60</sup> The witness of the Spirit-filled Church must be that conversion leads to transforming the present world rather than being confined to ensuring believers arrive in a future heaven. This practical witness of the Church makes the Gospel coherent to the post-modern world.

## **5. Conclusion: The Full Ministry of Reconciliation Mission Operationalized in the Church**

A practical ministry envisioned by Christian orthodox theological reflection, empowered by the Holy Spirit and established on a solid biblical footing, will naturally motivate a church that believes God planned to save the world through the ministry of full reconciliation to manifest that belief in the following three ways. First, it will promote a robust evangelistic emphasis centered on legal reconciliation between God and humanity, based on the justifying atonement of Jesus Christ. Second, it will actively teach that this reconciliation permeates every aspect of human life through holistic sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Third, it will identify and intervene strategically to address the most significant social impediments to human flourishing. Thus, the holistic mission of the Christian and Christ's Church embodies the full Gospel of

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<sup>60</sup>Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), p. 19.

reconciliation regarding humanity and the created order. Therefore, as Christians living a more Edenic life, we invite non-Christians to share in that same life while also fostering a more Edenic social existence within and outside the church. This fruitful and multiplying life fulfills Christ's prayer that the Father's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, the ministry of full reconciliation available in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit and perpetuated through the individual and the Church, is how God saves and restores the world.