THE TRINITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND THE *MISSIO DEI:*
A TRINITARIAN CONSTRUAL OF AGENCY, TREATING SOCIAL JUSTICE AS
PARADIGMATIC OF CHRISTIAN ACTION
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Introduction

Social Justice is a contentious topic for some, often becoming polemical. At times, its vocal advocates seem to reduce the Christian message entirely to "doing good," which is semi-pelagian at best. Yet, even a surface-level reading of the Bible, most explicitly the Old Testament prophets, precludes any quick dismissal of "social justice" as a soap box of radical "pelagians." Rather, social justice is the form God's righteousness takes in the life of those whom God has called.[1] What is lacking is a conceptuality that places the concern and injunction to "love good and establish justice" (Amos 5:15)[2] within a broader theological framework.

I propose a way forward by developing a theology of agency, wherein social justice is the paradigm for Christian action. John 15:5b serves as a springboard: "he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." Beginning with a trinitarian theology of the *missio Dei*, I develop a proposal for the manner in which human actions are joined with divine action. I then situate concerns of social justice as central within the proposed conception of the *missio Dei* by means of a Spirit-Christology and analysis of Jesus' action. Following a synthesis of these developments, I discuss "free will" in connection with the proposed theology of agency. My argument seeks to demonstrate that in each case social justice both illuminates and is illuminated by the theological issue being discussed.

Participation in the Triune God

Practices of the People of God and the Missio Dei

While concerns for social justice are usually attributed to the OT prophets, I agree with Dennis Bratcher that, though most explicit in the prophets, it is intimately connected with Israel's identity as a whole.[3] A clear example is the phrasing of many levitical commands. Leviticus 19:9-10 is exemplary:

> 9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

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[1] Dennis Bratcher, "Social Ethics in the Prophets," The Voice Christian Resource Institute: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians (November 11, 2011), under "Biblical Theology" http://www.cresourcei.org/socialethics.html (accessed January 19, 2013).

[2] All biblical quotations will be from the NRSV.

[3] Bratcher, "Social Ethics in the Prophets."

This command does not merely give the Israelites "one more thing to do," nor does it describe how the Israelites can "earn their salvation." Rather, it gives them a particular *practice* appropriate for those who image God. As Walter Kaiser interprets, "If the landowners are only stewards of the land and all that it produces, there is no reason to be selfish and stingy. Holiness begins with one's treatment of poor people; ... grasping, covetous, and stingy personalities are not holy people."[4]

The refrain that recurs following the command is not an arbitrary addendum. Rather, as becomes most clear in vv 34b and 36b, the refrain situates the command within Israel's larger narrative ("you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" [v 34b] and "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" [v 36b]). The Israelites should do these things because they know who God is, and God is the one who delivers slaves and provides for the orphan and widow. By keeping these practices, the Israelites continually situate themselves within that narrative, reminding them of God's care for the good creation. Consequently, "social justice" is not merely a piecemeal appropriation of isolated "commands" to do "good deeds"; it is having one's life conformed to specific *practices*, which are located within a specific *narrative* of God's action in the world, God's calling of a holy people, and in turn interprets reality in the light of God's grace. For this reason, my proposed theology of social justice needs to be located within a theology of agency, and will be concerned with the connection between social justice and holiness.

Trinitarian Action Ad Intra *and* Ad Extra

The thesis that human action is joined to divine action by participation in the triune God will be developed in three steps: I argue, first, that salvation is adoption by the power of the Spirit into the life of the divine Son; second, sanctification is the subsequent union of the human will to the divine will culminating in the human act being joined with God's outgoing activity; and, third, this union of agency is the manner in which human activity is connected with the *missio Dei*; in this sense, then, the Trinity is the model for human action.

Human salvation consists of the person's adoption into the life of the Son.[5] The adoption I am arguing for is participation in the triune life, but "participation" in this sense is not of a platonic type;[6] rather, it is best understood as *a sharing in the filial relations between God the*

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[4] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Book of Leviticus*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1133.

[5] The reason I make the claim at this point is merely to connect and distinguish salvation and sanctification in my argument, as concerns human agency.

[6] In a platonic rendering, the filial relation would be an ideal form which could then be instantiated (however imperfectly) in creatures. Rather than this ideal existing in a realm of abstract universals, *a la* Plato, a trinitarian rendering relocates the ideal form(s) within the life of God. This is what I find unhelpful in Samuel M. Powell, *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); without arguing *for* a platonic view of the Trinity, he assumes it, especially as instances of "identity and difference" in nature and society are for him

Father and God the Son, so that humans are able to come to God as their Father. So Wolfhart Pannenberg:

> We are to understand our acceptance into the filial relation of Jesus to the Father as also the fulfilling of God's purpose for humanity at creation (Col. 3:9-10). For with this adoption we are the new humanity that God had in mind at the first, in righteousness and true purity (Eph. 4:24).[7]

Sharing in the relation between the Father and the Son was the original goal of humanity, and now in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ this is again a reality.[8]

Next, sanctification is connected to salvation by adoption but does not merely consist of sharing in the filial relation between Father and Son but also of sharing in the divine *sending* of the Son by the Father in the power of the Spirit. For Pannenberg, a dipolar ecstatic movement by the eschatological power of the Spirit characterizes the Son's life. This means that the Son's life consists of moving *outside himself* (ecstatic) for the sake of both the Father and creation. Thus, understanding sanctification as the re-characterization of one's life in and by the power and life of the triune God,[9] the sanctified person is also caught up in the dipolar ecstatic life of the Son - to and for the created world and to and for the Father by the Spirit. For Pannenberg, the Eucharist is paradigmatic: "it is only as the body of Christ, seen at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, that the church is a provisional sign of the eschatological fellowship of a renewed humanity in the kingdom of God."[10] Pannenberg makes a strong and explicit connection between the sacraments and church as "a provisional sign of the eschatological fellowship" and the reality of sanctification; unfortunately, he does not move far beyond the sacraments in his account of human sanctification and agency. I attempt to compensate by extending sanctification to all actions of adopted persons. What he says of the sacraments is still applicable; Eucharist is still *paradigmatic* for the sanctified community and believer, though not exhaustive.

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means of participation in the triune relations of identity and difference. I see this as not taking seriously the differences between creaturely relations and intratrinitarian relations (see n. 11 below). Powell follows Paul Tillich's platonic metaphysics; cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vols. 1-3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-1976). In fact, as I see it, part of the problem with Tillich's system is that it is insufficiently trinitarian (*ST* 1:249-251; he dedicates 3 pages to discussing the Trinity in 130 pages on the being of God), which makes Powell's project all the more difficult for making a non- to barely-trinitarian metaphysic the framework for a trinitarian theology of creation. Rather, I take the trinitarian relations as the *power and possibility* of sanctified action when humans are joined to the Son.

[7] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 236. On adoption and the intention of God for humanity at creation, see also idem, *Systematic Theology,* 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 316f.

[8] See Pannenberg, *ST* 2:316f.

[9] Pannenberg, *ST* 3:435-439.

[10] Pannenberg, *ST* 3:478.

Finally, this ecstatic movement is the characterization of human participation in the *missio Dei*. Humans join God in acting for and in creation, not by trying to mimic the intratrinitarian relations, but by sharing in the filial relations of Father and Son, and by their lives and actions being transformed by the Spirit who animates and empowers the Son's and Father's relationship and movement outward.[11] Thus, the life of the sanctified person takes a new *telos* - the divine *telos* - and is characterized by the *missio Dei,* as the outgoing love of the Father and the Son in the eschatological power of the Spirit.

Social Justice and the Missio Dei

How is "social justice" related to this understanding of the *missio Dei*? For many, social justice has become an integral part of the Church's role and vocation in the world. Further, studies of social justice delve into considerations of "first theology" - meaning, social justice is seen as a high priority for God and so points to specific construals of God's nature and character. Bratcher emphasizes the way the prophets paired "the concepts of righteousness and justice ... righteousness was a way to describe how God acted in the world ... justice, on the other hand, described how the people were to live in the world in relation to each other."[12] So, God's righteousness is expressed in the *missio Dei* and humans act *justly* insofar as they are participants in God's mission; thus, conversely, humans are participants in the *missio Dei* insofar as they act justly.[13]

Having already proposed a trinitarian construal of the *missio Dei*, I will now present my theology of action in three stages; first, by developing a theology of power centered on the Holy Spirit; second, by developing Barth's christology, in which Jesus is the *actus purus* of God, toward an understanding of the character and *telos* of God's action to the world;[14] and third, by integrating the pneumatology of power with the christological conception of divine initiative for a complete theology of action.

The Spirit and Power

Lyle Dabney has developed a pneumatology in which the Spirit is understood to be the "power" (*dunamis*) of Jesus' life. With emphasis on the resurrection-power of the Spirit, Dabney develops

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[11] I do not argue that human relations should be modeled after intratrinitarian relations because, among other reasons, I believe such proposals equivocate between human personhood/relationality and divine personhood/relationality, committing a category mistake. I.e. human persons are finite and bounded, whereas divine persons and infinite and unbounded, overlapping and interpenetrating through perichoresis (which has no analogue in human relations but is definitive of the trinitarian relations).

[12] Bratcher, "Social Ethics in the Prophets."

[13] A clarification is needed here; this statement is only true in a qualified sense. It is not true for actions based on *every* conception of "justice" that they bring one to participate in the *missio Dei*; it is only true for "justice" understood as covenant faithfulness with Yahweh. That "social justice" is being qualified in this way should become apparent throughout the essay.

[14] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation,* trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 40f.

the claim that the Spirit is the "possibility" of God, by which he means that the Spirit is the ability of God to act for God-self (intratrinitarianly) and for that which is "other" (creation).[15] In trinitarian terms, the Spirit is the power by which the Father begets the Son, the power of the Son's own life, and the power in which the Son is obedient to the Father. Further, the Spirit is the power by which the Son ministers in the incarnation (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22), the power by which the Son is raised (Matt. 27:50-53), and the power which the Son sends on the disciples (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-9). Without the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would not have been incarnate, could not have carried out the ministry for which the Father sent him, and would not have been raised from the dead.

Irenaeus presented a "pneumatology of power" in *Against Heresies* as well, which focused on the Spirit's *life-giving* power, and used water as a metaphor:

> And as dry earth does not bring forth unless it receive moisture, in like manner we also, being originally a dry tree, could never have brought forth fruit unto life without the voluntary rain from above. For our bodies have received unity among themselves by means of that laver which leads to incorruption; but our souls by means of the Spirit ... The Lord, receiving this as a gift from His Father, does Himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of Himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon the earth.[16]

The Spirit is like water that makes it possible for a tree to produce fruit, likewise giving people their very life, which would not be theirs without the Spirit. This is the same Spirit the Father gave to Christ, and Christ gives to us.

For Irenaeus, the Spirit, who is life-giver, unifier (between persons), and power, is also the power of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.[17] This gives form to the Spirit's agency in a few ways. The Spirit, through communion, is the unity of our flesh and spirit and does this work of unification within us *just as* the earthly bread and the heavenly elements are united in the Eucharist. This union is both the granting of incorruptibility to one's body *and* making present the hope of resurrection. The Spirit, as life-giving power, was given to Jesus at his baptism and is given to us in baptism and communion.

While Irenaeus' pneumatology and that of Dabney have differences, it is clear through Irenaeus' emphasis on *koinonia* and the unifying love manifest by the action of the Spirit that much of the Spirit's action is interpersonal. In this sense, Dabney and Irenaeus are in agreement; the Spirit was the power of Christ's ministry from the moment of his baptism, raised him to new life in the resurrection, and is given to humans to be the power of their sanctification.

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[15] D. Lyle Dabney, "Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross" in *Starting with the Spirit,* ed. Stephen Prickard and Gordon Preece (Task of Theology Today II; Hindmarsh, Australia: Australian Theological Forum, 2001), 28-58; "The Nature of the Spirit: Creation as a Premonition of God" in *Starting with the Spirit,* 83-110.

[16] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies and Fragments*, Vol. I of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. and ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885), Book III, ch. 17, par. 2. Henceforth, cited as AH III.17.2.

[17] Irenaeus, AH III.17.2; IV.18.5.

Karl Barth and the Act of God

For Barth, God's being is act.[18] God is not static, and "perfection" is wrongly construed if it presupposes anything other than dynamic perfection. Given the epistemological gap that Barth perceives between the being of God and the human mind, God is only knowable as the *action* through which God reveals God-self to humanity. This happens paradigmatically and irreplaceably in the person of Jesus. Thus, the acts of Christ *are* the acts of God, and the life of Christ reveals the very character and life of God. In the trinitarian theology being developed here, this follows from the divine relations *ad intra*. Within the Godhead, the Son is the "shape" of the Spirit's power and the "Word" the Father speaks.[19] Thus, the Son is the shape and content of the divine nature. This means the way to understanding the character of God is by understanding the life of Jesus.[20]

The Character of Christ: A Case Study for Understanding Jesus' Ministry

Much of Jesus' ministry was dedicated to what today would be called matters of "social" concern - i.e. feeding the hungry,[21] healing the sick and blind,[22] and casting out demons.[23] Although today many of these acts would be seen as individual healings that enhance one's "quality of life," for first-century Jews they each would have been explicitly social and of communal value - primarily as restoration of the person to community.[24] While more texts would need to be examined for comprehensiveness, I look at only one for the sake of space and depth of examination: Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). Several elements of the story are remarkable for understanding the significance of Jesus' action.[25]

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[18] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1-IV/4, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010). Henceforth: Barth, *CD* II/1, 260-263, also 50-52, 263, 150-151; and idem, *CD* II/2, 107-108, 175-181.

[19] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207-231.

[20] Hence for Barth, the gospel, in sum, is *the revelation of God to man by Christ*. I want to allow that the gospel is more than "revelation", while maintaining revelation as an important aspect of the gospel; I recognize, though, that for Barth, "revelation" was construed to include at least some of this "more."

[21] E.g. Luke 3:11; Matt. 14:15-21, 25:34-46.

[22] E.g. Matt. 8:1-15, 9:1-8, 12:9-14, 20:29-34; Mark 7:31-37, 8:22-26; Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 17:11-19; John 4:46-54, 5:2-47, 9:1-41.

[23] E.g. Matt. 8:28-34, 9:32-33, 10:42, 12:22-30, 15:21-28, 17:14-21; Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4, 9, 11.

[24] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 191-195.

[25] Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible, e*d. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), suggests this story as parallel to experiences of the homeless populations in urban settings. She explains, "volunteers at homeless shelters ... struggle to overcome their fear and aversion of the persons they are trying to help. But if volunteers do

First, the context; the man has been possessed by a multitude of demons, is (quite literally) *insanely* strong because of it, and is consequently left with no home and so lives among the tombs, having broken out of the chains that the community tried to restrain him with. Already, the scene is pregnant with social language and significance. He is a social outcast, dead to the community (living among the tombs), is the object of fear, and even inflicts harm upon himself.[26] And, as Pheme Perkins suggests, merely by crossing over the Sea to "Gentile territory," Jesus is breaking boundaries and extending the Kingdom of God beyond Jewish borders.[27]

Second, the dialogue between Jesus and the demoniac; the man petitions Jesus, "Son of the Most High God," not to torment him (v 7). In v 8 we are told that he was responding to Jesus having said, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Interestingly, throughout the conversation "the man" and Jesus are dialogue partners, though it is difficult to tell if the man is speaking on his own behalf or on behalf of the spirits who possess him. One might think it is simply the latter, until in v 12 the spirits are said to speak for themselves. That the spirits are able to speak for themselves suggests that the man's earlier locutions are more complicated. The man, it seems, speaks for himself, but his identity is intertwined with the spirits. So, he says "do not torment *me*" when Jesus tells the *spirits* to leave, because he takes an affront to the spirits as an affront to his own identity.

This is affirmed when in verse 10 it says, "He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country." The personal pronouns "he" and "them" are connected; the subject, "he", is petitioning on behalf of an inclusive "they" with whom he identifies himself; for, "he" identifies himself as "Legion," "his" name is "many." And given the setting, this sense of identification is understandable; *he* has been driven out of the community, *he* has been chained up, *he* has no home but the tombs on the edge of town, and *he* has physically suffered from the spirits. So, when he/they feel that Jesus is going to send him/them "out of the country," he is justified because that is what other people have done in the past.

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overcome that fear and aversion, they are often surprised to discover human beings beneath the rags, smell, and foul language," 585.

[26] William C. Placher, *Mark: Belief: A Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 78-80, comments on the political and military symbols also in use: "legion" being a military term for a large Roman unit, Gerasa being a location where a military massacre occurred for Mark's contemporaries, the wild boar was a Roman military symbol, the word used of the "herd" is normally used of a military unit and not of pigs, the word used when the demons are allowed to go the pigs is similar to our "dismissed," which has military connotations. See also Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark,* 584-585. Placher admits that the passage is not *only* about the massacre or the demoniac, but both. Given the military overtones, I think a possible synthesis of the two "stories" could go something like this: those who are concerned about surviving and not being overwhelmed and dispersed by military invasions should look first at how they are contributing to their own societal breakdown; so, bring back home those who have been banished. Taking care of the homeless and needy can be a nonviolent way of acting out unity and community-value against those who pose a threat to the community's well being.

[27] Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark,* 582.

Third, the conclusion; whereas the decision to follow Jesus is an acceptable response to Jesus' acts of healing throughout Mark's gospel, the now healed demoniac is not allowed to, even though he begs for it (vv 18-21). In Mark's gospel, this refusal makes sense. The demoniac was adamant that Jesus not "send them out of the country" (v 10), which, as I analyzed above, is probably due to his already having been cast out by his own community and family. Jesus knows that he (Jesus) is without a home (see Mark 6:1-6). So, for the demoniac to follow Jesus would be for him to remain homeless, and he needs a real home. For him to receive new life, be healed, and restored, is for his home to be made among the living rather than the tombs. So Jesus tells him to "go home to [his] friends" (v 19). By healing the man and sending him home, Jesus is reconstituting his identity around family and home rather than the demonic spirits.

Fourth, there is the peculiar command Jesus gives to the healed demoniac. While telling him to go home, Jesus adds, "and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you" (v 19). As William Placher asked rhetorically, "has Mark forgotten the principle of the messianic secret?"[28] Given that, earlier, Jesus "would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him" (1:34) and has sternly warned people not to say anything to anyone (1:43-44), his allowing - and actually *commanding* - the healed demoniac to tell his friends is striking. I propose that Jesus deviates from "the principle of the messianic secret" as a further act of kindness to the man. That the man can go home *with news to tell* reintroduces him into society without the focus being on him. Jesus offers himself to draw extra attention away from the man, so that the man can go home *with a story* rather than *being* the story. Although Jesus is still concerned with the "messianic secret" (he warns people not to tell again in a later scene [5:43]), it is a priority for him that the healed man be fully restored by returning home welcomed and unfeared, so he lets him tell.[29]

The life of Jesus is, as appropriated through Barth, the act by which God's character is revealed to man. So for Barth, and for my argument, humanity's "vocation is a specific action of the living God ... It is the action of Jesus Christ who in His time lived and died as the Lord humbled to be a servant and the servant exalted to be Lord."[30] The life of Christ is a calling and vocation for every person, available by the presence of the Spirit making the Son known to each and to all. Barth calls this vocation "service," because it is primarily a posture of servant-hood toward Christ, for Christ's sake, and by Christ's leading.[31]

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[28] Placher, *Mark*, 81.

[29] If this idea that Jesus absorbs the consequences (being the focus of attention so the man can divert attention from himself) seems implausible, I would claim that it is supported by an earlier passage in Mark where Jesus appears to do the same thing. When Jesus heals the man with leprosy (1:40-45), Jesus tells the man to go home (though not to tell anyone), while Jesus himself "stayed out in the country" (v 45). *Not* being able to go into town was a consequence of having leprosy *or* of touching a leper, so Jesus lets the leper go home (and present himself to the priest) while Jesus himself stays out in the country where a contaminated person "should" be; he takes the effects of contamination upon himself so the leper can go home.

[30] Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 497.

[31] Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 600-603.

Synthesis: A Pneumatologico-Christological Theology of Action

I have argued that human *salvation* is the union of the person with the divine Son by the power of the Spirit as a participant in the filial relations between the Father and Son; *sanctification* is complete transformation of the person by the conformity of their *will* and *action* to that of God. The Spirit is the power and possibility of all divine life and action, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Without the Spirit, Jesus' ministry would not have been God's presence; the gospels make it clear that Jesus' life, ministry, and resurrection were done by the power of the Holy Spirit active in his life. "Power" can take many forms, yet divine power - the Spirit - has only one form: the Son. The Son, made known in the career of Jesus Christ, is the shape the Spirit's power necessarily takes. Further, Jesus' life is revelatory of the character of the life of the triune God *ad intra*.

Thus, the life of the sanctified person is lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and in conformity to the life of Christ. This means that the public activity of those sanctified should be characterized by christoformity, which stands in stark contrast to many modern Western notions of agency and power. We often understand "power" in terms of influence, strength, resources, control, wealth, etc, which is then characterized by narratives that interpret power as *the ability to do for oneself what one desires* or, simply, *the ability to do for oneself*. Hence, power is a capacity for autonomous exercise of the will. But *divine* power - and consequently *sanctified* power - is characterized differently. Intratrinitarianly, power is interpersonal; it is the possibility of being available for another,[32] and this power takes the shape of Christ. Similarly, "agency", generally, is not mere autonomous self-actualization, but is outward and personal character formation (both one's own character and the character of those with and toward whom one acts).[33] *Christian* agency, especially *sanctified* action, is outward and personal character formation in conformity to Christ's likeness - action that is fitting for one bound to the Son.

As I analyzed through the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus' ministry and action has a specific purpose. Especially in acts of healing and beneficent acts for the needy, Jesus makes opportunities for personal restoration into the community. And it is on behalf of this aim that the divine power - the Spirit - is operative. Insofar as the Spirit's power takes the shape of the Son's life, and insofar as Jesus' actions define both his own character and the very character of God, those actions are not merely exemplary - they are injunctions, imperatives, and commands for the

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[32] I am using "possibility" here in Dabney's sense and not in the philosophical modal senses or as "potentiality" which is paired in contrast to "actuality." "Possibility" is the agency of the Spirit to make persons available to O/others; intratrinitarianly, the Father for the Son and vice versa.

[33] This is a similar thesis to the philosophical argument of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 146-164, 181-225; idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 349-388. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 37-46, and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 29-38, and *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 41-46, 56-62, have also made similar theological arguments concerning agency and its relation to personal character formation. Their work has greatly influenced my own theological formulation of Christian agency here.

Christian. It is by these acts that one participates in the Son's agency in the world; it is by these acts that one acts in conjunction with and by the power of the Spirit; and it is by these acts that one is a witness on behalf of the character and glory of the Father. This is what it looks like to act justly.

The argument as a whole, however, begs for more to be said; for, not only do they witness, but these acts are the very power, character, and agency of God in the world. This is so because they are done only by the power of the Spirit, in the form of the life of the Son, and for the glory of the Father; because only the sanctified agency of one who has been wholly transformed by the Holy One, whose life and action have been completely united with the life and action of the one who is "pure act," could accomplish them. It is important to emphasize that this is neither *pantheism* nor *panentheism*. The divine is not the sum of the world or human activity, nor is the divine life in any way contingent upon created life. The sanctified human life is still entirely contingent and creaturely, though it is *transformed*. It is this transformation by and through which divine action corresponds with creaturely agency. To understand this, it is important to move beyond the typically modern zero-sum calculus for causality and agency - as if the more God acts the less humans do, and vice versa. So Kathryn Tanner:

> relations with God are utterly non-competitive because God, from beyond this plane of created reality, brings about the *whole* plane of creaturely being and activity in its goodness. The creature's receiving from God does not then require its passivity in the world ... Instead, the creature receives from God its very activity as a good.[34]

God's action is not in competition with human action, for human sanctified action is empowered by the dipolar ecstatic movement of the Trinity and characterized by a life of service both to God and to all creation. That humans can participate in the *missio Dei* does not mean that people are now doing what God should be doing or used to do, but God's action is having its transformative effect on creation, allowing people (and creation generally) to share in the filial relations between Father and Son and thereby act by and with God.

Conclusions: Theology of Action and Social Justice

To direct these concepts more explicitly to matters of social justice, it bears repeating that human action is intended (in a theology of creation sense) for participation in divine action. Christ's action is the *actus purus* of God and is thus the action of God in human form, serving as the divine imperative and so becoming normative for Christian ethics. Social justice is a call for us to hear the cries of those whom *God hears*. This means that Christian social justice is part of Christian perfection; it is *the love of God shed abroad in our hearts*,[35] so that God's love transforms our passions, life, and action. Sanctified persons are no longer "rational, self-interested utility-maximizers" but are "agents" in a personal and transformed way - they are agents for whom a new *telos* orients one's actions and passions.

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[34] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 4.

[35] A favorite phrase of John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kindle Ebook, Downloaded July 2, 2009), Kindle Location 239; paragraph 13.

This *telos* is found in the very same one who is the *power* and *command* of meaningful action. The Father sends persons, the Son acts with and through them, and the Spirit is the power, possibility, and perfecter of the act itself. When human passions are conformed to God's holy love, they are given a particular shape, that of Christ. Consequently, acts of reconciliation and restoration of the outcasts, homeless, and orphaned to community and fellowship is the shape of Christian action. As well, these acts conform to God's action because they are aimed to make the same power, possibility, and relations available to the rest of creation. Christian agency *is* "social justice."

Social Justice, Free Will, and Divine Ends

For the conception of Christian action developed above to be complete, I need to give an account of the transformation of human passions. For Robert Jenson, we need each other for our sense of self and for the actualization of human freedom, but "freedom" is only secondarily *shared* with human persons while primarily predicable of God.[36] It is by sharing in the triune life of God that we are able to have freedom at all. This is so because, as Jenson argues, for humans to be "free" is for God's will and freedom to be shared with us that we might see the world beyond our own desires and limited interpretations. To have a will to do *x*, *x* must be an interpreted "good" and worthy of pursuit. The "free" will, for Jenson, is the capability and desire to do *x*. Because *x* can only be a desire of the will as an *interpreted* good, there is only a limited sense in which one is "free" to act, and little to no sense in which one is "free" to choose what one desires.[37]

For some *x* to be understood as a desirable good, especially when understood contrarily before, *x* must be *interpreted* - or *reinterpreted* - in such a light, as a good within a particular interpretive framework. This is part of what Wittgenstein and subsequent philosophers call "seeing as."[38] It is one thing to "see" (not to say one could actually "see" reality as raw uninterpreted data), but it is something more to recognize or make sense of what one sees.[39]

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[36] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. 2: *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 106.

[37] For Jenson, it makes *no* sense for one to "choose" what one desires (*ST* 2:107); I, rather, opt to say that there are limited ways in which one can alter and/or affect one's desires. Even if only in a rudimentary sense, one contributes to one's interpretation of goods, though it is primarily *received* from God and from the communities in which one is a participant. I would lean toward a theologically qualified libertarianism, while Jenson opts for a theologically qualified voluntarism; see *ST* 2:98f, 104-108. What follows is *my* understanding of human free will transformed by God, though I acknowledge Jenson for contributing to my conception.

[38] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations",* 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Harper and Row, 1960), 162-185; *Philosophical Investigation,* 4th ed., trans. and ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 181-187, 189-222, 254-261.

[39] One of Wittgenstein's favorite examples was the ability for people to recognize faces in even the most basic marks. In today's technological society, a perfect example is the way in which a colon followed by a parenthesis is used as a happy or sad face (depending on which parenthesis is used): :)

At this point, the conception of the Spirit presented above and throughout with images of "power" and "possibility" coincides with the traditional understanding of the Spirit as present *within* persons cultivating knowledge and understanding sufficient for faith, as well as understanding the Spirit as the one who inspired the writing of Scripture and is necessary for its correct interpretation. For, belief (knowledge) and action do not have a unidirectional relationship; action is not merely the "application" of belief. Rather, the two are mutually conditioning and reciprocal in their relationship. Action shapes and affects beliefs and vice versa. In other words, how one *acts* in/to/with the world shapes one's interpretive scheme of comprehending the world (and vice versa).[40]

Consequently, that the Spirit is the power by which sanctified persons are motivated and led, means that the Spirit's activity in and through persons is also the transformation of their beliefs, which works the other way round as well - by transforming our beliefs, the Spirit further guides and transforms our agency in the world.[41] In traditional Christian interpretations of the prophets, they spoke "by the Spirit,"[42] and, so Bratcher, "the prophets' primary task was to call the people as a community to accountability and responsibility in their relationship with God ... [they] were mediators of the covenant" and "the focus was on living a certain way, a way that reflected who they were as a people delivered from slavery by God."[43]

To know God is to act justly, and to act justly, properly conceived, is to know God and the presence of the Spirit. The shape of the Son's life is the shape life takes when empowered by the Spirit; this is the sanctified life and is characterized by the *telos* of God, which is only possible by the total transformation of one's actions *and* interpretive framework. To act by the power of the Spirit is to see the world rightly. And this is to act, live, and love as Christ in the world. To love as Christ loves is to be present to those who have been alienated, giving to those who have lost all, to speak for and with those whose voices have been silenced, clothe those who are naked, feed the hungry - in other words, to "love good and establish justice." So, Christians need to engage in acts of social justice that they might be able to see the world rightly. Finally,

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So, people see reality through interpretive schemes and learn to identify meaningful patterns in often entirely unrelated marks, hence the ease with which humans find "faces" in shapes and marks of all kinds. The ":)" is a good example, because recognizing these particular symbols as a face is generationally specific; someone who lived prior to the technological age, especially prior to internet and cell-phones and so would not have grown up "texting" and "instant messaging," would have to be told or trained to see a face, whereas those raised in the technological age find the face interpretation as self-evident.

[40] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 371-388.

[41] See William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 83-118.

[42] So the Nicene Creed: "We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who has spoken through the prophets." English Language Liturgical Commission, "The Nicene Creed," Creeds of Christendom (November 17, 1997), under "Nicene" http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm (accessed January 19, 2013).

[43] Bratcher, "Social Ethics in the Prophets."

this is to act *freely* - which is to say, it is to act *beyond* the constraints of self-interest by being impelled by the *missio Dei* to act justly for others to the glory of God.

Here one of the conclusions of the investigation of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac has significance. Jesus' actions all lead to a reconstitution of the demoniac's identity. This happens in two ways: 1) by Jesus sending the healed demoniac home so that he might be cared for and reconciled with his own community, for one's identity is severely distorted with the loss of a community and a history;[44] and 2) by Jesus' permission for the man to proclaim the story, Jesus is creating a context for the man to become identified with Jesus, their histories are now connected and the man is able to claim that identification publicly. Jesus' action is not merely for his own sake that he might become a "free agent," but is for the development and identity of the demoniac and takes the context of reintroducing the man to his community. As sanctified human action is conformed to that of Christ, these qualities become true of them as well: they are not for one's own sake alone, broken identities are healed, and histories and identities are shared.

Systematic and Pastoral Implications

One benefit of this argument, if successful, is that it makes a strong bridge between concerns systematic and pastoral. For systematic theology, one conclusion is that ethical reflections are bound up with how one conceives sanctification and the nature of God's revelation in Christ. For pastoral theology, the same conclusion works in reverse; what social programs the church takes on should never begin without considering if the activity is fitting for those who are participating in God's mission and whether it conforms to Christ's likeness. The idea, as pastors, to "just try it; if it doesn't work, start over" is too flippant. For what we do shapes our interpretation of God's creation; consequently, new practices should be modest and closely tethered to the witness of Scripture, and what we do *should* be led by the Spirit, which will by nature conform to Scripture. Second, Christian unity and social practices are of a piece, insofar as they are both enabled by the Spirit's agency. When churches are neglecting social responsibility and the social call of the gospel, it is likely their internal unity will suffer as well (and vice versa). If the church is not acting in conformity to Christ and in conjunction with the *missio Dei*, then it seems it is not acting in the unity and power of the Holy Spirit. For systematic theology, the same is again true in reverse; theology will be least ecumenical when it neglects the gospel's call (to all) for social justice.

Conclusion

Social justice, it has been argued, is the paradigm for Christian action. It is this, not because doing so is "just the right thing" (though that may still be true), but because these acts most nearly conform to the action and passion of the triune God revealed in Christ. Social justice is an act of freedom, indeed the paradigm of freedom, because we are only free to do things when we share in the divine freedom. God's freedom is given to us through the power and inspiration of

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[44] Hauerwas is very critical of the liberal ideal of autonomous and "free" individuals. One of the major problems in contemporary American culture is its eschewal of history, giving the individual priority over history and ultimately robbing people of the ability to make positive sense of their own lives within extending narratives. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 74-83,125-128.

the Holy Spirit, who moves us to live in conformity to Christ, and to act with and by the Father's mission for the sake of creation. Insofar as God's grace is given us, we can become true agents, acting not merely in bondage to self-interest but in the freedom to give to and be for others. This too happens only in conformity to the character of God *ad extra*, which is to hear those who cry for justice, see those who suffer, know those who are alien, and care for those who are outcast.

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