

Reformed Theological Seminary

BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:

AN APPRAISAL AND APPLICATION

By

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ABSTRACT

The thesis question of this project is, “Is differentiation of self a helpful concept for Christian ministry?” The project begins with a careful explanation of what differentiation of self means in the context of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), explaining that it primarily relates to distinguishing the emotional from the intellectual process and developing the ability to act deliberately in terms of reason and principle as well as feeling.

The project examines various passages of Scripture to seek a parallel between the teaching of Scripture and the understanding of differentiation of self in BFST. This investigation demonstrates that while the words are not present, the concept is extremely important in Scripture. The project then considers parallels to differentiation of self in church history, particularly noting the parallels with a variety of explanations of virtue ethics. The project then provides a summary of modern scholarship on this issue. It concludes that writers on these topics find the concept of differentiation of self to be helpful to ministry while also critiquing the secular concept of differentiation of self in BFST as needing the purpose of God’s kingdom and the grace of God for implementation.

Finally, a model for ministry is developed in an outline and explanation of a seminar. This seminar is designed to introduce ministers and ministry leaders to the concept of differentiation of self in ministry and show its utility for a variety of ministry

contexts when placed in the context of Christian theological concerns and spiritual development.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The context for my interest in Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) was the intensity of the emotional interaction in my church. Over the years, I had experienced the emotional intensity of unexplained departures, shifting alliances, chronic neediness, and worried fixers. However, the most intense situation for me was always the angry person who attacked and criticized the church and myself.

A couple of years ago, one such person called me to complain about a variety of problems in the church. I responded by asking him about his anger with the church. This brought a swift end to the conversation and left me reeling. I went over the conversation in my head again and again. I could not stop thinking about it, and I felt continual anxiety.

I did not want to let this situation have such a hold on me, so I turned to some friends to ask their advice on how to deal with the person making the complaints and my own emotional state. One of my friends had studied BFST through the writings of Edward Friedman.¹ He helped me calm down and asked me to consider why I was so emotionally fused to this person's anger.

¹ See Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

At this point, I began to read BFST writings for myself. It brought immediate relief. It helped me to see the emotional process at work and look at it more objectively. I realized that I had taken seriously the issues that this person had raised and that my conclusion was that I disagreed with most of their complaints. This person was angry about things based on his perception. I did not need to judge or fix that. I had a different perception, and so I had a different feeling about the matter. I did not need to share in their anxiety or feelings about the situation. What I was doing was seeking out differentiation of self, as BFST explains it (more below).

This same person came to our Session explaining their position. This person wanted us to act on his concerns. We discussed the matter for quite a while and over a couple of days after the meeting. The conclusion of the elders was similar to mine, but we still wondered how we should respond. I proposed that we did not need to do anything other than to thank that person for sharing their thoughts and letting them know in a kind way that while we appreciated their concern, we did not see things the same way. That's what our Session did. Within two weeks, the concerned person left the church. Equipped with new thoughts from BFST, I was not surprised when this occurred because distance and, in extreme form, cutoff is an expected response in an anxious situation. This framework for thinking about the situation enabled me to handle the intensity of the emotions involved much better than in the past and take it less personally.

One thing I quickly realized was that these ideas were not merely for the church. I could use them in my home to change the way I reacted to my wife, parents, and children. I began to see ways in which my own automatic patterns of reacting helped to create the relationships in my home. More aware of the patterns, I realized I could change them.

This was not easy, but it led to some real progress in a variety of family relationships and a re-connection with my extended family that has been very beneficial to me.

In addition, dealing with the emotional intensity of my family life taught me to deal with it better in the church. That enabled me to relate with less anxiety and more objectivity to what was going on in the church. It empowered me to allow other people to be themselves and me to be myself while staying connected with the congregation.

In all of this, what I was seeking was greater differentiation of self: more ability to act as a self following my own principles, thoughts, and goals, even in the face of great emotional intensity in home and church. These efforts produced positive results. It helped many of my key relationships. It made me less stressed. It helped me accomplish more of my goals. It was a lifeline!

I freely admit that I embraced BFST for pragmatic reasons. It helped me preserve my own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. The problem was that BFST was a theory of practice not found explicitly in the Bible, but I wanted to base my life and ministry on Christ and His Word. So, I had to think through how to integrate BFST with the Bible and my theological perspective. That is why I chose this topic for my Doctor of Ministry Project. I wanted to see what the Bible and church history might say about these topics. I also wanted to consider how modern theologians had integrated, critiqued, and supplemented BFST in their writings and present this to my peers. These were the exact parameters for the Doctor of Ministry Project.

The Specific Topic: Differentiation of Self in Ministry

In this project, we will focus primarily on one of BFST's eight concepts: differentiation of self. As one of BFST's leading exponents Michael Kerr noted, this is

the concept that is most often misunderstood, and it is probably the most important.² We will be considering and using the concept of differentiation of self throughout the bulk of this project, and so it is important at the outset to explain clearly what the concept of “differentiation of self” means in the context of BFST. To do this, we will rely primarily on the writings of Murray Bowen and his close associate Kerr.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a variety of thinkers in a variety of fields began to talk about “systems thinking.” Some thinkers tried to apply this system thinking to human behavior. However, Bowen did something different. Kerr explains: “Bowen’s research was the basis for concluding that the human family is a naturally occurring system: the interactions of family members add up to a whole that is greater than its parts.”³ Bowen’s theory was the result of the research he did at the Menninger Clinic (1946–1954), the National Institute of Mental Health (also known as NIMH; 1954–1959), and the Georgetown University Department of Psychiatry (1959–1990).⁴ This research provides the foundation of his theory.

Bowen thought of his theory as consisting of eight inter-locking concepts.⁵ Kerr presents it a bit differently in his most recent book. For our purposes, we can simply note that BFST teaches that there is a family emotional system or process. This process occurs through four emotional reactions: conflict, distance, overfunctioning/underfunctioning

² Michael E. Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 48.

³ Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets*, xv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xv–xvi. Kerr also notes that since “Bowen’s death in 1990, his close associates and others in many locations have continued developing the theory and its applications” (*Ibid.*, xvi).

⁵ For an explanation of BFST from this standpoint, see Roberta Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Pompano Beach, FL: Leading Systems Press, 2004).

reciprocity, and triangles.⁶ Bowen believed that all family emotional reactions could be understood in terms of these four types of interactions. However, not all families and not all family members react in this way. The human being can act in terms of thinking rather than emotions. There are two main variables that determine whether or not she will do this: the level of her chronic anxiety and her ability to act according to her own thoughts and principles in the face of emotional pressure, her level of differentiation of self.

The Meaning of Differentiation of Self in BFST

The key to differentiation of self is learning to distinguish between the thinking process and the emotional process. Kerr says: “The characteristic that best describes the difference between people at various points on the scale is the degree to which they are able to distinguish between the feeling process and the intellectual process.”⁷ This does not mean that a person only acts based on thought rather than emotion or feeling. The ability to distinguish gives a person “the ability to choose between having one’s functioning guided by feelings or by thoughts.”⁸ This involves two things. First, one must be able to see the emotional process at work (i.e., the automatic reactions noted above).⁹ Second, the development of definite views about reality based on thought. As Murray

⁶ Note that theorists sometimes describe these in different ways. For example, in Murray Bowen’s essay “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy” in *Family Theory in Clinical Practice*, he says that there is “emotional distance,” (distance) “marital conflict” (conflict), “sickness or dysfunction in one spouse,” (overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity), and “projection of the problems to children” (triangles). Murray Bowen, *Family Theory in Clinical Practice* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1978), 377.

⁷ Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: The Role of the Family as an Emotional Unit that Governs Individual Behavior and Development* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1988), 97. Note that most of this book is written by Michael Kerr, and only the epilogue is written by Bowen.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kerr writes: “Being more of a ‘self’ begins with using the lens of systems thinking to observe the basic emotionally driven patterns that exist in family relationship systems and one’s part in sustaining those patterns . . .” Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets*, xx.

Bowen explains: “In periods of calm, they have employed logical reasoning to develop beliefs, principles, and convictions that they use to overrule the emotional system in situations of anxiety and panic.”¹⁰ The goal is emotional objectivity, seeing both the emotional process and understanding the world as it really is. This is a lifelong process, as Kerr stated in his earlier work with Bowen: “There is no limit to emotional neutrality. It is broadened each time a human being can view the world more as it is than as he wishes, fears, or imagines it to be.”¹¹

At first glance, one might expect differentiation of self to lead to less connection with other people, but the actual result for those with higher levels of differentiation of self is greater connection with those around them. Why? Because they do not have to separate themselves to calm themselves. They can control their own anxiety and continue to function well in anxious situations. As Kerr puts it, “The higher the level of differentiation of people in a family or other social group, the more they can cooperate, look out for one another’s welfare, and stay in adequate contact *during stressful as well as calm periods*.”¹² Consequently, they can be present with their families in situations that in those with lower levels of differentiation of self would trigger conflict, distance, etc.

Because differentiation of self is easily misunderstood, let’s consider a few things that differentiation of self is not.

¹⁰ Bowen, *Family Theory in Clinical Practice*, 369.

¹¹ Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 111. Note that Kerr seems to have replaced “emotional neutrality” with “emotional objectivity” in his latest work. See Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets*, 89–94.

¹² Emphasis mine. *Ibid.*, 93.

First, differentiation of self is not acting differently from others. Acting differently can be just as reactive to others as acting the same. As Kerr notes about adolescent rebellion, it is “reactive distancing, not differentiation.”¹³ When there is a high level of differentiation of self, there is no need for rebellion.

Differentiation of self is not rigid rationality. It is not simply being cool in the midst of conflict. This coolness can be just as emotional as the person who is angrily lashing out. Remember that distancing is just as much an emotional reaction as conflict. Kerr puts it this way: “Many marriages polarize around one partner being ‘rational/even-keeled’ and the other being ‘emotional/volatile.’ Both spouses are equally emotional in these situations but cope with their emotionality in mirror-opposite ways.”¹⁴

Differentiation of self is not suppression of emotion. It is not running away from our feelings. Instead, “it is about decreasing emotional reactivity by information processing, which automatically reduces the perception of threat.”¹⁵ It is understanding the emotional process and being able to choose on the basis of that information, not ignoring or repressing feelings.

Differentiation of self is not emotional distance. Bowen says: “The person who runs away from his family of origin is as emotionally dependent as the one who never leaves home. They both need emotional closeness, but they are allergic to it.”¹⁶ Moving

¹³ Kerr, *Bowen Theory's Secrets*, 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxiii. Kerr says, “Bowen theory emphasizes that what people may consider rational is often under far more influence than they recognize.” *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹⁵ Kerr, *Bowen Theory's Secrets*, xxii.

¹⁶ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 382.

away physically or mentally from emotionally difficult situations is emotional distancing not differentiation.

Differentiation of self is not selfish. In fact, differentiation of self enables one to be more in touch with people. The person with high levels of differentiation is able to care for people and be in connection even in very anxious situations. The person with low levels will move to the automatic reactions of conflict, distance, etc.

To fully understand differentiation of self and BFST, it is important to remember that BFST is a therapy. It is designed to help people overcome symptoms. So, what does that therapy look like? “Increasing one’s ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling within self and others and learning to use that ability to direct one’s life and solve problems is the central guiding principle of family psychotherapy.”¹⁷ This occurs through education about the emotional process and encouraging a person to think through their own position. An important component of the therapy is to enable someone to take an I-position.¹⁸ This means to state what a person thinks on a particular issue without attacking others or demanding conformity to their ideas. This is a hallmark of differentiation of self.

It is not easy to develop a greater level of differentiation of self. Our emotional reactivity is deeply programmed into us.¹⁹ So, a person needs not only to learn the principles but also to practice being less reactive in situations of high anxiety. “A person with the ability and motivation can, through a gradual process of learning *that is*

¹⁷ Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 98.

¹⁸ See Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets*, 51–52.

¹⁹ See Kerr on “Emotional Programming” in *ibid.*, 95–107.

converted into action, become more of a self in his family and other relationship systems.”²⁰ One can seek to do this in any relationship. However, the best place to do this is one’s family of origin. The reason for this is that this is where the relationship pattern started. If one can change the pattern in this context, then it will likely change elsewhere but not vice versa.²¹

The bad news of BFST is that it is hard to make changes. The good news is that even small changes can make a big difference.²² In addition, small changes will have effects not only on the individual but on the whole system. Kerr says:

One person’s ability to firmly maintain “self” in an anxious system interrupts the infectious spread of anxiety through the system. If people understand how they are part of a system problem—not its cause—they can be more confident that just managing themselves well in tense times will be sufficient to halt escalating chronic anxiety in the system. It is unnecessary and counterproductive to try to change others.²³

In this way, BFST provides a challenging therapy but one that is hopeful with significant ramifications for the life of the family and society as well as the individual.

Overview of the Project

I have taken some time to explain differentiation of self so that we will have clarity as we consider how this idea fits into the Bible, church history, and the modern literature. I will refer to these concepts as I go through the research material. The thesis

²⁰ Emphasis mine. Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 107.

²¹ See Roberta Gilbert’s discussion of this in *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Being Human* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1992), 82–84.

²² Kerr writes: “Increasing basic level even a little bit can make a valuable difference in someone’s life course.” Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets*, 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, xxii. More succinctly: “One family leader’s ability to maintain a ‘self’ when the family is dealing with significant stressors can halt the infectious spread of chronic anxiety through the system.” *Ibid.*, 48.

question is, “Is differentiation of self a helpful concept for Christian ministry?” My answer is, “yes” with the qualification that it be integrated into a proper theological framework. Understood in a proper Christian theological context, the concept of differentiation of self is helpful for Christian ministry.

Researching this topic in the Bible and church history is not as simple as other topics. One cannot simply look up “differentiation of self” in a systematic theology or a concordance. It takes a little bit of imagination to see the connections, even though they are there. What we are looking for is how the Bible and church history address the issue of acting (or not acting) in accordance with Scripture and principle in the face of emotional pressure. That is what differentiation of self is about. Once that is understood, the connections become more apparent.

In the exegesis chapter (Chapter 2), we will consider 1 Timothy 4 as a passage that relates to differentiation of self in ministry. Then, we will see the issue more broadly in Romans 12:9–21 as Paul tells Christians not to react but to act in accordance with Christian principles, even in the most charged emotional situations. Mark 4:35–41 provides an example of an act of differentiation of self in the life of Jesus. In contrast, in Mark 6:15–29, we have an example of lack of differentiation of self in Herod who simply reacts according to emotional pressure rather than doing what is right. These passages will demonstrate that some sort of concept of differentiation of self is not only helpful but required by the Scripture, especially in leaders.

In the church history section (Chapter 3), we will consider how various writers have explained acting in accordance with principle and Scripture in the face of emotional pressure. First, we will see an application of differentiation of self directly to ministry in

John Chrysostom's *On the Priesthood*. Then, we will see how Thomas Aquinas commends courage as a Christian virtue to enable Christians to act in accordance with Scripture and reason in the face of the emotional pressures related to fear. After that, we will review how Martin Luther faced emotional pressure up to and at the Diet of Worms and how he articulated a view of conscience that enabled him to act in accordance with his principles in the face of these emotional pressures. Finally, we will look at how several Reformed spirituality writers of the seventeenth century reflected on distinguishing emotional reactivity from proper biblical virtue and principled action. We will see that while the words "differentiation of self" are not present, the concept certainly is.

In the review of literature, we will see how modern writers have dealt with the concept of differentiation of self in a way similar to how older writers dealt with these issues. These writers have a generally positive evaluation of differentiation of self in BFST. They explain the ways that it can be helpful to Christians in general and ministry leaders in particular. At the same time, they note that differentiation of self must have the right goals and that the Christian must see the work of differentiation of self as moving towards the purposes of the glory of God, the growth of the kingdom, and the good of our neighbor. This faith perspective means that differentiation of self has a resource in and must be developed in the context of a relationship with God and by the grace of God and the means of grace.

The new model of ministry in Chapter 5 will be present the outcome, a seminar explaining the meaning and application of differentiation of self to ministry leaders. We will find there an outline for presenting the material in the seminar with an explanation of

its component parts and instructions for its use. After proposing the model, I will conclude this project with a few reflections on where I personally have been in regard to these issues, how I am using them now, and how I intend to research them in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Exegesis of Passages Related to Differentiation of Self

When we consider what the Bible says about differentiation of self, we are looking for passages that deal with how the Bible addresses the problem of emotional pressure. How do we act in conformity with reason and Scriptural principle when there is so much emotional pressure to do otherwise? In 1 Timothy 4, the Apostle Paul explains to Timothy how he should act in the face of the tremendous emotional pressure of the ministry in general and of the situation in Ephesus in particular. In Romans 12, he calls on Christians to consider how they might react in a variety of emotionally charged situations and to train themselves to act in accordance with the truths of the Word of God and the pattern of the Gospel. In Mark 4, we have a positive example of differentiation of self in the way that Jesus responded to the storm and to the emotions of the Apostles. Finally, in Mark 6, we will consider a lack of differentiation of self in Herod Antipas who responded out of fear and emotion rather than in accordance with principle.

1 Timothy 4 – Paying Attention to Your Own Functioning in Challenging Situations

Introductory Materials

The beginning of this letter reads: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the

faith . . .” (1 Tim. 1:1-2a).¹ On the face of it, it would appear that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. In addition, the many personal statements, including negative portrayals of the Apostle Paul (i.e., as chief of sinners and a violent man in 1 Tim. 1:15 and 13 respectively); the lack of any good reason to doubt it; and the unlikelihood that the church would have accepted a pseudonymous letter confirm that Paul wrote this letter.² The recipient is Timothy who is in Ephesus, and Paul probably wrote it after his first or second trip to Ephesus, but it is more likely the second because of his prediction that teachers would arise there like savage wolves (cf. Acts 20:26–31).³ It seems like the warning Paul gave about false teachers is now coming to fulfillment. This is important in the whole letter and particularly in 1 Timothy 4.

The context for the passage is set up at the beginning of the letter. Paul says: I left you in Ephesus “so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (vv. 3b-4a). While there are references to these issues throughout the book (1:6–7, 18–20; 6:3–5; 20–21), chapter 4 is where Paul deals with these issues most extensively. The multiple references to this issue demonstrate its pressing nature for Paul. He begins and ends his letter with it,

¹ All Scripture quotations taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc., unless otherwise noted. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

² For a full treatment of each of these issues, see D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 360–366; Terry L. Wilder, “Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and the Pastoral Epistles” in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 28–51; and William B. Barclay, “Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles,” in Michael Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 350–354.

³ This point is derived from Carson, Morris, and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 372–373.

“Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge” (6:20).

In addition to the challenges of the false teachers and purveyors of myths, there is a theme of Timothy’s own development. Paul mentions this in 1:18b-19a. Remembering the prophecies made about him, Timothy should “fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience . . .” The three themes of Timothy’s own development, the false teachers and the myth-purveyors are the three themes of chapter 4.

The division of the chapter is important for its exposition. Most commentators and translators disconnect v. 6 from 1–5 and make 6–10 a distinct paragraph. The New King James is one of the few that puts v. 11 with 6–10. I propose that the division of the chapter should be as follows: 1–6, 7–11, and 12–16. In each case, Paul refers to a problem group and then proposes a proper response. The response in each case refers to Timothy’s own actions and behavior. These actions are either directed toward Timothy and his character or to Timothy’s public behavior. In other words, they refer to Timothy’s own behavior, but there is an internal or external referent. Textually, these three sections are tied together by the word ταῦτα, “these things.” As Mounce observes, the repetition of ταῦτα as well as the 12 imperatives tie chapter 4 together as a unit.⁴ So, the structure in my view should be conceived this way:

1. Verses 1–6
 - a. Problem Group 1: Teachers of false doctrine (1–5)
 - b. External Response: Put these things before the brothers (v. 6)

⁴ William D. Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 246.

- c. Internal Response: Nourish himself on the true teachings (v. 6)
2. Verses 7–11
- a. Problem Group 2: Purveyors of myths
 - b. External Response: Avoid the discussions (v. 7); command and teach godliness (v. 11).
 - c. Internal Response: Train himself to be godly (v. 7).
3. Verses 12–16
- a. Problem Group 3: Those looking down on young Timothy
 - b. External Response: Exercise his gift; be an example (vv. 12–14)
 - c. Internal Response: Develop his character (v. 15).

We can consider v. 16 to be either a further elucidation of vv. 12–15 or a summation of the whole.

Problem Group 1 – False Teachers (1–6)

The first problem group is false teachers. They are false teachers because they teach things that are false and not in accord with the truth. In this specific instance, they are “forbidding to marry and [teaching people] to abstain from foods” (my translation, v. 3). In referring to them, Paul calls them conscience-seared, hypocritical liars teaching doctrines of demons. This rhetoric may seem extreme in our ears, but as Barth Campbell points out, this was common in the rhetoric of the time. It was a way of producing negative pathos or feeling against one’s opponents.⁵ Ben Witherington has also warned against judging the rhetoric of the ancient world by our own standards, “What might well

⁵ Barth Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (April–June 1997): 198–204.

appear manipulative in one cultural setting might appear quite normal and appropriate in another.”⁶

The presence of these teachers helps us understand what Paul means by saying that this would occur in the last times. It is referring to the present time, the days in which the Messiah has arrived.⁷ In these last times, the Spirit has said that some will turn away from the faith. Here the Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit. Yarborough says that the Spirit is always the Holy Spirit, citing 1 Tim. 3:16, 2 Tim. 1:7, 14; 4:22, and Titus 3:5.⁸ Some ask, how has the Spirit revealed this? Was there a direct revelation? We may not know the exact reference Paul has in mind, but it is clear that the Apostles in general believed that false teaching was a characteristic of the last days and that they were experiencing it in their own time. Köstenberger demonstrates the connection between the false teachers and the last days from Matthew 24:11, 2 Thess. 2:3, Acts 20:29–30, and 2 Peter 2:1.⁹ We add to these 1 John 2:18–29.

Paul then moves on to describe the false teachers and the content of their teaching. They are those who turn away from the faith. Here as in 1:2 and Tit. 1:4 “the faith” refers to faith in an objective sense, the thing believed as oppose to that faith by

⁶ See Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Rhetoric* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 223.

⁷ See Robert W. Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 226; See also Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 289 and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2017), 140–141.

⁸ Yarborough cites Witherington to the effect that the “‘range of function’ of the Holy Spirit in the PE ‘in facts sounds very much like what we find in the earlier Paulines.’” Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, fn. 488.

⁹ Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 140.

which one believes.¹⁰ By holding and teaching something different, they apostatize from the faith like Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). They teach doctrines of demons or deceiving spirits. Some think this is hyperbole, but, as Towner notes, the literal meaning is worth considering in light of the fact that Paul considered himself in an intense conflict with Satan. Towner cites 1 Tim. 3:6-7, 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5, 10:20-21, 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14, 12:7 to demonstrate this point.¹¹ Paul also says that they were lying in hypocrisy, speaking in a two-faced way, saying one thing and holding another internally. This could mean that they are deceivers seeking gain as in 2 Peter 2:18–19 or simply that they are not consistent in what they teach as in Gal. 6:13. Finally, their consciences are cauterized with a hot iron. Köstenberger suggests that it is cauterizing for a crime or to signify ownership, i.e., by the devil.¹² But Barth Campbell argues:

The perfect passive participle for “seared” refers, as a metaphor, to the searing or cauterization of a hot iron to the point of moral insensitivity (as suggested in the *New Revised Standard Version*) and not to the branding of the hearers with Satan’s mark like the branding of fugitive slaves (as suggested in the *Revised English Bible*). The former meaning is consistent with what Paul had already said about Hymenaeus and Alexander, men who rejected a good conscience.¹³

The point here is that whatever allure these opponents may have, they are leading people in a wrong direction by their lives and false teaching.

So, what did they teach? In this passage, Paul gives us a clear statement of some of their teachings. They forbid to marry and teach people to abstain from certain foods. In

¹⁰ When we consider the content of the “faith,” it is worth considering the faithful sayings. On this, see the article by R. Alastair Campbell, “Identifying the Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16, no. 54 (1994): 73–86. See also George W. Knight, *The Faithful Sayings of the Pastoral Letters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979).

¹¹ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 260.

¹² Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 141.

¹³ Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” 194.

spite of the fact that we do not know the full system these false teachers taught, we have an outline in Paul's epistles. At the same time, the qualification of Towner is helpful:

Generally, Paul's letters bear witness to the fact that the issues of sexual relations and rules about foods were items of lively debate as his churches sought to understand the implications of salvation and the Spirit for Christian living in the last days (Rom. 14:13-21; 1 Cor. 7:12-16; 8:1-13; 10:25-31; Gal. 2:11-14; Col. 2:16; 1 Thess. 4:3-6). And in none of these cases do we know all the elements at work in the debates: Jewish tendencies and sensibilities, Spirit enthusiasm, a too-realized view of eschatology.¹⁴

Paul dealt with a variety of issues and false teachings. We should probably be cautious about assuming the presence of all the doctrines Towner mentions in any particular case. What we know is the specific issues that Paul mentions in each book.

After mentioning the false teaching, Paul goes on to give a specific refutation of the views of his opponents. Paul says that these teachers forbid what God has made to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth (4:4). Paul's reasoning is that these are things God created and established. He refers specifically to the creation account when he says that all things are good (Gen. 1:31). Since it is all good, nothing is to be rejected but rather received with thanksgiving. Marriage and foods are actually sanctified (*ἀγιαζέται*). How? Through the Word of God and prayer.

Yarborough suggests that the Word of God refers to our own appropriation of the Word of God by faith.¹⁵ However, it seems more likely that God's own sanctifying word is in view. God's own word has actually set these things apart for this use as in Gen. 1:29 and 9:3. This fits better with Paul's own reference to Genesis. Thus, we can perhaps take

¹⁴ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 294.

¹⁵ Yarborough explains how the Word of God sanctifies: it brings people into relationship with God, call for gratitude, teaches proper regard for marriage, and keeps them close to God and thus in gratitude. Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 233.

“Word of God” as being sanctification from God’s side and prayer as sanctification from our side, i.e., accepting the gift in faith.

Paul sums up what he has just said by using the word ταῦτα (v. 6). Most translations treat the following two participles very differently.¹⁶ The first is ὑποτιθέμενος “to place before” and is generally translated as an active indicate verb. The second, ἐντρέφόμενος is translated as a participle. But why not translate both the same way? “You, placing before . . . and being nourished . . . will be . . .” Or, in more idiomatic English, “If you place these things before . . . and . . . are nourished . . ., then you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ.” The advantage of this translation is that it removes the difficulty of explaining ἐντρέφόμενος. If a minister nourishes himself inwardly and says those things outwardly, he will be a good minister. This also has an obvious application. Keep these things in your mind and teach them, i.e., watch your teaching closely! (see v. 16).

In sum, there are false teachers who will preach things contrary to the faith. Timothy has a responsibility to explain the faith clearly in contrast to these teachers, setting boundaries where necessary. He will do this either by or in connection with meditating deeply on the truths of God’s word.

Problem Group 2: Purveyors of Myths (7–11)

The next challenge is the purveyor of myths. “Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales.” This goes back to the beginning of the letter. The very

¹⁶ You can see some of the difficulty in the variety of explanations of ἐντρέφόμενος. For example, I. Howard Marshall suggests two possibilities for 4:6: “provided that you are nourished” or if you do this it “shows that you yourself a good servant.” He suggests the second fits better, but he doesn’t give any reasoning. Note that he says that 2 Tim. 3:10-16 may flesh this out a little better. I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 549.

purpose of leaving Timothy in Ephesus was so that he could command them not “to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work—which is by faith.” This was his task. Paul essentially repeats the same command here: “Command and teach these things” (1 Tim. 4:11).

Who are the myth-purveyors? It is hard to know. We should observe the same caution as above concerning the false teachers.¹⁷ The terms βαβήλους and γραώδεις, used to describe myths, are “highly emotive.” Says Barth Campbell, “Both expressions evoke negative pathos in the audience toward the heretics.”¹⁸ The term γραώδεις can be translated “silly” or as “old wives’ tales.”¹⁹ According to Towner, “it was derogatory, typical of the male-dominant cultural stereotype of women, and applied to trivialize a competing view.”²⁰ Mounce argues, however, that we do not need to assume any particular chauvinistic views in Paul’s use of this term.²¹ It was commonly used in philosophical debate.²² Paul does not spend much time discussing these things, especially

¹⁷ Recall Towner’s caution concerning the difficulty of identifying the opponents’ views: Generally, Paul’s letters bear witness to the fact that the issues of sexual relations and rules about foods were items of lively debate as his churches sought to understand the implications of salvation and the Spirit for Christian living in the last days (Rom. 14:13-21; 1 Cor. 7:12-16; 8:1-13; 10:25-31; Gal. 2:11-14; Col. 2:16; 1 Thess. 4:3-6). And in none of these cases do we know all the elements at work in the debates: Jewish tendencies and sensibilities, Spirit enthusiasm, a too-realized view of eschatology.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 294.

¹⁸ Barth Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” 197.

¹⁹ For “silly,” see Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 251

²⁰ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 305.

²¹ Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 251.

²² Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 550.

compared to what he says in vv. 3–5. For Paul to discuss them at any length would be counterproductive. They are not worth talking about.

Paul moves very quickly to the internal and external response that Timothy should make to these myth-purveyors. The internal response is to train or exercise (γύμναζε) himself to be godly. The imperative verb here is the verb that the Greeks used for their physical training. Paul takes it and uses it in a spiritual sense just as other biblical writers do (Heb. 5:14, 12:11; 2 Pet. 2:14).²³ He uses it for spiritual training. We use the same term when we say “spiritual exercises.” According to Mounce, “*Eusebeia* ‘godliness’ in the PE is a technical term for a life totally consecrated to God, carrying an emphasis on the observable aspects of this type of life (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2, 3:16).”²⁴ He is to train his mind and heart for godliness.

Paul expands on this in v. 8. He contrasts training in godliness with physical training. Does this mean that physical exercise has no value? The Greek term πρὸς ὀλίγον means for a little while. Yarborough cites James 4:14 and explains: “The phrase means to a certain and limited extent, with the limitation perhaps viewed most of all as temporal: for a while.”²⁵ Consequently, we do not need to read this passage as a negative view of exercise. It is only that godliness has a much greater value than exercise. In fact, as Yarborough notes, we must remember that Paul himself exercised a great deal. In our own context, obesity is generally a much larger problem than that of too much emphasis

²³ See *ibid.*, 551.

²⁴ Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 251.

²⁵ Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 239. Compare to Marshall who notes that the time reference is qualified by πρὸς πάντα. He says “of no profit” goes too far and then cites for comparison Epistle of Crates 3: “Take care of your soul, but take care of your body only to the degree that necessity requires.” Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 552.

on exercise (though the latter is not absent).²⁶ In contrast, there is great value in godliness.

In verse 9, Paul says “this is a faithful saying.” There are five “faithful sayings” in the Pastoral Epistles.²⁷ The question in this case is, what is the faithful saying? Does it refer to what comes before or what comes after? Most commentators go with what comes before. The most plausible reason is that v. 8 sounds more like a saying than what comes after.²⁸ In contrast, the statement in v. 10 includes a personal statement from the Apostle Paul. However, R. Alastair Campbell makes a good case that it is what comes after. He argues that the general pattern of the faithful sayings is introductory formula, parenthetical reinforcement, the saying, and further qualification. It is generally agreed that the faithful saying in 1 Tim. 1:15 refers to what comes after. A personal statement is used in 1 Tim. 1:15, and so a personal statement should not disqualify v. 10 from being a faithful saying.²⁹ This puts the weight of the evidence on the side of what comes after.

²⁶ He writes: “In an age of increasing obesity worldwide, from which clergy in many quarters have not escaped, Paul’s words should not be used to justify neglect of the body’s need for regular vigorous activity. E. Schnabel reckons that Paul traveled at least 15,500 miles, of which some 8,700 was by land, much of that on foot. . . . He advises Timothy here from a framework of personal physical toughness . . .” Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 239–240. Compare to 1 Cor. 9:27 and 2 Cor. 11:23–27. See *ibid.* Seneca makes a similar point to Lucilius: “Now there are short and simple exercises which tire the body rapidly, and to save our time; and time is something of which we ought to keep strict account. These exercises are running, brandishing-weights, and jumping . . . Select for practice any one of these, and you will find it plain and easy. But whatever you do, come back soon from body to mind.” Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic: Epistulae Moralis AD Lucilium*, trans. Richard Mott Gummere (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2016), 33–34.

²⁷ See George W. Knight III, *The Faithful Sayings of the Pastoral Letters* for a full treatment of these sayings.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 62–63 for a full treatment of the reasoning.

²⁹ R. Alastair Campbell, “Identifying the Faithful Sayings of the Pastoral Epistles,” 77–78. His argument could actually be stronger than what it is. He suggests that the faithful saying in 1 Tim. 3 is actually down in vv. 15–16, even though the introductory formula is in v. 1. However, there is no reason not to make it verse 1 other than that the content of the saying is not as exalted as some would wish. This does not seem to me to be a good reason. At any rate, the faithful saying in chapter 3 clearly does come after the introductory formula. See *ibid.*, 80–84.

So, what is the specific faithful saying? “We have hoped on the living God who is the Savior of all men.” The statement “for this end we labor and strive” would be R. Alastair Campbell’s “parenthetical reinforcement,” and the statement “especially of those who believe” would be his “further qualification.”³⁰ The “parenthetical reinforcement” addition is significant. As Barth Campbell notes “Paul enhanced his ethos when he maintained that he exerted himself strenuously for Christ.”³¹ Paul is emphasizing the importance of what he said and showing his own consistency with it. Salvation has reference to both salvation in time and in the life to come (see v. 8). If this is the faithful saying, the connection may be between the life mentioned in v. 9 and “living” in v. 10.

The main question about the content of v. 10 is, what does it mean that God is the Savior of all men? It cannot mean that every single person is saved. This would be out of accord with Pauline theology as well as the words themselves which say, “especially of the believing” (v. 10). Hendriksen and others want it to refer to God’s common grace and government of the world. He says: “One must study this term in the light not only of the New Testament but also of the Old Testament and archaeology” (154).³² He then shows that a wide variety of passages refer to God as Savior in a sense that does not refer to the call of the Gospel or the life to come.³³ Even granted that Hendricksen is correct on these

³⁰ Ibid., 78.

³¹ Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” 199.

³² William Hendricksen, *The Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), 154.

³³ Hendriksen notes that there is a connection with 1 Cor. 10—he was the deliverer of all, but especially of those who believed. Compare to Dt. 32:15, Ps. 25:5, Ps. 106:21. Ibid., 154–155. There are also the judges (Judg. 3:9, 2 Kings 13:5, Neh. 9:27). Another passage is 43:3, 11. “According to the Old Testament, then, God is *Soter* not only of those who enter his kingdom but in a sense also of all others, indeed, of all those whom he delivers from temporary disaster.” Ibid., 155.

other verses, there is no need to go into these references to understand this broad meaning. 1 Tim. 2:4–6 tells us the sense in which God is the Savior of all men: He wills all men to be saved and has established one Mediator between God and man. Any person who comes to the knowledge of the truth can be saved. This does not mean that all will be saved but that God is potentially the Savior of all people.³⁴ Steven M. Baugh argues in a way similar to Hendricksen. He believes that “Savior of all men” refers to common grace. He argues this based on the use of the word in Ephesus. The term Σωτήρ was applied to the Caesars based on their rule over the nations.³⁵ Even if Baugh is correct at every point, there is no reason to exclude eternal salvation from the meaning. Consider Acts 4:12. Here is a saying that clearly refers to the Caesars but is applied to Jesus. While this does not mean that there is no overlap between its reference to the Caesars and to Jesus, Peter and John clearly intended to use the phrase in a much larger sense than that which even his worshippers applied to Caesar. So, why not here, especially in light of 1 Tim. 2:4–6?

Tying this all together, the living God is the Savior who offers a saving godliness to all people and actually effects it in the life of believers. Godliness is for everyone, especially those who believe.

Paul concludes this section by telling Timothy to command and teach these things. Yarborough suggests that the word “command” refers to “hortatory intent” as in

³⁴ On this issue, see Robert Lewis Dabney “God’s Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy As Related to His Power, Wisdom, and Sincerity,” *Discussions*, Vol. 1, (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), 281–313.

³⁵ Steven M. Baugh, “‘Savior of All People’: 1 Timothy 4:10 in Context,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (1992): 331–340.

1:3, 5, 18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17.³⁶ He is to teach and command. He is not merely to give them instruction but call them to do something. This is obvious from the context. The point is that Timothy should teach the importance of godliness and then call on them to train themselves for it rather than looking to myths. Each person is to seek good works and godliness. This is very similar to his point in Titus 3:8.

Problem Group 3: Those Looking down on Timothy (12–16)

The third issue is those who would look down on (καταφρονεῖτω) him. The pressures Timothy faces are not only outside the church. They are inside the church. Paul concedes that Timothy is young (he has νεότητος). David Pao suggests that Timothy might not yet be 30.³⁷ Even if he was in his 40s, people may still have considered him young.³⁸ The concern is that this might keep Timothy from carrying out his ministry in the minds of others or of himself.

How is Timothy to respond? He is to focus on himself (v. 16). This refers both to his character and his teaching, the internal and the external. This is the substance of what Paul says in vv. 12–16. Paul discusses the problem only briefly but expands in some detail on the response. In verse 12, Paul tells Timothy to be an example (τύπος) in five ways: speech, conduct, faith, love, and purity. Paul has a similar statement in 2 Tim. 2:22. There, he emphasizes the same characteristics in response to the general temptations of youth. In this case, Timothy needs to seek to counter the challenge of his age with an exemplary character.

³⁶ Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 245.

³⁷ Cited in *ibid.*, 246.

³⁸ See Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 258.

In vv. 13–14, Paul turns to the issue of Timothy’s teaching. Timothy has a gift, and he is to use it. Paul tells him to use it by using litotes, i.e., not neglect means *exercise*.³⁹ We do not know *exactly* what Paul means by the gift. The reason is that “[t]his verse presupposes a historical scenario whose details are largely unattested elsewhere”⁴⁰ It is very similar to what Paul says in 2 Tim. 1:6 using a positive command: “Fan into flame.” If we look at the immediate context of 2 Tim. 1 and 1 Tim. 4, it is most likely that this gift refers to an ability to preach and teach. Thus, in 2 Tim. 1:14, Paul says, “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” Here Paul recognizes the Holy Spirit as the one who “helps” or enables him to do what he is called to do. In verse 13, Paul tells Timothy to give attention to reading, to exhortation, and to teaching. The reading refers not to general reading but to the public reading of Scriptures as in the context of the synagogue and thus Marshall suggests that it is more about regularity rather than skill.⁴¹ However, the two other words flesh this out by adding preaching and teaching. Mounce brings these things together nicely: “The agenda Paul spells out for Timothy emphasizes the centrality of the text for theological correctness and includes not just a basic reading but a fuller awareness of the text’s meaning that is gained through study, reflection, and devotion.”⁴² The point of all of this

³⁹ A litotes is “a figure of speech by which an affirmation is expressed by its negation.” Barth Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” 201. Note also the contrast with the positive form of this verb in v. 15.

⁴⁰ Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 250. For discussion of the broader context of ordination in the New Testament see Burton S. Easton, “Jewish and Early Christian Ordination,” *Anglican Theological Review* 6, no. 4 (Mar 1924): 285–295; David F. Wright, “Ordination,” *Themelios* 10, no. 3 (Apr 1985): 5–10; Sharyn Dowd, “Ordination in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 2 (Sum 2002): 205–217.

⁴¹ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 563.

⁴² Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 261

is that he should not let his youth dissuade him from doing what he is called and equipped to do.

Verse 15 is the third “ταῦτα” in the chapter. It further explains the response to the challenge of those looking down on his youth. There is a contrast with verse 14. He is not to let his gift be neglected (ἀμέλει). Instead, he meditates on or practices (μέλετα) these things. He is to give thought to these things, to his character and public teaching. That is to be his focus (see v. 16). He is to take his stand (ἵσθι) in them, which means here “to devote oneself to.”⁴³ He is not to remain static in his ability. He is to develop his ability so that his progress is evident to everyone.⁴⁴ He is to get better and better at exercising his gift and growing in his character.

The final verse tells us that he is to watch himself and his teaching. Bishop Butler said it well: “Be more afraid of thyself than of the world.”⁴⁵ Again, there is a summary of the inner and outer work that he is to do. Köstenberger compares this verse to 1 Tim. 2:15: “Just as women will be preserved from falling into error by adhering to their God-ordained role (2:15), so by his exemplary conduct Timothy will preserve both himself and his entire congregation . . .”⁴⁶ Köstenberger takes “save” as referring to preservation not eternal salvation. I do not think it matters whether it is mere preservation or eternal salvation. The point is that they will be saved, if they continue in the faith. Timothy’s life

⁴³ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

⁴⁴ The word προκοπή (progress) is highly significant here. Marshall comments on it: “The word-group belongs more to Hellenism and is found in the LXX only in Ecclus. 51.17 and 2 Macc 8.8. It was used in Stoic philosophy for human ethical and spiritual development, and from there it found its way to Philo who makes considerable use of it (cf. Epictetus, 1.4.12f.)” Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 263.

⁴⁶ Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 144.

and teaching is an external means of salvation. That is why it is so important for him to give attention to them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all three of these sections give Timothy clear instructions on what to do in the face of the opposite. He needs to guard himself. He is to focus on improving His character by the Spirit and clarifying his teaching. It is clear that it is *godly character* as well as public teaching that is the appropriate response to the opposition that Timothy will face.

There is a rather remarkable parallel here with differentiation of self in BFST. The Apostle Paul emphasizes Timothy's own action in the face of emotional pressure. BFST also posits that the most important thing that a person can do in an emotional system is to consider their own actions and reactivity. BFST suggests that when a person can do this, they will reduce the anxiety in the system and that others will adjust to their actions. This is especially true if they are in a more important place in the system. As Michael Kerr says:

One person's ability to firmly maintain 'self' in an anxious system interrupts the infectious spread of anxiety through the system. If people understand how they are part of a system problem--not its cause--they can be more confident that just managing themselves well in tense times will be sufficient to halt escalating chronic anxiety in the system. It is unnecessary and counterproductive to try to change others.⁴⁷

What the Apostle Paul suggests here is similar to BFST's call to focus on one's own functioning, i.e., to "watch yourself and your teaching" and not focus so much on what others do or do not do.

⁴⁷ Michael Kerr, *Michael E. Kerr, Bowen Theory's Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), xxii.

Romans 12:9–21 – Reacting by Principle Rather than Emotion

There is a surprising consensus in regard to the structure and introductory questions of the book of Romans. In 1977 and 1991, Karl Donfried edited a book entitled *The Romans Debate*.⁴⁸ Donfried quoted F.F. Bruce to explain the basic issues of the debate. According to Bruce, the Romans debate is “about the character of the letter (including questions about literary integrity, the possibility of its having circulated in longer and shorter recensions, the destination of chapter 16) and, above all, Paul’s purpose in sending it.”⁴⁹ Donfried reported that there was a consensus on five issues: the specificity of the letter to the Roman congregation,⁵⁰ the seeming lack of a single purpose,⁵¹ Romans 16 as part of the letter, diatribe as a rhetorical device not a literary genre, and Romans 9–11 as part of the overall argument.⁵² The point here is that there is consensus on the unity of the whole letter as we have it in our Bibles.

When it comes to the structure of the letter there is also broad consensus, though there is, of course, some debate on the meaning of each section. Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that there are two ways to approach the structure and purpose of the letter. You can seek to be very precise, or you can define a minimalist understanding that commands

⁴⁸ Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xlix.

⁵⁰ He wrote: “Without question a consensus has been reached that Romans is addressed to the Christian community in Rome which finds itself in a particular historical situation.” *Ibid.*, lxix.

⁵¹ Carson, Morris, and Moo rely on this consensus but propose the following: “It is possible that Romans does not have a single theme, that the most we can do is note recurring motifs within several distinct topics. But if we are to single out one theme, a good case can be made for the ‘gospel.’” Carson, Morris, and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 254.

⁵² Donfried., *The Romans Debate*, lxix.

scholarly agreement and provides a foundation for scholarly work.⁵³ Engberg-Pedersen chooses the latter and divides the letter into three sections to explain the meaning of the letter:

1. Romans 1:18–4:25 – Jews and Gentiles are alike under sin and are brought into a state of righteousness through “Christ-faith” and “the Christ event.”
2. Romans 5:1–8:39 – All Christ believers participate in a righteousness that is “distinctly forward looking.”
3. Romans 9:1–15:13 – The common state of righteousness requires of them “specific practices” in their relationships, especially those between Jews and Gentiles.⁵⁴

No doubt, we can debate some of the wording of Engberg-Pedersen’s divisions and discussion, but it provides handy framework for putting Romans 12 in context. Romans 12 is part of the discussion of the specific practices that the “Christ event” and “Christ-faith” require of believers.

When it comes to introductory questions to Romans 12:9–21 itself, there are three issues that relate to the whole passage: the participles, the structure, and the objects of the participles.

Walter T. Wilson in his book on this passage writes, “The explanation of Paul’s use of participles in the imperatival mood in 12.9b-13, 16-19a has proven to be a major

⁵³ See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 180–181.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 186–187.

and largely unresolved interpretive crux.”⁵⁵ In spite of these questions, Richard N. Longenecker notes, “there can be little doubt that here in 12:9–13 the context is decidedly set out in the imperative mood.”⁵⁶ Jeffrey S. Lamp cites A.T. Robertson who says, “In general it may be said that no participle should be explained this way [imperatively] that can properly be connected with a finite verb.”⁵⁷ So, what are we to do? Lamp’s solution seems to me to be elegant and simple. Namely, the participles “are connected with a finite verb, namely, the unexpressed imperative form of the copula.”⁵⁸ This provides a grammatically satisfying way of conceiving the participles of our passage as imperatival.

A second issue is the structure. Longenecker writes: “There is very little agreement among commentators, however, regarding the internal structure and development of thought in 12:9-21.”⁵⁹ As most translations indicate, there is agreement on a soft break between 13 and 14. The reason for this is hermeneutical more than exegetical. Commentators often understand 9–13 as referring to the church and 14–21 as referring to unbelievers. This distinction is probably unwarranted, as the discussion in regard to the objects of the participles will demonstrate. Some regard ἀγάπη as the

⁵⁵ Walter T. Wilson, *Love Without Pretense: Romans 9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 156.

⁵⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 936. See also on this consensus, Jeffrey S. Lamp, “An Alternative Explanation for the Alleged ‘Imperatival Participles of Romans 12:9-21,’” *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (2010): 313.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁵⁹ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 935.

general statement and the rest of the passage as fleshing out what love means.⁶⁰ Others disagree and see the major idea as unexpressed, namely, living a life consistent with Christ and faith in Him.⁶¹ Wilson has also proposed a chiasmic structure for 14–21 that is worth considering.⁶² Whatever structure one adopts does not seem to alter the exegesis much, as Cranfield cautions: “it is a mistake to look too anxiously for precise connexions of thought or for a logical sequence in these verses.”⁶³

Runar M. Thorsteinsson argues that there is a difference between the Stoics and Paul in this way: “[W]hereas the ethics of the Roman Stoics is universal in its scope, Paul’s ‘love ethic’ is not.”⁶⁴ This brings up the broader question of the objects of the participles/imperatives of the passage. Are the objects only the people within the church community, or do they apply to those outside? Kent L. Yinger provides a good starting point for this discussion.⁶⁵ Most commentators see the command to bless persecutors as referring to those outside the church community. However, Yinger argues at length that it

⁶⁰ See Walter T. Wilson, *Love Without Pretense*, 151–155.

⁶¹ See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Paul’s Stoicizing Politics in Romans 12–13: The Role of 13.1–10 in the Argument,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (2006): 163–166.

⁶² See Wilson, *Love Without Pretense*, 176. Wilson’s chiasms are intriguing, but there are a couple of problems. To make them work, he has to take 17–19a as being the center of the chiasm. However, the contents of this section are diverse, and it is unclear to me that they should all be taken under the heading “Live at peace with all people.” He breaks down 17a–19a into another chiasm. The trouble with this is that the center of the chiasm is “if possible, so far as it depends on you . . .”, but this what the Apostle would want to highlight in the section? Longenecker notes well: “Much of what has been said (or can be said) about these matters is conjectural. Yet certain ‘informed conjectures’ are better than others . . .” Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 934.

⁶³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 629.

⁶⁴ Runar M. Thorsteinsson, “Paul and Roman Stoicism: Romans 12 and Contemporary Stoic Ethics,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (2006): 159.

⁶⁵ Kent L. Yinger, “Romans 12:14-21 and Nonretaliation in Second Temple Judaism: Addressing Persecution within the Community,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 74–96.

refers to those inside. He provides examples from Jewish literature that persecution can come from within the community. He also says that verse 15 so clearly refers to those inside the community that it seems strange to apply verse 14 to those outside it and then move back into the community. He also argues that there is no historical context of persecution. Against this, even if everything he says proves true, it does not prove his point. There may be persecution from within the community, but that would not limit the recommended response to persecution from *only* those inside the community. He would merely prove that this command is applicable also to those inside, and *that* is a sound conclusion. A better approach is if the objects are not specifically limited in the text, then we should not limit them. This is not only sound exegetically but also hermeneutically. In the larger section (going back even to 9:1), those outside the community are clearly in view, i.e., in Romans 11 and Romans 13:1–7. When we are talking about love, we are talking about love of our *neighbor* (see 13:10). The context indicates that the object of love is far more than fellow church members. Timothy Sensing has captured the right note here: “Yet this love should not be compartmentalized into groups such as Christians, outsiders, enemies, and God. The exhortation to love needs to be viewed holistically in all situations, even the most demanding ones; otherwise, it is not love at all.”⁶⁶

Exegesis

Walter T. Wilson argues that the first participle is the key to the whole passage: “Let love be without pretense” (my translation, following Wilson), as his book title *Love*

⁶⁶ Timothy Sensing, “From Exegesis to Sermon in Romans 12:9-21,” *Restoration Quarterly* 40 no. 3 (1998): 178.

Without Pretense demonstrates.⁶⁷ Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that the main theme is simply living out the implications of the Christ event. He claims that there is nothing in the grammar that would indicate that this participle is the key other than its placement as first in the list. As Runar Thorsteinsson argues, “What vv. 9–21 offers is a series of exhortations which seem to be singled out rather randomly . . . [T]he passages gives the impression that it simply contains a jumble of loosely related maxims.”⁶⁸ Wilson seems to have the better perspective. The main reason for this conclusion is what Paul states in Romans 13: “whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (13:9b–10). This ties together love, the Ten Commandments, and the prescriptions we have here. Paul himself expressly takes love as a summary of his ethic, so it is appropriate to follow Wilson’s lead here in thinking of this participle as a header.

The word ἀγάπη is very significant. Wilson notes: “numerous modern studies have demonstrated, the early Christians invested the term ἀγάπη with a far greater significance and decidedly more theological meaning than it had possessed previously.”⁶⁹ The reason for this is no doubt the love of God expressed in sending His Son into the world. Timothy Sensing draws our attention to the earlier part of Romans: “Romans 5 clearly teaches that we, too were God’s enemies when he demonstrated his love toward us in Jesus. Paul now exhorts us to let our enemies experience what we experienced when

⁶⁷ See Wilson, *Love Without Pretense*.

⁶⁸ Thorsteinsson, “Paul and Roman Stoicism: Romans 12 and Contemporary Stoic Ethics,” 145.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Love Without Pretense*, 151. See also James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 739.

we were God’s enemies.”⁷⁰ What is interesting here is that Paul does not tell them to love. It’s almost as if he assumes that love is necessary and merely wants to add, let it be ἀνυπόκριτος, “sincere” or “unfeigned.”⁷¹ How are they going to do that? He fleshes that out in the rest of the passage.

“Hate what is evil, cling to what is good.” Colin Kruse points out that the word for hate here (ἀποστρυγούντες) refers to vehement hate. He suggests even, “let it be anathema.”⁷² He also notes that the word for “cling” (κολλώμενοι) is the same as that in Mt. 19:5, let a man be “united to his wife.”⁷³ The word for good (ἀγαθῶ) should be considered in light of Paul’s writings. Kruse provides a good summary:

For Paul, the ‘good’ is essentially what is pleasing to God (cf. 12:2) but includes doing what is right in the eyes of the authorities (13:3; Tit. 3:1), doing good to one’s neighbors and to all people (15:2; Gal. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:15), and returning good for evil (12:21). Believers, he says also, are to be given to good works (2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10).⁷⁴

We should note that the three participles in v. 9 are very broad. Love, hate evil, and cling to good.⁷⁵ This indicates the universality of these statements that connects them not only to the Gospel but also to the natural law and the pagan writers who have written about

⁷⁰ Sensing, “From Exegesis to Sermon in Romans 12:9-21,” 178.

⁷¹ Douglas J. Moo writes: “The exhortation is so common that Paul doesn’t even call them to love. He says, “Let love be sincere.”” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 776.

⁷² Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 475.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ In regards to love, Cranfield suggests that the ἀγάπη may be wider because there is a switch to φιλαδελφία. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 630.

them. At the same time, Cranfield says: “The fact that this is general does not make it not worth saying.”⁷⁶

“Be devoted to one another in love.” Here two words are used that are “‘family words’ denoting belongingness that transcends natural or ethnic boundaries.”⁷⁷ 1 Pet. 1:22 is a parallel. Peter writes that obeying the truth that brings about φιλαδελφίαν (as opposed to ἀγάπη) ἀνυπόκριτος: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love (φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυπόκριτον) for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

“Honor one another above yourselves.” There is some disagreement on the meaning of the words here. Cranfield suggests that there are three ways we can understand this verse: “Anticipating one another in showing honor,” “surpassing one another in honour,” or “in honour preferring one another.” Cranfield opts for the last.⁷⁸ Moo argues that there are really only two options “surpassing” or “preferring” one another in honor. Moo says “surpassing” is better because “preferring” would be an unattested use of the verb.⁷⁹ Most modern translations adopt some form of the “surpassing” option. It is easy to get lost in the grammar here. We should stop and note the ambition that we should have: to outdo each other in giving honor to one another. If we could implement that goal, each person would be encouraged to fulfill and use their gifts under God (Rom. 12:3–8), and the whole body would be healthier.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 631.

⁷⁷ John D. Harvey, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Romans* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 306–307.

⁷⁸ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 633.

⁷⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 777.

“Never be lacking zeal but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (12:11).

These three exhortations amount to essentially the same point. We should maintain a spiritual fervor in our service to God. Beyond our love for others is a desire to serve and glorify God. Kruse points out that this is an important theme for the Apostle Paul: 2 Cor. 7:11, 1, 8:7, 8, 16 as well as 12:8 and 11 here.⁸⁰

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (12:12). This phrase can be connected with the previous one. How do we maintain our spiritual fervor? By maintaining our joy. We may see joy as one of Paul’s main goals in writing this letter: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy . . .” (Rom. 15:13). The kingdom is all about joy (Rom. 14:17). And how do we maintain our joy? By hope. It is important for us to recognize that hope is not a wish. It is a firm expectation of good things. It is a parallel to the word ἀπεκδέχομαι, to wait eagerly, as you can see in Rom. 8:23–25. Of course, our hope is not immediately fulfilled and sometimes afflictions come that seem contrary to it. So, patience is need. Ὑπομένω means “to maintain one’s belief or course of actions in the face of opposition, that is, to stand one’s ground, to hold out, or to endure.”⁸¹ These afflictions should lead us to prayer, which is very important for Paul.

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (12:13). The word for “share” is derived from the word for “fellowship,” κοινωνία. Paul uses it to describe his “partnership” with the Philippians in that they provided for his needs (see 1:5

⁸⁰ Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 476.

⁸¹ Ibid., 477. See also Moo on this point: “Even as we ‘rejoice in hope,’ gaining confidence from God’s promise that we will share the glory of God, we recognize the ‘down side’: the path to the culmination of hope is strewn with tribulations.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 779. Paul “quickly moves from hope to endurance.” Ibid.

and 4:15–16). Kruse sees a parallel here with Eph. 4:28.⁸² Hospitality was also very important for Paul, and he emphasizes that is an important and necessary virtue in the leaders of the church (see 1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8).⁸³ Schreiner suggests that the verb would lead us to think that one should take initiative in providing hospitality.⁸⁴

“Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.” It is common for commentators and translators to see a soft break here. The reason is that they consider the objects of 14–16 to be those outside the church in contrast to 9–13. However, this is neither necessary nor helpful. As argued in the introduction to this passage, there is no reason to limit the objects of the participles without very clear hermeneutical or exegetical reason. In addition, there is much reason to the contrary. Some who advocate the soft break because it refers to those outside the church still refer 15 to those inside the church, which does not make sense. Paul has also already introduced the thought of persecution in v. 12. Yinger has demonstrated that there is ample reason to think that persecution can come from inside the covenant community.⁸⁵ Certainly, anyone who has been around the local church can tell you that the command to bless those who persecute you and not curse them is just as applicable to those inside the church! It may not be physical persecution, but it is an affliction that calls for patience and overcoming evil with good.

⁸² Ibid., 478.

⁸³ See Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 478.

⁸⁴ Cited in Harvey, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Romans*, 308.

⁸⁵ Yinger, “Romans 12:14-21 and Nonretaliation in Second Temple Judaism: Addressing Persecution within the Community.” He is only in error *to limit* the persecutors to those inside the covenant community.

There is no reason to think that there is a big persecution going on in Rome at the time of the writing of this letter.⁸⁶ Anyone who converted to Christianity faced multiple social pressures because they would not participate in the life of the Roman world. The response to persecutors is to bless them.⁸⁷ A shocking response! Our natural response is to get even with those who persecute us. So, we have to go against our natural response. Calvin puts this matter well: “Although there is hardly anyone who has made such advance in the law of the Lord that he fulfills this precept, no one can boast that he is the child of God, or glory in the name of a Christian, who has not partially undertaken this course, and does not struggle daily to resist the will to do the opposite.”⁸⁸ We should consider what is the appropriate response that is in accord with love and not merely react as we feel.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (12:15). As Dunn notes, there are some who confine the objects of this command to the church, but he says rightly: “There is no reason why Paul should not have had wider associations in view as well.”⁸⁹ A point worth considering is from Joseph Fitzmeyer: “Since John Chrysostom . . . commentators have noted that it is easier to ‘sympathize’ with those who

⁸⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁸⁷ According to Cranfield, the second εὐλογεῖτε may not be part of the original text, but the sense does not change. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 641.

⁸⁸ Cited in *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 746. See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 641. Cranfield makes an important point that people rejoice and weep wrongly. Here is his idea: “the Christian is to take his stand beside his fellow-man (whoever he may be), to have time and room for him in those experiences in which he is most truly himself, in his real human joy and real human sorrow, and to strive to be both with him and for him, altogether and without reserve, yet without compromising with his evil or sharing, or even pretending to share, the presuppositions of this age . . .” *Ibid.*, 642.

mourn than to ‘congratulate’ those who succeed . . .”⁹⁰ This command call us to act out of a principle of sympathy and not merely react to other people’s emotions or automatic reactions, even when it is difficult to do so.

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (16b–c). “Live in harmony with one another” (16a) may refer to the church specifically, but there is no reason not to extend it out further when the Apostle tells them in a few verses to “live in peace with everyone” (v. 18) and to do what is good in the sight of everyone (v. 17). The command to live in harmony with one another is very similar to what the Apostle Paul says in Phil. 4:2 and 2:2.⁹¹ There is a close parallel between this verse and v. 3. The root word φρόνησις, prudence, was the key virtue for the Stoics. As Thorsteinsson notes, “Moreover, it is unlikely that the Roman audience would have missed his playing on the root (φρον-) of the Stoic primary virtue, especially since such linking had already been established in the verses immediately preceding.”⁹² Of course, the difference is that this is about having a mind that thinks differently about relating to others that it is in conformity with Jesus Christ. “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). It is precisely in Christ’s humility that Paul wants them to be able to relate to others.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (12:17). This is a precise reiteration of Jesus’ teaching (see Mt. 5:10, 38–48).

⁹⁰ Cited in Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 480.

⁹¹ See Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 481.

⁹² Thorsteinsson, “Paul and Roman Stoicism: Romans 12 and Contemporary Stoic Ethics,” 149.

This statement is very similar to v. 19 except that it is more general.⁹³ Paul himself spoke from experience. He knew what it was like to be persecuted (2 Cor. 11:16–32). In regards to doing good, Cranfield thinks that it refers primarily to doing things that are good, even if people don't recognize it.⁹⁴ It seems better to go with Moo thinks that such an understanding is too restrictive. There is an emphasis on doing those good things that “non-Christians approve and recognize.”⁹⁵ The sentiment of the Apostle Paul is captured with slightly more clarity by the Apostle Peter: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet. 2:12).

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (12:18).

Mary K. Schmitt writes: “Paul in chapter 12 is able to exhort believers out of the peace they have received with God to live in peace with everyone.”⁹⁶ Of course, there is the proviso, “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you.” The seventeenth century theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel wrote lucidly on this topic in his book *The Christian's Reasonable Service*. He explains that there are times when it is impossible to maintain peace: “However pleasant and desirable peace may be, we must nevertheless be on our guard that we do not pursue and maintain it at the expense of truth and godliness.”⁹⁷ This captures well the sentiment of the Apostle Paul here.

⁹³ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 645.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 785.

⁹⁶ Mary K. Schmitt, “Peace and Wrath in Paul's Epistle to the Romans,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32 no. 1 (Winter 2014): 74.

⁹⁷ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 4 Vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), 4.94.

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (12:19). Schmitt notes the contrast with peace here in the book of Romans. “In contrast to the exhortation to live peacefully, believers are excluded from the realm of wrath and are instructed not to take revenge but to leave wrath to God.”⁹⁸ This is in line with Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek.” In the original, the word “God’s” is not present explicitly. Paul may have left it open to apply it to the ἀρχή who is “ἐκδικος εἰς ὀργήν” (Rom. 13:4).⁹⁹ Paul gives an explicit reason why we should not take revenge. It belongs to the Lord. This is a powerful motivation. Edwin Ochsenmeier has captured the “gospel” element here: “Despite all the difficulties the text raises for Paul, Rom. 12,17-13,1 participates in answering Habakkuk’s pleas to God to intervene in the affairs of this world so that evil will not triumph and have a free rein. That God does so is good news for Paul.”¹⁰⁰

“On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head’” (12:20). Paul contrasts taking vengeance on those who do us wrong with how we should treat them. To do this, he cites Prov. 25:21–22. In sum, we should bless and do good to those who persecute us or attack us.

This brings us to the most controversial interpretive issue in the passage. What does it mean to heap “burning coals of fire” on the enemies we feed? The central problem

⁹⁸ “Peace and Wrath in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 74.

⁹⁹ On this subject, see Erwin Ochsenmeier, “Romans 12,17-13,7 and the Justice of God: Two Neglected Features of Paul’s Argument,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovienses* 89, no. 4 (2013): 361–382.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

is this. The term “coals of fire” is generally a symbol of judgment.¹⁰¹ How is it consistent to do good and bring judgment on an enemy? In light of this, the majority of commentators have explained the coals of fire as kindness to enemies that is so good that they are shamed into repentance. John N. Day has proposed an alternative.¹⁰² Day points out that not only does “coals of fire” refer to judgment, it is never used to refer to shaming in any other passage.¹⁰³ “For the apostle Paul to utilize this potent image in a manner foreign to its common usage—and without any clear contextual indicators to that effect—seems unlikely.”¹⁰⁴ Day points out that God Himself holds these things together in the book of Romans: “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:4–5). Here God Himself really does good, but the unrepentant response leads to coals of fire, as it were! Thus, no hypocrisy is required in the person who does good to someone who does wrong. As Day writes: “Rather, it is a positive word of comfort for Christians in the face of stubborn and unrepentant enmity. . . . Christians are called to seek the benefit of those who hate them (v. 14), but believers are also to remember that grace repeatedly spurned has the assurance of divine vengeance (v.

¹⁰¹ Kruse notes that the term “coals of fire” is found 9 times in the OT. In 5 of these, it refers to judgment: 2 Sam. 22:9, 13; Pss. 18:8, 12; 140:10 (see *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 484).

¹⁰² John N. Day, “‘Coals of Fire’ in Romans 12:19-20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 no. 640 (October-December 2003): 414–420.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 418.

19).”¹⁰⁵ This appears to be a much more satisfactory solution than the “shaming” solution.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (12:21). This is a fitting conclusion to the whole section. Cranfield has a very helpful description of how the Christian can avoid being overcome by evil: “The Christian’s victory over the evil consists in his refusal to become a party to the promotion of evil by returning evil for evil and so becoming himself like the evil man who has injured him, in his accepting injury without resentment, without allowing his love to be turned into hate or even only weakened.”¹⁰⁶ This is substantively similar to what Seneca wrote: “Allow any man who so desires to insult you and work you wrong; but if only virtue dwells with you, you will suffer nothing.”¹⁰⁷ Instead, we should do good, seeking peace, feeding our enemies, and blessing the persecutors. When we can do this by faith, then we will have overcome the world.

Conclusion to Rom. 12:9–21

There is much food for thought in Rom. 12:9–21. Paul teaches a universal ethic that is applicable to a large variety of situations. The heart of it is a character and disposition of love that manifests itself to any object where it is appropriate. We will know we love without pretense when we can love when the pressure is on and bless our persecutors. Love is a characteristic that is independent of the world and acts according to faith and principle. It is not reactive to attack, and it is not activated merely by someone

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 420.

¹⁰⁶ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 650.

¹⁰⁷ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, 183.

else's love. It is a love that is rooted deeply in our hearts and minds through the power of God in Christ that the world cannot defeat. That is the glorious image that the Apostle Paul sculpts for us in this passage.

This passage fits well with BFST's concept of differentiation of self. Instead of merely responding in a way that is natural to us, we should respond according to what love demands, even if it is extremely difficult. Even though love has an emotional side, it requires clear thinking to see what love requires and then an ability to act out of principle in the face of internal and external emotional pressure. Ronald Richardson explains this from a BFST perspective:

I see the Bible as holding up the values and ethical principles that require the emotional maturity of differentiation of self to achieve. . . . Paul spoke of being in the world but not of it. This could be a way of speaking about differentiation in the emotional system of our families. How do we remain in good emotional contact with our family and remain outside of it, so that we are not run by it, and without reflection, take on its values and beliefs or simply react to the people in it? In my thinking, Paul and Bowen were on the same wavelength here.¹⁰⁸

True love requires differentiation of self because we cannot judge what true love requires simply by acting according to feeling. Our feelings can lead us astray. We must distinguish between our feeling and our thinking and submit both to Scripture.

Mark 4:35–41 – Jesus in the Storm

Mark 4:35–41 and 6:14–29 in the Context of Mark

We will consider the context of Mark 4:35–41 and 6:14–29 together. When it comes to placing these passages in the context of Mark, there is general agreement. As Carson, Morris, and Moo put it, “This fast-paced narrative is punctuated by six

¹⁰⁸ Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 67.

transitional paragraphs or statements, which divide Mark’s account into seven basic sections.”¹⁰⁹ They divide them this way:

1. Preliminaries to the ministry (1:1–13)
2. First part of the Galilean ministry (1:16–3:6)
3. Second part of the Galilean ministry (3:13–5:43)
4. The concluding phase of the Galilean ministry (6:7–8:26)
5. The way of glory and suffering (8:27–10:52)
6. Final ministry in Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)
7. The passion and empty-tomb narratives (15:1–16:8)¹¹⁰

This places our passages in #3 and #4 respectively.

When it comes to the composition and authorship, the church has generally accepted Mark as the author (hence the name of the Gospel).¹¹¹ Over the past centuries, “every conceivable hypothesis has been offered to explain the creation and publication of the four Gospels . . .”¹¹² The problem with so many of these is that they are “highly speculative.”¹¹³ According to Benjamin Gladd, Richard Bauckham’s work on

¹⁰⁹ Carson, Morris, and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 89.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 89–91.

¹¹¹ See *ibid.*, 92–93.

¹¹² Benjamin Gladd, “Mark,” in Michael Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 62–63.

¹¹³ Robert H. Stein makes this point on Mark 6, “Attempts to reconstruct the stages of development that led its present form in Mark are highly speculative.” Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 299. For multiple examples of trying to figure this out and interact with it, see Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989). For a rather conservative (in the sense of relying strongly on the text itself) approach, see Wendy J. Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait through Encounter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 195–232. Her conclusion was that “[t]he redactional analysis of Mark 4:35–41 has shown that the evangelist did not alter this account in any substantial way.” Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 205; see also her whole treatment, 196–206.

eyewitnesses “cuts through the presupposition of a long oral development of the Gospels without the control of eyewitnesses.”¹¹⁴ This would give greater weight to considering the text as we have it. It is worthwhile to simply consider the text as it is, especially in light of the difficulty of attempts to get behind it and the many and conflicted versions of how it came about.¹¹⁵

Other directions for historical research have produced more fruit. Gladd summarizes the research on genre this way: “In the last few decades, New Testament scholars are now categorizing the four Gospels as Greco-Roman biography. In the ancient world, there existed a genre known as ‘lives.’”¹¹⁶ There is an important contribution to this understanding that has bearing on both our texts. “If the Gospels are deemed to be Greco-Roman biographies . . . [w]e must continually ask ourselves, what do we learn about Jesus in light of the present passage?”¹¹⁷

The final introductory question we will consider is this: what are the major themes of this book? Gladd makes this confident statement: “The Gospel of Mark plucks at this string from beginning to end; Israel’s long-awaited King has arrived on the scene. But as Mark makes clear, Israel’s King differs somewhat from expectations.”¹¹⁸ While that perspective is helpful, Carson, Morris, and Moo’s more cautious approach is

¹¹⁴ Gladd, “Mark,” 63.

¹¹⁵ Harold Hoehner argues that Matthew and Mark’s versions are so distinct that they could be rooted in two different accounts of the same event. “There is, then, a strong cumulative case for considering that here are two separate traditions of the Baptist’s death.” Harold Hoehner, *Herod Antipas: A Contemporary of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 117. See his whole discussion of the literary development on 112–117.

¹¹⁶ Gladd, “Mark,” 62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

probably more accurate. They put it this way: “Mark thus wants to help his readers understand who Jesus is and what real discipleship involves. But we must recognize that Mark has many other things to say that cannot easily be placed into these categories.”¹¹⁹ Both these perspectives are relevant to our two passages.

Exegesis of Mark 4:35–41

We have already noted that this passage fits in the “second phase of the Galilean ministry.” This miracle is the first in the series of four miracle stories in this part of Mark’s Gospel. James Edwards sees them as part of a section from 4:35–6:6a that he entitles “Who Then Is This?” taken from 4:35.¹²⁰ Robert Stein also likes that theme for this section using the heading, “Who is this man?”¹²¹ This is a compelling section that Darrell Bock says “is an A to Z portrayal of Jesus’ power: nature, demons, disease, and death.”¹²²

Brian K. Blount in his article, “Jesus as Teacher: Boundary Breaking in Mark’s Gospel and Today’s Church,” explains that Jesus “teaches not by talking, but by doing . . . One must advance beyond knowing something new into doing something new; something like the touch of a leper.”¹²³ It is worth considering whether Jesus’ request to go across the lake was one of those instances. Why? The other side is Gentile country

¹¹⁹ Carson, Morris, and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 101.

¹²⁰ James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 147.

¹²¹ Stein, *Mark*, 239.

¹²² Darrell Bock, *Mark* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 184.

¹²³ Brian K. Blount, “Jesus as Teacher: Boundary Breaking in Mark’s Gospel and Today’s Church,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 70, no. 2 (2016).

(Mark 5:1). This may be one of those boundary crossings like the touching of the leper.¹²⁴ If so, as Blount notes, then the storm would represent the opposition to moving across boundaries.

Mark 4:1 provides an explanation for v. 36. “The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge.” That is why it says that they took him ὡς ἦν in the boat.¹²⁵ Mark also adds a detail that Matthew lacks, namely, that other boats were with them.

What makes this a “story” is what happens next.¹²⁶ A λαῖλαψ arises. Edwards explains what this means: “The ‘furious squall’ of v. 37, which in Greek can mean ‘hurricane,’ fits the stories of Galilean fishermen even today, to whom the early evening easterly is known as ‘Sharkia’ (Arabic for ‘shark’).”¹²⁷ The Sea of Galilee is uniquely shaped to allow the regular development of this storm as William Lane explains:

The Sea of Galilee, surrounded by high mountains, is like a basin. Sudden violent storms on the sea are well known. Violent winds from the southwest enter the basin from the southern cleft and create a situation in which storm and calm succeed one another rapidly. Since the wind is nearly always stronger in the

¹²⁴ Another suggestion of significance is from Stein who says that this is an application of Jesus’ statement in Mark 1:38, Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” Stein, *Mark*, 240. In other words, it is the fulfillment of Jesus’ mission.

¹²⁵ “The phrase ὡς ἦν (‘as he was’) however, shows a Markan recognition that Jesus has already been in the boat teaching from it” (Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 199).

¹²⁶ Rick Strelan gives a summary of the basic pattern of the numerous storm stories of the ancient world: “The storm is sudden; the winds are fierce; the boundary between heaven and sea is merged; the waves threaten to overwhelm the boat; attempts are made to free the boat of cargo; the situation is hopeless—even the captain feels hopeless; people cry to the gods for help; and finally the hero is saved.” Rick Strelan, “A Greater than Caesar: Storm Stories in Lucan and Mark,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 91 no. 3–4 (2000): 167–168.

¹²⁷ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 149.

afternoon than in the morning or evening, fishing was done at night. But when a storm arises in the evening, it is all the more dangerous.¹²⁸

The suddenness and severity of the situation made for a very scary situation. The result was that “the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped” (v. 37).¹²⁹

The scary and challenging situation makes it all the more surprising to read the next phrase: “Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.” James L. Bailey cites Joel Marcus with a good description of what this would look like: “The sort of boat envisaged in the story would have had a large stern platform, which was the helmsman’s station, underneath which there was an area protected from the elements. This is where Jesus is pictured as sleeping.”¹³⁰ This is all the more striking because this is the only time we ever read of Jesus sleeping.¹³¹ Blount suggests that this very act is Jesus’ way of teaching faith.¹³²

The disciples are incredulous, wake Jesus up, and ask Him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Stein suggests that this is not a rebuke because the *ouò* expects a positive answer and because it is difficult to imagine a scene where the disciples are

¹²⁸ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 175.

¹²⁹ Blount goes too far here, however. He renders the Greek: “There became . . . suddenly, there just was . . . a magnificent squall of wind, a howling of nature . . . waves threw themselves like possessed phantoms against the boat.” He then comments: “Most English translations smooth out the rough edges and temper its shocking start, but Mark’s original language makes it clear that nature had come alive. It was personified. Like evil. Like God.” Blount, “Jesus as Teacher,” 188. This translation is not clear from the Greek. It relies on the interpretation of the storm as demonic. See the discussion below on the meaning of the silencing of the storm.

¹³⁰ James L. Bailey, “Fifth and Sixth Sundays After Pentecost (Mark 4:35-41 and Mark 5:21-43),” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 4 (October 2017): 25.

¹³¹ I owe this observation to James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*. 149.

¹³² His contention is that Jesus teaches by action not primarily by talking, “How does Jesus teach faith? By falling asleep on a sinking boat. That curricular effort does something. It not only informs; it instigates.” Blount, “Jesus as Teacher,” 184.

rebuking Jesus.¹³³ On the first point of Stein, Cranfield disagreed and saw no reason to see it as anything other than a “definite reproach.”¹³⁴ As to the second, we have a clear example where the disciples did just that: “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him” (Mark 8:32). Mark has no problem with a scene in which the disciples rebuke Jesus. This is better understood not as a rebuke out of anger but as an accusation born out of anxiety. Note that they were extremely afraid (v. 40). This fits in with the common experience of leaders that when their followers or subordinates feel overwhelmed, they believe their superiors should be doing more and so attack them as uncaring. It is more a statement born of anxiety than one that is well thought out.¹³⁵ Wendy Cotter has a better perspective (though perhaps worth tempering slightly). She says that the question of the disciples “is a hurt and panic-stricken question that doubts Jesus’ love and commitment to them.”¹³⁶ This view is confirmed by the fact that Jesus does not answer their actual question with any words. He does not defend himself. He simply acts.

Once Jesus woke up, He immediately rebuked the sea, and there was a great calm. Edwards describes this in a little more detail: “Its unusual perfect passive imperative form indicates that the condition shall persist, that is, ‘Be still, and stay still.’”¹³⁷ The rebuke recalls the rebuke of the demon in Mark 1:25. However, Jesus also rebukes

¹³³ Stein, *Mark*, 243.

¹³⁴ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 174. Cranfield makes a good point when he puts the statement into a larger context: “The rudeness of the Mark form, which is no doubt more original, is an eloquent pointer to the messianic veiledness--the Son of God subject to the rudeness of men.” Ibid.

¹³⁵ See the interesting comments on this phenomenon in Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 228–234.

¹³⁶ Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 211.

¹³⁷ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 150

people, and, as Lane notes, this may be the first in a series of rebukes (7:18; 8:17f., 21, 32f.; 9:19).¹³⁸

What are we to make of this action? According to Wendy Cotter, there are three major ways in which commentators have understood this rebuke of the storm: as evidence of Jesus' divinity, as eschatological, and as power over the demonic.¹³⁹ In regard to the first, Cotter says, "Since these texts ascribe command of the sea to God alone, Jesus is shown to be standing in God's place (cf. Pss. 29:3, 89:9; Nah. 1:4; and Hab. 3:15)."¹⁴⁰ The problem with the second view is that the storm is not compared to the end of time in Mark. It would seem necessary to have some clue within the text itself that this was Mark's point.¹⁴¹ On the third point, Cotter provides citations that demonstrate how common it was for people to anthropomorphize nature, including storms. She explains the implication: "Such addresses to the sea illustrate that Jesus' command to the wind and the sea would not have invited ideas of demon possession, or of the primordial myths of Marduk and Tiamat, if such myths were even available in the first century."¹⁴² This doesn't mean that there is no cosmic message. "But it does show that exorcism would not have occurred to the listener."¹⁴³ Consider also that the argument for the demonic is the language of rebuke that silenced the waves. However, Jesus rebukes other humans as well. Thus, there is no necessary connection between Jesus' rebuke and

¹³⁸ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 177.

¹³⁹ See her whole discussion of this issue in *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 213–221.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 214–215

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

demons. The necessary connection between the silencing and the demons needs to be demonstrated. The result is a compelling argument for the first of the three interpretations. As Cotter notes, “Of the three interpretations that rely on Jewish sources, the clear allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures identify Jesus as empowered by God. But even for a Gentile, the command of the forces of the wind and the sea attest to Jesus’ divinity.”¹⁴⁴

Jesus then turned to His disciples. He asked them, “Why are you so timid? Where is your faith?” Jesus indicates that if they had more faith, they would not be so afraid. It’s easy to miss how astonishing this question is. Consider the description of the storm above, and you will see that fear would be a normal response. Some might even suggest that Jesus was insensitive to what they had been through. But Jesus points to something very important that is ultimately for their best emotionally. Jesus tells them through the question that faith should enable His disciples to overcome their fears of even very difficult situations. Just because something feels scary does not mean that they should fear. They should look beyond their emotions and consider what ought to be feared in light of reasoned reflection on God’s revelation.

One question that one might have here is, faith in whom? Is it faith in God in general or in Jesus specifically? One might think that Jesus had in mind the general care of God the Father. This would be similar to what Jesus said in the other Gospels about trust in the Father (i.e., in Mt. 6:25–34 and 10:26–28). However, Mark does not have statements like this in his Gospel. In Mark, faith seems to be centered in Jesus Himself as in Mark 2:5, 5:36, 9:23–24, 10:52. We could also perhaps extend that idea out a little bit

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

further with Bock who says, “This lack of faith is not merely in Jesus as a miracle worker, as Mark is consistently against seeing Jesus in such limited terms. Faith here is about trusting God for his care and program.”¹⁴⁵

Following this question, the disciples change from fear of the storm to fear of Jesus. Mark describes even more strongly than Jesus does the fear that the disciples had of the storm (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν). This experience, as Stein notes, “is the normal experience [in Scripture—J.W.W.] of being in the presence of God or experiencing his power.”¹⁴⁶ You can see this also in other parts of Mark such as in 1:22; 5:17, 42; 6:51; 16:8, etc.

The disciples’ great fear leads them to ask, “Who is this person?” This is a powerful question that Mark invites readers to consider for themselves. For those with background in the Hebrew Bible, they would have recalled the passages that refer to God as the Lord of storms. It’s also possible that they would have heard an echo of the story of Jonah. There are similarities in the sleeping prophet, people being afraid, the danger to the boat, waking up the prophet, and the calm of the storm.¹⁴⁷ If so, then they would have said, “a greater than Jonah is here” (cf. Mt. 12:41).

But what about the Gentiles? What would they have heard? Cotter notes that people said that the philosopher Pythagoras had control over nature. Many believed that he was an incarnation of one of the Olympian gods. Wendy Cotter writes:

The popular idea that sprang to mind, as expressed by Iamblichus, ‘that he was one of the Olympian Gods, who, in order to correct and improve terrestrial existence, appeared to their contemporaries in human form, to extend to them the

¹⁴⁵ Bock, *Mark*, 185.

¹⁴⁶ Stein, *Mark*, 244.

¹⁴⁷ See the very detailed analysis in Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 221–224.

salutary light of philosophy and felicity,' seems to express what many listeners might gather about the identity of Jesus due to his benevolent use of his power.¹⁴⁸

This is worth considering. Would the Gentiles who first read Mark have seen Jesus as an Olympian god?

Rick Strelan draws our attention to another storm story that was very familiar in the Roman world. Julius Caesar's experience of a dangerous storm was recounted by Lucan in Book 5 of *Pharsalia* or *De Bello Civile*.¹⁴⁹ According to Lucan, Caesar was scared when he saw the storm. However, he survived and was able to move forward with his agenda. People drew implications from this story. "The legend was well-known and despite the failure of the crossing, was told to show Caesar's audacity and that Fortune was on his side."¹⁵⁰ The significance for this passage is that Jesus did not merely survive. He commanded the storm! Strelan summarizes the point for understanding this passage: "Mark asks the question: Who is this? (4, 41). Some in his audience would answer: A greater than Jonah is here (compare Matt 12,41//Lk 11, 32); this man has the authority of Yahweh. Others would reply: A greater than Caesar is here; this man has the authority of Zeus/Jupiter."¹⁵¹

Conclusion to Mark 4:35–41

In conclusion, this storm story would have caused its hearers to ask, "Who is this?" just like the disciples did. For the community of Jesus, it would have been (and can still be) a great encouragement. "The Jesus story promises no sociopolitical life-

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 225.

¹⁴⁹ Rick Strelan, "A Greater than Caesar: Storm Stories in Lucan and Mark," 166-179.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 175.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 179.

threatening force should shake them, for Jesus' commitment to them will prevent their destruction by any seemingly murderous 'storm.'"¹⁵² This commitment on Jesus' part opens the door to a faith that is courageous in the face of whatever storm a believer may encounter.

In regard to differentiation of self, this passage also challenges us to consider our fears. We should not let our fears control our reactions. Instead, we should think through our real situation in light of who God is and let that determine the way we feel. Jesus demonstrates differentiation of self in two ways. He is not afraid. He sleeps, even though there is a storm. He does not merely react to a scary situation. He thinks it through and sees it in light of faith. Second, he does not get caught up in the disciples' attempt to bring him into their anxiety by answering their question, "Don't you care about us?" This is one of BFST's means of passing conflict around a system: conflict. When someone responds to it defensively or attack back, then anxiety is spread further. The alternative is to do what Jesus did. As Friedman notes, "Despite the time-bomb quality of the emotionality, it is usually rather harmless in itself and will tend to self-destruct if there is no defensive feedback to keep it ticking."¹⁵³ Instead, he challenges them to consider their own reaction to the situation. Jesus provides a positive example of and positive teaching on differentiation of self.

Mark 6:14–29 – Herod Antipas in the Grip of the Family Emotional System

As noted above, this passage comes in the fourth section of the book, "The concluding phase of the Galilean ministry." What is interesting about this specific

¹⁵² Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories*, 232.

¹⁵³ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 207.

pericope is that it is one of only two passages in the book of Mark that is not about Jesus. Both of these pericopes are about John the Baptist. James Edwards places it in a context of 6:6b–7:23, “Witness to Jews,” and under a subsection on the cost of discipleship from 6:6b–6:30.¹⁵⁴ There is a switch in focus in v. 6b to Jesus’ disciples, but we should also note Mark’s statement in 6:4 that “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his own relatives and in his own home.” So, in all these passages from 6:1–30, you have the idea of opposition to the message of the good news. Regina James shows some broader connection with what goes before and after these verses. She notes that there is a contrast between the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter (5:37–42) and John the Baptist’s death. Then, there is also the contrast between the platter in 6:25, as if the head of John the Baptist were food and the feeding of the five thousand in 30–43. These were perhaps some of the things that Mark had in his mind in the placement of this pericope.¹⁵⁵ Whatever the case, it is very clear that the 6:14–29 is a distinct section.¹⁵⁶

The Herod in this passage is Herod Antipas. Antipas ruled in Galilee and Peraea from the death of King Herod the Great in 4 B.C. until A.D. 39.¹⁵⁷ James Edwards gives a good description of what he was like: “Like his father, Antipas was shrewd, pitiless, and a lover of luxury, particularly of magnificent architecture. He built two cities in Galilee, Tiberias and Sepphoris. Jesus’ reference to Antipas as ‘that fox’ (Luke 12:32) bears

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 176.

¹⁵⁵ Regina James, “Why the Daughter of Herodias Must Dance (Mark 6:14-29),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 4 (2006): 443–467, see in particular 448 and 452.

¹⁵⁶ Stein suggests that it is actually two parts, but this does not seem to make two distinct pericopes because the past event (from the standpoint of the text) is an explanation of Herod’s questioning. See Stein, *Mark*, 299.

¹⁵⁷ For more on his life, see Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*. For the geography of his kingdom, see particularly 43–51.

eloquent testimony to the latter's cunning and malice."¹⁵⁸ Antipas was certainly his father's son. Here he is called king, and as Gabriella Gelardini explains, "That Mark nevertheless addresses him as 'king' can safely be perceived as an instance of literary irony based on a historic quarrel regarding royal succession."¹⁵⁹ Antipas had earnestly sought the title of king, but he was unsuccessful in doing so. It is possible, however, that people in the region called him king in an honorary way.¹⁶⁰

Mark connects v. 14 to what precedes by saying that King Herod had heard about something that happened. This could refer either to all that precedes this pericope or the specific statement in v. 13: "They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." Stein suggests that the reports show the success of the disciples' ministry.¹⁶¹ Mark records that there are three possibilities posited: John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, or another one of the prophets.¹⁶² James believes that Mark's way of explaining this is a way of asking his readers to consider, who is Jesus?¹⁶³ This is plausible in light of Mark's account of the disciples response to the question, "Who do people say I am?" (9:27). They said, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets" (9:28). Herod's answer to that question is

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 184.

¹⁵⁹ Gabriella Gelardini, "The Contest for a Royal Title: Herod versus Jesus in the Gospel According to Mark (6:14-29; 15:6-15)," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 28, no. 2 (July-December 2011): 99. See her explanation in this article of how he sought it out, 95-99 and 101-102. See also Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 18-42

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 149-151.

¹⁶¹ See Stein, *Mark*, 306.

¹⁶² Stein puts the claim that Jesus was Elijah in Scriptural context: "Since Elijah was expected to return in the last days, and since Jesus was considered a prophet (Mark 6:4; Luke 7:16; Matt. 21:46) and preached that the kingdom of God had arrived, his being considered Elijah was quite natural." *Ibid.*, 301.

¹⁶³ James, "Why the Daughter of Herodias Must Dance (Mark 6:14-29)," 447.

clearly the first, “But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’” (6:16). This whole scenario matches Herod’s internal struggles in vv. 20 and 26, and it introduces us to the background story.

Before we move on to the historical background of Herod’s question, observe with Abraham Smith that “[s]cholarship on Mark 6:14–29 generally has featured a cluster of interrelated historical and literary conundrums.”¹⁶⁴ This focus has often given short shrift to other themes in the text. For example, Smith notes the presence of a tyrant theme: “Mark’s textured construction of Herod Antipas as a ‘tyrant’ type, however, remains virtually unnoticed.”¹⁶⁵ In his article, he explains that this was a well-known type in literature. There were several “stock features”: the tyrant’s paranoia, the tyrant’s possession of a bodyguard, the tyrant’s display of excess, and the tyrant’s encounter with a philosopher.¹⁶⁶ It is likely that Mark’s audience would have at least subconsciously detected this type, and it would have produced a particular pathos in the audience beyond the mere tragedy of the story.¹⁶⁷

The background story begins with the order of Herod to have John arrested and put in prison.¹⁶⁸ The first question that arises here is, how could Herod order this

¹⁶⁴ Abraham Smith, “Tyranny Exposed: Mark’s Typological Characterization of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29),” *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 259.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 262

¹⁶⁶ See the explanation in *ibid.*, 272ff.

¹⁶⁷ And it is a classic tragedy, as Gelardini notes: “this crime bears all the hallmarks of tragedy so aptly described by Aristotle: it is unrighteous, arbitrary, and dreadful . . .” Gelardini, “The Contest for a Royal Title: Herod Versus Jesus in the *Gospel According to Mark* (6,14–29; 15,6–15),” 101.

¹⁶⁸ Note that Mark had already introduced this point in Mark 1:14.

arrest?¹⁶⁹ According to Mark 1, John was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, but Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee. An explanation is that Herod also ruled in Perea near Judea, and it is likely that John preached there as well. Josephus reports that John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed in Machaerus, a fortress in Perea.¹⁷⁰ Samuel Sostre puts the two together: Machaerus was located in the inferior part of Perea, the territory on the east side of the River Jordan controlled by Antipas, a territory where John was performing his baptism ministry and where he, most likely, preached against any happenings he considered sinful—such as the behavior of Antipas.¹⁷¹ We will see that this explains a conundrum about the relationship between Josephus and Mark that commentators have long pondered.

The second question relates to Herodias being Philip's wife. The only brother of Herod we know for certain was named Philip is the tetrarch Philip, a tetrarch in the area northeast of Galilee. The trouble is that Josephus reports that it is Herod who was the husband of Herodias and that Philip the tetrarch married the daughter of Herodias, Salome. In light of this, some scholars suggest Mark and Matthew were simply in error. The problem with that view is that it would involve them in significant errors in the identity of Herodias' husband, Philip the tetrarch's wife, and the identity of Philip the tetrarch's children.¹⁷² This is a problem because these would be “blunders in matters of

¹⁶⁹ Samuel Sostre puts the question of where the banquet took place in broader context: “what authority did Antipas have to condemn John? Did John at any time move to preach in Galilee to fall under the rule of Antipas? How is it possible for Antipas to condemn a citizen of Judea that was ruled by a Roman governor without any prior coordination?” Samuel Sostre, “Machaerus: The Fortress Where John the Baptist was Beheaded,” *Journal of Biblical Theology* 1, no. 1 (March 2018): 76.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁷² See Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 134.

well-known history with which the evangelists otherwise show familiarity.”¹⁷³ On the other side, the details line up in every other way with Josephus, and Mark gives this Philip no title. So, how do we bring these things together? One suggestion is that Herod II was also named Philip. This would mean that Josephus’ Herod and Mark’s Philip are the same person. There seems to be no strong objection to making them the same person and much to commend it. As Hoehner noted, to say Josephus or the Gospel writers is wrong “may be the easiest solution to the problem but hardly the most cogent.”¹⁷⁴

The third question that arises is the motivation of Antipas for putting John in prison. For Josephus, the motivation was political. For Mark, it was because of Herodias.¹⁷⁵ However, human motives are complex. It is not at all hard to see that both could have been factors in what Herod did. On the face of it, we could easily see additional information on the reason for the imprisonment rather than a contradiction. Viewed in another way, we can probably bring these two things together. Hoehner cites C.H. Kraeling to explain some of the significance of John’s preaching: “It meant aligning the pious Jewish inhabitants of Peraea with those of the Arabic stock against the sovereign and thus fomenting sedition and encouraging insurrection. John’s denunciation of Anitpas as reported in Mark, far from contradicting Josephus, provides the one detail necessary to make Josephus’ account of the political threat involved in the Baptist’s execution intelligible.”¹⁷⁶ So, there is no need to see a contradiction at all.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷⁵ See Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 216–217.

¹⁷⁶ Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 145–146.

Verse 18 explains why Herodias' marriage ended up landing John in prison. John said, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." This sort of incestual intermarriage in the Herodian family seems to have been very common. As David M. Hoffeditz and Gary E. Yates note, Archelaus did the very same thing.¹⁷⁷ Edwards makes a helpful contrast between Antipas and John the Baptist on this point: "There were no sacred cows in his herds; he did not read the polls before speaking and acting; he protected no special interests; nor did he predicate what he said and did on the chances of success. John's was a costly courage."¹⁷⁸ John the Baptist was not afraid to declare the truth, even when he knew it could cause difficulties for himself.

According to Mark, Herodias wanted to kill John. Some see Herodias here as a type of Jezebel opposing Elijah.¹⁷⁹ According to Jesus, Elijah had already come by the time of Mark 9 (see 9:12–13). Mark does not say explicitly that it is John, but the text leaves little doubt. Mark also indicates this connection in two ways in his Gospel. His description of John's clothes is exactly like those of Elijah (see Mark 1:6 and 2 Kings 1:8). Also, just as Elijah had to face Jezebel, so John faced Herodias.

In spite of the fact that Herodias wanted to kill John, she was not able to. Why? Because of Herod's fear of John. Some see here a contradiction with Matthew's statement that he feared the people (14:5), but once again, motives are complex. This complex relationship with the prophets has a strong parallel in the relationship between

¹⁷⁷ David M. Hoffeditz and Gary E. Yates, "Femme Fatale *Redux*: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14–29," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2005): 214.

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 188.

¹⁷⁹ See Hoffeditz and Yates, "Femme Fatale *Redux*: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14-29," and James, "Why the Daughter of Herodias Must Dance (Mark 6:14-29)."

the ancient Israelite kings and the prophets (see 2 Kings 3:1–13, 5:1–10, 6:8–23, etc.). Stein notes that there is a very important reason why Mark brings this up: “The purpose of recounting Herod’s confusion is not a desire to vindicate him but to show John was not put to death because of a crime.”¹⁸⁰

There is a significant textual variant in v. 20. Cranfield summarizes the issues very nicely:

ἠπόρει. So κ B L W (ἠπορειτο) Θ bo; but A C D and the great majority of Greek MSS. and also most versions support ἐποίει. The support for ἠπόρει, though numerically weak, is strong in quality, and intrinsically this reading is more likely (after ἐποίει the following words would be just a weak repetition, but after ἠπόρει they make good sense—καί meaning here ‘and yet’). ἠπόρει vividly describes Herod’s moral weakness.¹⁸¹

Almost all modern translators adopt Cranfield’s reasoning here. It simply makes more sense of the text to say that Herod was perplexed than “did many things” when the textual evidence is certainly adequate to decide for ἠπόρει.

Then the “opportune time” (my translation, ἡμέρας εὐκαιρου) came. It was the well-timed opportunity for Herodias, not for Herod, let alone John the Baptist. It was the day she had been looking for. The text might lend us to believe that this took place in Galilee because of the presence of the “high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.” Again, the problem is that Josephus says that John was executed at Machaerus.¹⁸² Mark indicates that the execution happened immediately after Salome’s dance. This would not be possible if the party took place in Galilee. However, Hoehner is right when he says, “In fact, the evangelists are silent on the matter of location, and hence

¹⁸⁰ Stein, *Mark*, 304.

¹⁸¹ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 210.

¹⁸² Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 146–148.

there is nothing in the Gospels to contradict Josephus on this point.”¹⁸³ In fact, in light of what Josephus says, we can probably say that this party took place at Machaerus.¹⁸⁴

The specific opportunity was the dance of Herodias’ daughter. She danced and pleased Herod and his guests. A question to be considered here is a textual variant. The question is whether to read “his (αὐτοῦ)” or “her (αὐτῆς).” The textual evidence is about equal, but we know from history that Herodias brought a daughter into the marriage and that Antipas and Herodias had no children together. Stein acknowledges the challenge of fixing the exact relation but says that she was most likely “niece (on her father’s side), his grandniece (on her mother’s side), and his step-daughter.”¹⁸⁵ It does not seem, though, that there is any reason not to adapt, αὐτῆς. In this case, the sense would be as Cranfield describes: “We may translate ‘the daughter of Herodias herself’ (the nuance would be that it was actually Herodias’ own daughter who danced); or, perhaps more probably αὐτῆς may be explained as a redundant pronoun anticipating a noun (an Aramaism; cf. v. 17).”¹⁸⁶

Some commentators object to the idea that Salome could have done a dance at this party because “[i]t is clear that in Roman circles dancing was generally considered indecent at this time.”¹⁸⁷ However, Hoehner provides clear evidence of royal or noble

¹⁸³ Ibid., 148. See his whole discussion of this point on 146–148.

¹⁸⁴ Note the description in Sostre: “Herod had reconstructed it making in the interior of the fortress a magnificent palace where Antipas frequently resided. It is likely that he gave a great feast there, during which and according to the Bible, Salome executed the fatidic dance and fatidic request for John’s head.” Sostre, “Machaerus: The Fortress Where John the Baptist was Beheaded,” 79.

¹⁸⁵ Stein, *Mark*, 303.

¹⁸⁶ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 212–213.

¹⁸⁷ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 221, fn. 76. See Lane’s argument in this note as well.

daughters dancing, especially if it was not a sensual dance.¹⁸⁸ At any rate, the dance pleased Herod so much that he took an oath and offered a gift, up to “half [his] kingdom.” This reminds us of the Esther story (see Esther 5:3, 6, and 7:2).¹⁸⁹

The daughter’s response was to go immediately to Herodias and see what she would say. Herodias’ answer was “the head of John the Baptist.” What is interesting to observe here is the connections between the family. Antipas rules the nation, but his family has a profound effect on his emotions and actions. Edwards points out that Salome’s relation to Herodias is similar: “Salome is merely an extension of her will, a compliant pawn in a game of intrigue and power.”¹⁹⁰ This view of Herodias fits well with other things we know from Antipas’ life. As Hoffeditz and Yates observe, “One can also observe Mark’s portrayal of Herodias as an instigator of trouble in Josephus’s writings. On two different occasions the reader learns of Herodias’s yielding power, contrary to the social norms of the first century C.E.”¹⁹¹ Herodias finally got her way.

¹⁸⁸ Hoffeditz and Yates state, “While various dances did exist in the first century C.E., the Markan account seems to portray a popular entertainment dance called *pantomimus*. This solo dance reenacted a story, ‘often with dramatic and sensual movements and postures.’ Extravagant gifts often were granted to entertainers.” Hoffeditz and Yates, “Femme Fatale *Redux*: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14–29,” 157.

¹⁸⁹ For a full discussion of the possible background of this story in the Esther story as developed in Jewish tradition, see Roger Aus, *Water into Wine, and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther in 1 John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:7–29* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 186.

¹⁹¹ Hoffeditz, and Yates, “Femme Fatale *Redux*: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14–29,” 208. Also, see the examples they provide on 209. James notes, “This returns us finally to the point of origin, to Mark. As to historicity, Mark’s account is confirmed at most points by Josephus . . .” James, “Why the Daughter of Herodias Must Dance (Mark 6:14–29),” 463. The main difference is “Herodias’ responsibility and her daughter’s dance, with platter.” *Ibid.*

Herod did not reject the request. There is a dramatic change, however. The party was going well, and all of a sudden, great anxiety and doubt are thrown into the mix.¹⁹² He was moved by his “oaths and dinner guests” to carry out what Herodias and Salome had asked for. Stein notes the similarity with Pontius Pilate later in the Gospel: “Like Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas is trapped between what is right (releasing John) and what is expedient for his personal reputation.”¹⁹³

The story concludes with John’s disciples. They took his body and laid it in the tomb. It is interesting to contrast this with the likely original ending of Mark 16:8. There, the disciples flee from the tomb because Jesus has risen. Here, John has died and remains in the tomb.

Conclusion to Mark 6:14–29

In conclusion, here are a few points on the application and purpose of this text in light of the Gospel according to Mark. According to Lane, Mark 9:9–13 is a key. There, Jesus says that Elijah has come “and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him” (9:13b).¹⁹⁴ John’s death was to be expected, and Jesus’ was as well. John’s death foreshadows Jesus’, but there is a contrast in the final ending. Jesus will rise from the tomb.

Hoffeditz and Yates provide another way of viewing the text. John can be viewed as a prophet and also as a disciple. In light of John as a follower of Jesus, he shows what

¹⁹² William Lane says on 6:26: “The request of Salome, expressed with arrogance and malice, immediately sobered Antipas. Only moments before he had revelled in boisterous conviviality; now he experienced the deepest grief.” Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 222.

¹⁹³ Stein, *Mark*, 306.

¹⁹⁴ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 223.

can happen to the followers of Jesus. They write: “The account of John’s beheading also dispels any glamorous notions concerning discipleship. John joins a long line of prophetic messengers who suffer persecution for declaring the word of the Lord (cf. Matt. 23:30-32; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15), and the disciples of Jesus who proclaim the gospel will also share in this persecution.”¹⁹⁵ This is precisely what Jesus promises in 9:30.

This text also fits in with the broader purpose of Mark who seems to want us to keep asking, “Who is this man?” By the questions of the crowd and Herod, we enter into the question of Jesus’ identity for ourselves.

This passage also demonstrates the sinfulness of the opposition to Jesus and His message and highlights the wickedness of the world. This not only puts Jesus and His salvation in a better light, it also provides a very specific negative example of behavior. This is a parallel to what Jesus said in Mark 10, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.”

Third, consider Herod’s actions as examples of a lack of differentiation of self. It is the emotional reactions of Herodias that are driving him. He puts John in prison on account of her. When Herodias’ daughter asks for the head of John the Baptist, he does not want to do it but is afraid of the crowd. In some sense, Herod sees the right principle and the emotional process, but he lacks the ability to act according to principle.

¹⁹⁵ Hoffeditz and Yates, “Femme Fatale Redux: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14–29,” 221.

Finally, this text also demonstrates how the emotional dynamics of family life spill over into the broader life of those organizations of which those families are a part.¹⁹⁶ Speaking of religious organizations, Friedman notes that the anxiety that affects the church can come from the church family itself, the families of the lay people, or the families of the clergy. This is true even if it manifests itself in an attack on the clergy or a lay leader. The point is that the tension in the family can manifest itself in the life of the organization.¹⁹⁷ This is how the systems interact. These dynamics are observable in the state and other organizations as well as the church.

Conclusion of the Exegesis

In all of these passages, we have examples of significant emotional pressure with a recommended response, except in the case of Mark 6:14–29 where we see an example of a wrong response to emotional pressure. In 1 Timothy 4, the Apostle Paul considers the outward pressure of false teachers as well as the internal (to the church) pressure of people “looking down” on Timothy’s youth. In this letter, the Apostle Paul recommends that Timothy focus on himself and his teaching (1 Tim. 4:16). This means that Timothy should focus on his own moral development (1 Tim. 4:8, 12), clarity on his own teaching (1 Tim. 4:6, 15), and clear statements of the biblical position (1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 14, 16). This is a striking parallel to the idea of differentiation of self, which recommends in the case of emotional pressure that a person focus on his or her own functioning and not focus on the emotional pressures surrounding him or her.

¹⁹⁶ See Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 202–205.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

In Romans 12:9–21, the Apostle Paul gives us a summary of the Christian love ethic. He contemplates a variety of emotional situations, particularly ones in which other people attack a follower of Jesus by words or deeds. He commands believers to respond out of love and not to retaliate, which is what our natural (sinful) response might be. This would require self-control and thoughtful reflection in how to respond. Again, there is a parallel with differentiation of self in that the Apostle Paul recommends that a person not simply react in difficult situations but act in accordance with principle.

Calm in the storm is the theme of Matthew 4:35–41. There, we have the external storm on the water and the internal storm in the disciples. Jesus provides us an example of someone who is able to respond with calm and faith in the midst of these storms and not get caught up in the disciples' fear and anxiety. Jesus commends this same response in His disciples, challenging them that they should not have been so afraid. Here we see differentiation of self in that a person needs to not only look at what is scary but also see the other factors that might affect it, such as the presence of God. In this way, we can also see how a theological perspective might change the way we look at differentiation of self, which we shall consider more fully in chapter 4.

Finally, we have the example of Herod in Mark 6:14–29. In this chapter, emotion is in the driver's seat rather than reason and principle. This leads to the gruesome beheading of John the Baptist. Herod is an example of a lack of differentiation of self. He has real concerns about beheading John, but he reacts to his family and to the guests rather than doing what is right. In this way, we see how lack of self-control or differentiation of self can be a factor in leading to sinful acts.

In the next chapter, we will see how some of these same themes play out. John Chrysostom reflects the teaching of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4. Thomas Aquinas provides careful teaching on how to remain calm in the face of fear. Martin Luther demonstrates how a follower of Jesus both struggles to carry this out and can in the end do so by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Reformed spirituality writers of the seventeenth century continued to make use of the same themes of Scripture and their predecessors in church history and develop them. Following the Scriptures, we will see how these writers saw that it was extremely important to understand one's emotional response and not let it determine one's actions but instead to be led by reason, principle, and Scripture.

CHAPTER THREE

Differentiation of Self in Church History

Looking for the concept of differentiation of self in church history is not a simple process. You can't simply look up the chapter on "differentiation of self" in Peter Lombard or Augustine like you can look up the doctrine of the Trinity or the ascension. In order to find references in church history, you have to understand what is meant by differentiation of self in the scientific literature and then find something that closely fits with the concept in church history.

Recall that differentiation of self is not being different or unemotional. It is understanding the emotional process and being able to distinguish it from the thinking process in the human mind. Once that is understood, growing in differentiation of self is developing the ability to act according to thinking and principle in the face of emotional pressure. Once you have this clearly in mind, the parallels in church history become a little bit clearer.

In this section, we will begin with a discussion of John Chrysostom's *On the Priesthood*. His teaching there strongly parallels what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 4. He expands significantly on the types of emotional pressures that ministers face. He insists strongly that they must learn to act according to their principles and not according to this powerful emotional pressure, which he himself felt acutely.

From Chrysostom, we will move to the great teacher of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas. Anxiety, in BFST, is a response to a perceived threat. In the Bible and church history, a word that is close to this is fear. Fear can cause us to act out of emotion and contrary to our principles. Thomas Aquinas explains that this tendency can be overcome by the development of the virtue of courage.

After Aquinas, we will look at how Luther acted according to principle rather than in line with his fears at the Diet of Worms and that this ability was rooted in his theological reflection. Luther demonstrates the challenges that believers face in reacting out of principle rather than emotion but also the possibilities of what they can do by God's grace.

Finally, we'll look at a few of the Reformed writers on spirituality from the seventeenth century to see how they developed and articulated a concept somewhat parallel to differentiation of self. We will see that in each case, they taught and explained an ability to see and understand the emotional process and act according to principle and Scripture in the face of that emotional process, which is the substance of differentiation of self. We will consider writings from William Ames, Wilhelmus à Brakel, John Flavel, and Francis Turretin. In each case, we find the importance they place on distinguishing between the emotional and intellectual process and applying it to live a godly life.

John Chrysostom on Differentiation of Self in Ministry

BFST's therapy often begins by treating a family whose homeostasis or normal way of functioning results in symptoms. The therapy seeks to get the individuals in the system to look more objectively at their emotional interactions and begin to alter their thinking and interaction with the family. When they do so, the rest of the family most

likely will react intensely, seeking to get them to change back to the way they were before.¹ Eventually, however, if the person who is changing his or her functioning can persist, then the whole system may adjust to a new equilibrium or homeostasis. When this occurs, the symptoms often disappear.²

One important aspect of the nuclear family emotional system is that not all members of the family are equal in importance to the system. This means that change in one individual can be more or less likely to produce changes in the system. For example, a youngest child's ability to react differently is less likely to produce change than that of the father.³ Change in a parent makes the whole system much more likely to change.

Based on this understanding of how the family system works (and other considerations), Edwin Friedman developed his idea of leadership by differentiation of self. Friedman describes it this way: "If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as 'head' and work to define his or her own goals and self, while *staying in touch* with the rest of the organism, there is a more than reasonable chance that the body will follow (emphasis his)."⁴ The key challenge is to remain differentiated from the body while staying connected with it. The hard part is maintaining your own position as

¹ "The togetherness forces are so strong in maintaining the status quo that any small step toward differentiation is met with vigorous disapproval of the group." Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1978), 371.

² However, Murray Bowen's caution is important: "A differentiating effort that is successful has to be for 'self' alone. If it is done for self alone and the effort is to be successful, the system automatically benefits also. If it is done primarily to help others or with the expectation that others will approve and express appreciation, then the effort was for togetherness and not for differentiation; an emotional system does not appreciate such stressful nefarious maneuvers in the service of togetherness." *Ibid.*, 518.

³ "If the world of counseling generally tends to focus on individual symptoms rather than on family emotional process, this is particularly the case when the symptom is located in the child. This is most unfortunate because children tend to occupy the least influential position in the family hierarchy." Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 100.

⁴ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 229.

head when the body wants you to be different. When they want you to be different, it is often easier to withdraw than to stay connected. As Friedman explains, “Many leaders have the capacity to stay in touch, fewer leaders have the capacity to differentiate themselves, fewest have the capacity to remain connected while maintaining self-differentiation.”⁵ Can the leader be self-directed, non-reactive, and connected? If so, according to Friedman, it is likely that he will be able to lead the body in the direction the leader believes is necessary. This is the heart of the application of differentiation of self to leadership in general and ministry leadership in particular.

In this section, we will compare Friedman’s perspective with that of the Church Father John Chrysostom (349–407).⁶ Chrysostom explains the nature of church leadership in his book *On the Priesthood*.⁷ We will consider this in detail and show how John Chrysostom applies differentiation of self to leadership in the church. He does so in the context of defending his refusal of ordination to the episcopate and his hiding from those who would seek to ordain him. *On the Priesthood* is divided into six books. In the first book, Chrysostom gives the background of his refusal, and in the next five books, he explains why he refused. All of this takes place in the form of a dialogue with his good friend Basil (not Saint Basil the Great, 329–379).

⁵ Ibid., 230.

⁶ On the life of John Chrysostom, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁷ John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:25–83) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999). On the background of the book, see Richard Valantasis, “Body, Hierarchy, and Leadership in Chrysostom’s *On the Priesthood*,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 10, no. 4 (1995): 455–471.

Chrysostom's refusal takes place in the context of an intense emotional situation. He begins by explaining that he had many friends but no one as close to him as Basil. They were so close that Basil wanted Chrysostom to live with him. When Chrysostom's Mother found out about it, she pleaded with him to stay with her. We learn that she had been widowed when Chrysostom was very young, and she explained to Chrysostom what a comfort he had been to her. She urged him: "do not plunge me into a second widowhood; nor revive the grief which is now laid to rest: wait for my death: it may be in a little while I shall depart."⁸ Basil, however, did not relent but pressed Chrysostom all the more. While all this was going on, the electors for the episcopate came to take Chrysostom and Basil for the office. Chrysostom hid, but they succeeded in taking Basil. Basil did not want to go, and so he was grieved at being placed in the office. He was also grieved by the criticism that his friend received for having refused the office. It was all over town. It's in this context that Chrysostom explains his view of the office.

For Chrysostom, the reason for refusing the office was that he was unqualified to deal with the multiple emotional pressures that came with the office. These pressures came from God Himself, from the people, from the priest, and from the nature of leadership.

First, there were pressures from God Himself. Chrysostom explains how important it was for the priests of the Old Testament to administer the rites correctly. He explains that God held them accountable for proper administration. He then goes on to say that the rites of the New Testament are much more serious. "[T]hey are not only

⁸ Ibid., 1.5, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:34).

marvellous to behold, but transcendent in terror.”⁹ He provides a compelling example,

Saint Paul:

Even Paul, with all His gifts, was afraid: No man loved Christ more than Paul: no man exhibited greater zeal, no man was counted worthy of more grace: nevertheless, after all these great advantages, he still has fears and tremblings concerning this government and those who were governed by him. “I fear,” he says, “lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ.” And again, “I was with you in fear and in much trembling . . . ”¹⁰

It is a great sign of love to God to shepherd His flock well, but it is also a very fearful thing to do it badly. Thus, there is an intensity in the relationship with God not present for the ordinary believer. In fact, Chrysostom explains the intense fear so well that he has Basil responding, “I am at present scarce master of myself, thou hast reduced me to such a state of fear and trembling by what thou hast said.”¹¹

That would be enough, but there is also tremendous emotional pressure from the people around him, “for all who surround him are ready to smite and overthrow him: not enemies only and adversaries, but many even of those who profess friendship.”¹² He provides an extended discussion of these types of emotional pressures in 3.17. He says, everyone wants a visit from him. If he ever visits the rich for some reason or another, “he is immediately stigmatized with a character for fawning and flattery.” Everything he does is under scrutiny. “For the public rigorously criticize their simplest actions, taking note of the tone of their voice, the cast of their countenance, and the degree of their laughter. He

⁹ Ibid., 3.4, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:47).

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.7, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:48).

¹¹ Ibid., 4.1, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:62).

¹² Ibid., 3.14, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:52).

laughed heartily to such a man, one will say, and accosted him with a beaming face, and a clear voice, whereas to me he addressed only a slight and passing remark.”¹³ The people around him are highly emotionally reactive to his actions.¹⁴

If he only had to deal with emotional pressure from without, then the office might be less challenging. However, he also has to deal with the emotional pressure from within. He calls these emotional reactions “wild beasts.” And what are they?

They are wrath, despondency, envy, strife, slanders, accusations, falsehood, hypocrisy, intrigues, anger against those who have done no harm, pleasure at the indecorous acts of fellow ministers, sorrow at their prosperity, love of praise, desire of honor (which indeed most of all drives the human soul headlong to perdition), doctrines devised to please, servile flatteries, ignoble fawning, contempt of the poor, paying court to the rich, senseless and mischievous honors, favors attended with danger both to those who offer and those who accept them, sordid fear suited only to the basest of slaves, the abolition of plain speaking, a great affectation of humility, but banishment of truth, the suppression of convictions and reproofs, or rather the excessive use of them against the poor, while against those who are invested with power no one dare open his lips.¹⁵

There are all sorts of ways that the priest can go wrong by the way that he reacts to the situations of which he is a part. This is also intense emotional pressure that must be resisted in order to function well in the office.

¹³ Ibid. Some of this perspective on leadership may have arisen from watching his Mother. He describes her condition this way: “For no words are adequate to describe the tempest-tossed condition of a young woman who, having but lately left her paternal home, and being inexperienced in business, is suddenly racked by an overwhelming sorrow, and compelled to support a load of care too great for her age and sex. For she has to correct the laziness of servants, and to be on the watch for their rogueries, to repel the designs of relations, to bear bravely the threats of those who collect the public taxes, and harshness in the imposition of rates. . . . even if it be a girl, great anxiety will be caused to the mother, although free from much expense and fear: but a boy fills her with ten thousand alarms and many anxieties every day, to say nothing of the great expense which one is compelled to incur if she wishes to bring him up in a liberal way.” Ibid., (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:34).

¹⁴ Note these are exactly the sorts of things that BFST picks up on as ways in which anxiety is passed around a system. See Michael Kerr, *Bowen Theory’s Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 89–94.

¹⁵ John Chryostom, *On the Priesthood*, 3.9, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:49).

Fourth, the process of leadership itself is a source of tremendous pressure. Chrysostom explains that once a man is a leader in the church, there is a connection between the leader and the followers that will have an effect, for good or for ill. He compares this to a shepherd and the sheep. “For the pastor of sheep has his flock following him, wherever he may lead them.”¹⁶ He also compares it to the relationship of the head to the body.¹⁷ He notes that all he does has an effect in the followers. For example, he may not be bothered by not being able to defend the truth in a debate. However, the followers get discouraged and even end up in “shipwreck.”¹⁸ This requires him “to be sober minded, and penetrating in discernment, and possessed of innumerable eyes in every direction, as one who lives not for himself alone but for so great a multitude.”¹⁹ Such is the pressure of the leadership position.

So, what is the leader to do? He needs to stay the course, which is no easy thing to do. Chrysostom says, “Thus the priest ought to be protected on all sides by a kind of adamantine armour, by intense earnestness, and perpetual watchfulness concerning his manner of life . . .” He goes on to say, “The souls therefore of men elected to the priesthood ought to be endued with such power as the grace of God bestowed on the bodies of those saints who were cast into the Babylonian furnace.”²⁰ They need an ability to walk into this emotional fire and not be burned. Chrysostom contrasts the life of the priest to the life of the monk. The monk develops virtue in isolation outside of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.4, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:47). 2.4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.10, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:50). 3.10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.9, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:69).

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.14, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:52).

²⁰ Ibid.

emotional pressures of human interaction and leadership. The priest, however, must be “very discreet, and skilled in many matters, and to be as well versed in the affairs of this life as they who are engaged in the world . . .” and at the same time “be free from them all more than the recluses who occupy the mountains.”²¹ He needs to be engaged in the world but not emotionally of it, we might say.

The most important tool in the leader’s tool kit for carrying out the leadership function is the preaching of the Word of God.

Pray, art thou not aware that that body is subject to more diseases and assaults than this flesh of ours, is more quickly corrupted, and more slow to recover? . . . But in the case before us, it is impossible to take any of these things into consideration; nay there is but one method and way of healing appointed, after we have gone wrong, and that is, the powerful application of the Word.²²

The preaching of the Word is the most important tool we have, and, note, not there mere reading but the application of the Word to particular cases. This is the key, but it is not easy to use either. There is much within and without that keeps the preacher from proclaiming the Word of God accurately. The main thing that keeps him from doing so is love of praise. Love of praise gives the congregation only food “as will suit their taste,” not what they actually need.²³ Chrysostom concludes from this, “Therefore it is especially necessary to be trained to be indifferent to all kinds of praise.”²⁴ This means an ability to see the emotional pressure and to act in accordance with what is right rather than

²¹ Ibid., (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:76). The goal is to be just as peaceful with the multitudes as the recluse: “But if any one who has devoted himself to whole multitudes, and has been compelled to bear the sins of many, has remained steadfast and firm, guiding his soul in the midst of the storm as if he were in a calm, he is the man to be justly applauded and admired of all, for he has shown sufficient proof of personal manliness.” Ibid., 6.7, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:77).

²² Ibid., 4.3, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:64).

²³ Ibid., 5.2, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:71).

²⁴ Ibid., 5.8, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:73).

following the natural reaction.²⁵ The other side of praise is the insults, criticism, and challenges that others bring against him. He must also learn to stand above these. He writes:

To what else ought he then to be indifferent? Slander and envy. Unseasonable evil speaking, however (for of course the Bishop undergoes some groundless censure), it is well that he should neither fear nor tremble at excessively, nor entirely pass over; but we ought, though it happen to be false, or to be brought against us by the common herd, to try and extinguish it immediately. For nothing so magnifies both an evil and a good report as the undisciplined mob. For accustomed to hear and to speak without stopping to make inquiry, they repeat at random everything which comes in their way, without any regard to the truth of it.²⁶

So, what should be his attitude?

Therefore the Bishop ought not to be unconcerned about the multitude, but straightway to nip their evil surmisings in the bud; persuading his accusers, even if they be the most unreasonable of all men, and to omit nothing which is able to dispel an ill-favored report. But if, when we do all this, they who blame us will not be persuaded, thenceforward we should give them no concern. . . . Thus then must the Priest behave towards those in his charge, as a father would behave to his very young children; and as such are not disturbed either by their insults or their blows, or their lamentations, nor even if they laugh and rejoice with us, do we take much account of it; so should we neither be puffed up by the promises of these persons nor cast down at their censure, when it comes from them unseasonably.²⁷

²⁵ We should note here that Chrysostom does not underestimate the challenge of this: “But this is hard, my good friend; and perhaps, methinks, even impossible. For I know not whether any man ever succeeded in the effort not to be pleased when he is praised, and the man who is pleased at this is likely also to desire to enjoy it, and the man who desires to enjoy it will, of necessity, be altogether vexed and beside himself whenever he misses it. For as they who revel in being rich, when they fall into poverty are grieved, and they who have been used to live luxuriously cannot bear to live shabbily; so, too, they who long for applause, not only when they are blamed without a cause, but when they are not constantly being praised, become, as by some famine, wasted in soul, particularly when they happen themselves to have been used to praise, or if they hear others being praised.” *Ibid.*, 5.4, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:71).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* A comparable work is Charles Bridges’ (1794–1869), *The Christian Ministry* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), 112–126. He believed that “a very large proportion of our inefficiency may be traced to the source of worldly conformity.” *Ibid.*, 120 or, in BFST terms, lack of differentiation of self. He goes on to describe fear of man as a central reason for lack of ministerial ineffectiveness: “What conscientious Minister is not painfully reminded of the truth of the inspired aphorism—‘The fear of man brings a snare?’” *Ibid.*, 122.

He needs an ability to look at slander and attacks more objectively and act in accordance with wisdom, reason, and Scripture. He must not let himself be caught up in the winds of emotional reaction to the attacks that he experiences.

Even though the leader must be clear on the Word of God and stand above praise and attack, this does not mean that he should be insensitive to the emotional condition of his followers. He needs to stay connected in a compassionate way. As Chrysostom says in regard to censures, the priest must “proportion it to the scale of the offence, but [also] keep in view the disposition of the sinner . . .”²⁸ The priest faces a formidable challenge in his leadership. He must stand above the fray emotionally but also know how to engage with his people with tenderness. As Chrysostom puts it: “Consider, then, what kind of man he ought to be who is to hold out against such a tempest, and to manage skillfully such great hindrances to the common welfare; for he ought to be dignified yet free from arrogance, formidable yet kind, apt to command yet sociable, impartial yet courteous, humble yet not servile, strong yet gentle, in order that he may contend successfully against all these difficulties.”²⁹ Chrysostom advocates awareness of the leader’s own feelings and an ability to keep doing his duty, but he also wants leaders to engage with sensitivity and compassion with the feelings of others.

The priest should be able to exist with people’s desire to be close to him or without it. Chrysostom suggests that the person who can differentiate himself in this way,

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 2.4, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:41).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.8, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:62).

acting according to what he believes without concern for approval can not only lead well but enjoy health himself. He can act as out of a “quiet haven of rest.”³⁰

So, how does Chrysostom suggest that we do all this? There is not much Gospel encouragement in this book whose design is to explain why one would *not want* to enter the ministry and would obtain safety from all these dangers by “not undertaking this office at all.”³¹ However, it is clear that Chrysostom does not believe that carrying out this office is impossible. He believes in the grace of God.³² At the end of the book, Chrysostom has Basil saying: “For I am no longer concerned about the excuses I shall give them on thy behalf, but what excuse I shall make to God for myself and my own faults.”³³ Chrysostom responded,

But since this is pleasant to thee, take courage, dear soul, for at any time at which it is possible for thee to have leisure amid thine own cares, I will come and will comfort thee, and nothing shall be wanting of what is in my power. . . . For I believe, said I, that through Christ who has called thee, and set thee over his own sheep, thou wilt obtain such assurance from this ministry as to receive me also, if I am in danger at the last day, into thine everlasting tabernacle.³⁴

Chrysostom had already noted that there were “many, who are superior to these entanglements, and exceed in number those who have been caught by them.”³⁵ According to Chrysostom, Basil should be encouraged that he would be one of them.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 4.1, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:62).

³² Ibid. He says: “Do not, I beseech and implore thee, do not be so downcast. For while there is safety for us who are weak, namely, in not undertaking this office at all, there is safety for you too who are strong, and this consists in making your hopes of salvation depend, next to the grace of God, on avoiding every act unworthy of this gift, and of God who gave it” (Ibid.).

³³ Ibid., 6.13, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:83).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.10, (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/9:49).

Beyond all this, we can consider the whole scope of the book as helpful. What Chrysostom does in the treatise is to show us the nature of the priesthood and its challenges. He opens our eyes to the challenges from within and without and helps us to see God with the eyes of faith. It is this entire picture that can enable a leader to see things more objectively and have at least a beginning of acting outside mere emotional reaction.

In conclusion, we can see that what Chrysostom says is very much in line with how Friedman and by extension BFST explain leadership. There are innumerable emotional pressures that arise from within and without the leader. The leader is connected to the followers, and they will always tend to move in his direction. The main thing is for the leader to maintain both connection and differentiation of self. He must not be drawn into the attacks or the praise of people. Instead, he needs to focus on his duty and doing what is right and good for all the people. The major difference is that Chrysostom emphasizes the divine relationship as the primary help and context for obtaining differentiation of self.

Thomas Aquinas on Fortitude

Fortitude Proper and in General

Increasing differentiation of self is not easy. Much inside us revolts against moving outside the emotional reactions that repeated actions have carved into our minds and bodies. Much outside us opposes it as well. People are comfortable in an emotional equilibrium. When someone acts outside of the expected emotional reaction, those around them cry, "Change back!" They may attack, distance, or triangle. The ability to continue to act in conformity with principle in the face of this emotional pressure is what

Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) calls differentiation of self but which has often been called “courage” or “fortitude.” It is a virtue that involves rational reflection and practice to develop. To understand how Christian writers have explained differentiation of self, we will consider the teaching of Thomas Aquinas on courage or fortitude (used synonymously here).³⁶

Aquinas discusses fortitude in the context of his discussion of the major virtues. He discusses them under the heading of the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) and the four general or cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice). James F. Keenan provides a succinct explanation of what Aquinas means by virtue. Virtues are “good habits that dispose a power toward proper or right actions. Conversely, vices are bad habits that dispose a power toward improper or wrong actions.”³⁷ On the other hand, the cardinal virtues may be good in some respects but not in others. R.E. Houser points out that by defining these last four virtues in a general way, these virtues “may help in doing what is morally good, but Aquinas realized they may

³⁶ On the life and theology of Thomas Aquinas see Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). On the theology of Aquinas, see Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). On the ethics of Aquinas, see Stephen J. Pope, ed. *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 309.

³⁷ James F. Keenan, “Virtues,” in Philip McCoster and Denys Turner, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to The Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 195. Rebecca Konyndyk De Young’s definition in her discussion of courage is also helpful: “a virtue is a persisting disposition or character trait, learned and made firm with time and experience and practice.” Rebecca Konyndyk De Young, “Courage as a Christian Virtue,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 303.

also help us do what is morally wrong.”³⁸ Thus, Aquinas could appreciate the virtues of fortitude in the pagans while also critiquing them.³⁹

Aquinas begins his discussion with a general definition of fortitude. In one sense, it means the strength of mind that continues doing good no matter what. Every virtue requires this.⁴⁰ That is why it is a general or cardinal virtue. However, we can also understand it as a special virtue that “denotes a certain firmness of mind . . . required both in doing good and in enduring evil, especially with regard to goods or evils that are difficult.”⁴¹ According to Aquinas, there are two general hindrances to doing what is right: the lure of pleasures and the threat of pain. Temperance answers the first, and fortitude answers the second.⁴² Aquinas says that fortitude has two parts: aggression and endurance.⁴³ According to Aquinas, endurance is the more difficult aspect of the two. Rebecca Konyndyk De Young has captured the spirit of Aquinas’ thought here when she writes: “The heroic warrior, fighting for justice, still has some control . . . The martyr—the one who can best resist evil by enduring her suffering—must give up all illusions that

³⁸ R.E. Houser, “The Virtue of Courage” in Stephen J. Pope, ed. *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 309.

³⁹ Thus also in differentiation of self. We can admire the firmness with which someone can hold to a course of action in spite of family emotional pressure. However, in order to be truly good, this course of action must aim at the good of those around the person as well as the glory of God. Aquinas explains this throughout his discussion on fortitude. This will become evident throughout this chapter and the next.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Vol. 3: IIa IIaeQQ.1–148 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 2-2.123.2. On this point, see Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae: A Guide & Commentary* (New York: Oxford, 2014), 269.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.139.1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2-2.123.1.

⁴³ As to the first, it “regards preparation of the mind, and consists in one’s having a mind ready for aggression.” *Ibid.*, 2-2.128. Endurance requires two things. “The first is that the mind be not broken by sorrow and fall away from its greatness, by reason of the stress of threatening evil.” *Ibid.* “The other is that by the prolonged suffering of hardships man be not wearied so as to lose courage . . .” *Ibid.* The first refers to patience and the second to perseverance.

her own power can fix things or save the day.”⁴⁴ Being at someone’s mercy is much harder than having some opportunity to deliver oneself from an obstacle. To sum up, “fortitude is chiefly about fear of difficult things, which can withdraw the will from following the reason.”⁴⁵

Aquinas develops his discussion of fortitude in dialogue with many authors from the past but especially the Philosopher, Aristotle. It is fascinating that Aristotle limits courage or bravery to death on the battlefield.⁴⁶ Aquinas deals with this in the fifth Article of Question 123, “Whether Fortitude Is Properly About Dangers of Death in Battle?” Aquinas answers in the affirmative but still broadens the definition, “Moreover, a brave man behaves well in face of danger of any other kind of death . . .” The reason he wants to affirm Aristotle’s position is this: “it belongs to the notion of virtue that it should regard something extreme: and the most fearful of all bodily evils is death, since it does away all bodily goods.”⁴⁷ In other words, if you can have fortitude in the face of the threat of death, which takes away everything in this life, then you will not fear losing anything else in this life. Recall, however, that Aquinas said that endurance is greater

⁴⁴ Konyndyk De Young, “Courage as a Christian Virtue,” 308.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.123.2.

⁴⁶ Aristotle’s reasoning is as follows: it is not all deaths that require bravery but the most excellent death. The virtue depends on the type of death. It is not commonplace death that makes a man brave but deaths in the context of noble things. “Now such deaths are those in battle; for these take place in the greatest and noblest danger.” Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics” in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3.6. In response, see Patrick Clark, “Is Martyrdom Virtuous? An Occasion for Rethinking the Relation of Christ and Virtue in Aquinas,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 141-159. R.E. Houser responds to Aristotle: “One is tempted to ask: if the strength to face disgrace and disease, or lesser problems like a relentless foeman or rigorous teacher, are not truly courage, then what are they?” Houser, “The Virtue of Courage,” 305.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.123.4. As he says in as he says in 12, “fear of dangers of death has the greatest power to make man recede from the good of reason.” *Ibid.*, 2-2.123.12.

than aggression. Consequently, he extends his discussion of the virtue of fortitude to martyrdom. In martyrdom, we have the greatest example of fortitude because someone endures the greatest bodily evil for the sake of the greatest good, God.⁴⁸

The context for exercising courage is fear. It is important to recognize that for Aquinas fear is not necessarily a bad thing. There are some things that reason tells us should be avoided. Fear is appropriate when it leads us to avoid those things.⁴⁹ On the other side, when reason tells us not to avoid something, such as dying for confessing our faith, then fear is “inordinate” and sinful. The opposite of inordinate fear is *audacia*. This can be translated as daring, foolhardiness, or rashness. This is sin on the other extreme. It is not avoiding things that reason tells us to avoid. It is foolishly putting ourselves at risk.⁵⁰ Fortitude is only a virtue when it stands firm in the face of the right things. The right things to fear have a hierarchical relationship: “Now the evils of the soul are more to be feared than the evils of the body; and evils of the body more than evils of external things.”⁵¹ That is why martyrdom is an option. If someone threatens to kill someone for professing Christ, then that person should fear tainting their soul more than they do the death of the body. As Aquinas says, “Hence it belongs to fortitude that man should moderate his fear according to reason, namely that he should fear what he ought, and

⁴⁸ In Q. 124, Aquinas turns to martyrdom. According to Aquinas, “Now of all virtuous acts martyrdom is the greatest proof of the perfection of charity: since a man’s love for a thing is proved to be so much the greater, according as that which he despises for its sake is more dear to him, or that which he chooses to suffer for its sake is more odious.” *Ibid.*, 2-2.124.3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-2.125.1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2-2.125.4.

when he ought, and so forth.”⁵² Fear involves a rational calculation that is not always easy but is necessary in order to determine what obstacles should be overcome through fortitude and which should be avoided.

The motivation of fortitude is also important. It is not enough simply to endure things. You can endure the wrong things for the wrong reason, and you can endure good things for the wrong reason. In his discussion of vainglory, Aquinas sets forth the proper goals of fortitude. Some things we seek are unworthy of glory. Sometimes people think things are glorious, but they are incorrect in their judgment. People may do good things out of fortitude, but even these need to be referred to God. They also have to be for the right ends, namely, God’s glory and our neighbor’s profit.⁵³ Perhaps surprisingly, Aquinas notes that it is not wrong to seek your own glory. It is wrong when we seek it for something actually unworthy of glory, when we seek it from someone whose judgment is not sound, or when we seek it for ends that are not proper, i.e., anything other than God’s glory and our neighbor’s profit.⁵⁴ These parameters set limits on what makes fortitude a special virtue. Courage needs to have the right purpose.⁵⁵

Since courage needs the right motive, does that mean that anyone who is not aiming at the glory of God does not have courage? Aquinas believed that the natural man was capable of exercising the “cardinal” virtues in a general way. However, he believed

⁵² Ibid., 2-2.126.2.

⁵³ Ibid., 2-2.132.1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Aquinas scholar Josef Pieper puts it this way: “The praise of courage depends on the justice involved.” Josef Pieper, *An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 68.

that the theological virtues are infused by the grace of God.⁵⁶ At the same time, as special virtues, the virtue of fortitude and its subordinates (see discussion below) involved having the right faith, love, and aims. This, says Thomas, is a work of the grace of God. For example, he said that “it is evident that patience as a virtue, is caused by charity . . .” Since this is the case, grace is necessary. No one loves God without the help of grace.⁵⁷ Grace is the foundation of virtue in the fullest sense of the term.

Fortitude's Subordinate Virtues

After discussing fortitude as a special virtue, Aquinas discusses several other virtues that fit the basic characteristic of fortitude but are less than fortitude in some way. These subordinate virtues help us flesh out the general concept of fortitude. R.E. Houser explains this in a helpful way: “These subordinate virtues possess the formality of general courage (overcoming obstacles) and that of special courage (doing so in a rational and moral way), but they apply these formal traits to other matter, areas of life less harmful than death.”⁵⁸ These virtues are magnanimity, magnificence, patience, and perseverance.

The first subordinate virtue is magnanimity. Magnanimity is the virtue that seeks to do great and significant things. Magnanimity is similar to courage because through this virtue a person takes on tasks that are difficult and require overcoming many obstacles. Magnanimity is easier than courage, however, because to fail at a large project is easier than to lose one's life.⁵⁹ Aquinas follows Aristotle's idea of the virtues as a mean.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See Keenan, “Virtues,” 198.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.136.5.

⁵⁸ Houser, “The Virtue of Courage,” 310

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 311.

⁶⁰ See Aristotle, “*Nicomachean Ethics*,” 2.6–9.

Aquinas says that the vice in excess of this virtue is presumption, when we take on more than we are capable of doing. Pusillanimity is a vice in defect of magnanimity because the pusillanimous person refuses to do what they could do. Thus, “magnanimity observes the means, not as regards the quantity of that to which it tends, but in proportion to our own ability . . .”⁶¹ It is the quality of the desire and the opportunity that make a person magnanimous. We cannot judge it simply by the result.⁶² In discussing magnanimity, Aquinas discusses ambition and seeking after glory. According to R.E. Houser, it is important to recognize that for Aquinas “[d]esire for glory in itself is not bad.”⁶³ The question is the approach to glory. The problem is when people do not refer the glorious thing to God or the good of others. In fact, the great souled person will seek those great things.

The second subordinate virtue is magnificence. This means spending large sums of money on things that are good for the community and glorifying to God. This virtue is like courage because parting with one’s money is an obstacle. However, it is less than courage because magnificence “derives its difficulty from the dispossession of one’s property, which is of much less account than danger to one’s persons.”⁶⁴ Again, Aquinas places this in the context of the mean. The excessive vice is prodigality. This vice occurs when “it exceeds the proportion which reason requires to exist between expenditure and

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.130.2.

⁶² R.E. Houser notes, “greatness of soul also can be exhibited in small deeds made great by their eternal consequences.” Houser, “The Virtue of Courage,” 312.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.134.4.

work.”⁶⁵ This occurs not only from spending too much money on a noble project but money spent in excess to its nobility.⁶⁶ The vice in defect is meanness, when someone refuses to spend money on that which they could and should for the glory of God and good of their neighbor.

The third subordinate virtue is patience. Patience is the virtue “necessary to safeguard the good of reason against sorrow, lest reason give way to sorrow: and this patience does.”⁶⁷ Patience enables us to endure the challenges that we inevitably face when doing good. Konyndyk De Young captures this well by asking: “What fears implicitly work on us in everyday ways? Fears of disapproval? Of failure? Of loss of control? Of those we love?”⁶⁸ These are all things that involve real threat but not the threat of death, which is the proper object of courage. Even in losing lesser things, though, there has to be something in our hearts and minds that enables us to endure these sorts of losses. As Konyndyk De Young notes in her article, this way of thinking about courage is about our loves.⁶⁹ According to Aquinas, we can bear the loss of good things because we love something greater.⁷⁰

The fourth subordinate virtue is perseverance. Whereas patience enables us to suffer losses as we continue doing good, perseverance is the virtue that enables to

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2-2.135.2.

⁶⁶ See Houser, “The Virtue of Courage,” 313.

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.136.1.

⁶⁸ Konyndyk De Young, “Courage as a Christian Virtue,” 311.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 301–312.

⁷⁰ And this is why he says that grace is necessary for the exercise of patience. Love of God is an infused virtue, given by God’s grace.

actually continue to do the good thing, even when there are difficulties or trials. Aquinas says that the error in defect is effeminacy. He writes: “an effeminate man is one who withdraws from good on account of sorrow caused by lack of pleasure, yielding as it were to a weak motion.”⁷¹ One might not think that there is an error on the other side, but there is, according to Aquinas. It is pertinacity, when someone continues doing things that are not necessary or good in the face of difficulties.

These four subordinate virtues flesh out what Aquinas means by fortitude. His discussion helps us see how extensive the need for this virtue is.

Conclusion on Aquinas: Fortitude and Differentiation of Self

Aquinas is presenting essentially a doctrine of differentiation of self. He says that there are emotional pressures that would keep us from doing the things that we are supposed to do. The virtue of courage is what enables us to act in accordance with reason and principle rather than merely react emotionally. This involves a rational analysis of our real threats that is similar to BFST’s analysis of anxiety. It also involves continual practice. One does not become courageous in a day. Where Aquinas supplements Aristotle’s view of virtue (and by extension BFST’s) is in the goal of courage. A virtue is only truly virtuous if it is done for the right ends of God’s glory and the good of our neighbor. Further, this ability is from God’s grace. Since that is the case, Aquinas will also have a different understanding of how differentiation of self/courage is developed.

Luther on Differentiation of Self in Practice and in Theory

Luther had criticized the church. Criticizing the church was a scary thing to do. As Heinz Schilling wrote: “Those who criticized the church could not easily shake off the

⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.138.1.

memory of the bonfire lit in Constance some hundred years earlier to silence Jan Hus, the ‘heretical’ Czech reformer.”⁷² Within four years of his posting of his ninety-five theses, Martin Luther would have to face those fears. First, the Pope condemned him and excommunicated him. Then, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire instituted the imperial ban upon him. The two most powerful men in Western Europe along with a host of others opposed Luther and his teaching. And what was Luther’s response? “Here I stand.” He held fast to the position that he had reasoned out from the Scripture in the face of tremendous emotional pressure and threats. Luther believed that a Christian needed to understand his own principles and the emotional pressure that would lead him to deny them. He then had an obligation to act on his principles rather than reacting emotionally. That is the sum of Luther’s teaching, and it is a parallel to BFST’s idea of differentiation of self, which is about distinguishing the thinking process from the emotional pressure of the emotional processes of which we are a part. In this section, we will consider the intersection of what happened leading up to and at the Diet of Worms, Luther’s emotional state during these events, and Luther’s thinking about the issues at the Diet based on the broader context of his writings.

After the posting of the ninety-five theses, the hierarchy of the church was quick to demand that Luther explain himself, and Luther was happy to do so. He had opportunity before his own monastic brethren, the Augustinians; the papal legate Cardinal Thomas Cajetan, and with Johann Eck in debate at the University of Leipzig. Luther was happy to present his position, but he also struggled with great fear. As

⁷² Heinz Schilling *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*, trans. Rona Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 147.

Herman Selderhuis explains: “Luther was afraid to die a heretic’s death: ‘Along the way I thought: Now I will die! And in my mind I already saw the stake prepared before me and said: O, what a shame that would be for my parents.’”⁷³ Selderhuis refers here to Luther’s journey to see the papal legate Cajetan, but this was a concern throughout this period. Luther had the support of the Saxon nobility, but how did he know that they would stand with him?⁷⁴

It was in the context of these debates/hearings that Luther clarified his positions in his own mind. Particularly, in his debate with Eck at the University of Leipzig, Eck skillfully forced Luther to take more and more extreme positions. Heinz Schilling says:

With extraordinary debating skills, Eck drew precisely this conclusion and forced his sparring partner to adopt ever riskier positions, to the extent that Luther even found himself expressing solidarity with individual teachings of the Czech theologian Jan Hus, who had been burned as a heretic in 1415, and stating explicitly that councils could err, and, indeed, had erred.⁷⁵

After the debate, Luther continued to think though the teaching of Hus. As he thought about it, he came to the conclusion that Hus was right and that Paul and Augustine were Hussites after all.⁷⁶ Once Luther had come to that conclusion, “[t]he great Reformation treatises followed blow upon blow, and 1520/21 proved Luther’s ‘golden year’ as an author.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Herman Selderhuis, *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 113.

⁷⁴ As Schilling points out in *Martin Luther*, 147–148.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 155.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

In these treatises, Luther sets forth his understanding that each Christian has the responsibility to read the Scriptures for herself and make a judgment about whether any teaching is in conformity with it or not. It is especially in his treatise “To the Christian Nobility of a German Nation” that he explains this position.⁷⁸ He notes that the “Romanists” have three walls that keep out reform of the church. “The second wall is even less firm and sound, in that the Romanists want to be the sole masters of Scripture, although they never learned anything from it in their whole life.”⁷⁹ He made clear that every Christian is a priest who has the power to consider matters of faith for herself. “In addition, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have on faith, one gospel, and one kind of sacrament, why should we not also all have the power to determine and judge what is right or false in matters of faith?”⁸⁰ It is not only in their power. It is their duty. “Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to attend to the faith, understand, and champion it, and condemn all error.”⁸¹ Luther would go on from there to urge the nobles of the German nation to call a council to rebuke the errors of the papacy.

It is not surprising that the papacy responded quickly and strongly to these challenges. On June 15, 1520, the Pope issued his bull “Exsurge Domine.” It condemned 41 propositions from Luther’s writings and ordered him to recant within 60 days or face excommunication. Luther’s response was to continue “to insist that only refutation based

⁷⁸ Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of a German Nation,” in Tryntje Helferrich, ed., trans., *The Essential Luther* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2018), 48–58.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

in Scripture was valid,” and so he “refused to recant.”⁸² Eventually, Luther burned the papal bull that had threatened excommunication. According to Schilling, this was not as dramatic as it might be to us. “Only subsequently, reworked by the public and through memorialization, did Luther’s action become a revolutionary repudiation of his threatened excommunication.”⁸³ Nevertheless, it indicated clearly that Luther was not going to recant his position unless he was convinced by Scripture to do so. The Pope responded by excommunicating Luther. The question was now, what would the young German Emperor, Charles V, do in response?

The Events Leading up to the Diet of Worms

The Diet of Worms began its formal meeting in mid-January 1521. The Emperor did not summon Luther to the Diet until March 6, 1521. This was the result of negotiation and intrigue. Charles V seems to have had little personal sympathy for Luther. The papal nuncio wanted the Emperor to simply ratify the Pope’s decision and place him under the ban. The Pope had leverage here not simply because of his general authority but because Charles V had not yet been crowned Emperor, and the Pope was traditionally the one who crowned the Emperor.

On the other side, Charles V did not want to seem to be or be a pawn of the Pope. Robert Rosin explains: “Luther was, after all, a German university professor, and the emperor was to watch over the universities in his lands, so he could hardly let Rome simply reach in and pluck up a professor without giving him a hearing. The emperor had

⁸² Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 164.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 165.

his own legal rights and privileges to defend.”⁸⁴ The Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, also insisted that Charles V follow the Constitution on this matter and give Luther a hearing.⁸⁵ The rest of the nobility agreed to this position and made it their own. We must also understand that in the background was concern for sedition and revolt.⁸⁶

Charles V found a way to navigate between the two and accomplish his ends. Hartmut Lehmann notes: “To be sure, he did finally invite Luther to Worms, thereby acceding to the request of Frederick the Wise; but he kept Luther’s trial so brief that in the end, he did in effect pronounce the imperial ban immediately after the papal ban, thereby allowing the papal side to feel vindicated as well.”⁸⁷ This became clear after the fact, but it was not clear to those involved when the Emperor summoned Luther on March 6, 1521 and gave him a safe conduct to the Diet.

For his part, Luther was excited about the opportunity. He wanted all along to explain his views to the Emperor and the leading nobles of Germany. At the same time, the specter of Hus caused him a great deal of fear as he traveled to Worms. Again, his anxiety went up: “During the journey I had a feeling that, indeed, I now shall die. And I imagined the stake that had been prepared for me and often told myself, ‘Oh, what shame am I bringing on my parents!’ In this was the physical that made me afraid.”⁸⁸ Luther

⁸⁴ Robert Rosin, “Luther at Worms and the Warburg: Still Confessing,” *Concordia Journal* 32, no. 2 (April 2006): 161.

⁸⁵ See Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 167–168.

⁸⁶ But note that for Luther, “[t]he blending of religious reform with social upheaval was for Luther the work of the devil.” *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸⁷ Hartmut Lehmann, “Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883-1983,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 417–418.

⁸⁸ Cited in Selderhuis, *Martin Luther*, 154–155.

had the normal anxieties one might feel in going before the great and knowing they opposed you and could put you to death. Was Luther in any actual danger? Lehmann suggests that “there was probably no real danger to Luther in Worms, since the emperor was determined not to allow Luther’s case to prevent important agreements on other issues from being reached.”⁸⁹ I think that this assumes that there was no danger that the Saxon nobility could turn on him. It is hard to see how one could assume that this is the case, and Luther himself wondered whether they would stand with him.⁹⁰ Whatever the case, Lehmann admits: “there is no question that his subjective fears before and during the trip to Worms should be taken seriously . . .”⁹¹

Even though Luther had anxiety about the Diet, he also had much to encourage him. Schilling describes Luther as “already a famous figure, in today’s terms a best-selling author and media star.”⁹² Everywhere he went, people flocked to see him and hear him. To see the range of emotions in Luther, consider his response to his friend George Spalatin who warned him not enter the city. He said, “we shall enter Worms in spite of the gates of hell and the powers of darkness.” Earlier, he said he would go to Worms “and kick the Behemoth in the mouth between his big teeth.”⁹³ Luther did enter into Worms, and Selderhuis describes the sensation: “The entry into Worms, according to critics, was so well organized that most people would have been reminded of Jesus’s

⁸⁹ Lehmann, “Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883–1983,” 418.

⁹⁰ Schilling points this out in *Martin Luther*, 147–148.

⁹¹ Lehmann, “Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883–1983,” 418.

⁹² Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 175.

⁹³ Cited in Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2016), 167.

entry into Jerusalem.”⁹⁴ When Luther entered the hearing at Worms, they had to bring him by a side entrance because of the throng.⁹⁵

At the Diet

The Imperial summons to the Diet did not say anything about Luther recanting his works. Instead, it asked him to “give information about the doctrines and the books. . . produced by you.”⁹⁶ Numerous people present at the Diet produced accounts of what occurred at Luther’s hearing. One anonymous report said that Luther did not know what he would actually face until he entered the room.⁹⁷ When he entered the room, all his books were there. The secretary of the Bishop of Trier asked if these books were his and if he would recant. Luther had help as he stood before the Emperor. Hieronymous Schurf was the law professor at Wittenburg. He said, “Let the titles of the books be read!” This was done. Roper concludes that this audible recounting of the books “demonstrated as nothing else could the depth and range of Luther’s attack on the papacy and established Church.”⁹⁸ Luther responded by asking for a delay to consider the question. He was not entitled to such, but the Emperor granted him one day to think about it.⁹⁹

When Luther returned, he had prepared an answer. He said there were three types of statements in his books. The first were general truths of the Christian faith, and he

⁹⁴ Selderhuis, *Martin Luther*, 155.

⁹⁵ Roper, *Martin Luther*, 168.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁹⁷ This is an account that Schilling judged to be authentic, even though it was anonymous. See his explanation in Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 181.

⁹⁸ Roper, *Martin Luther*, 169.

⁹⁹ See further details on this in Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 181.

could not renounce these. The second were attacks on the Pope's tyranny, and he could not renounce these. Finally, he admitted that he was too strong in his denunciation of the Pope's supporters but that he could not renounce the actual criticisms.¹⁰⁰

The Imperial Orator responded to Luther's statements by saying: you did not answer the question. He wanted a plain and simple answer. At this point, Luther made one of the most famous speeches in the history of the Christian Church: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."¹⁰¹ The account published at Wittenburg concludes with these words: "I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen." There is some dispute over whether Luther actually said these words at Worms, but, as Roper notes: "If he did not say these words, this was the phrase that soon became famous. It certainly encapsulated the spirit of his appearance."¹⁰²

Luther's response left a strong impression on the crowd. News of it soon went out throughout Germany. His statement, "Here I stand!" became the rallying cry of Protestantism. In spite of this, the Emperor put him under the ban in the Edict of Worms. The German nation in general did not approve of this Edict. In addition, under the protection of the Saxon government, it was unlikely that its provisions would ever be enforced.

¹⁰⁰ A summary of the details as provided by Roper, *Martin Luther*, 171.

¹⁰¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰² See Lehmann, "Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883-1983," 417 and for the quote, Roper, *Martin Luther*, 172.

The Stand of Luther in Broader Context

Let us look at Luther's statement more closely. What Luther was claiming was that he was going to follow what his conscience judged to be correct based on "Scripture and plain reason." He could not go against this, for to go against what his conscience told him was good and right was not "safe."

What did Luther mean by conscience? According to Roper: "It has a modern resonance, suggestive of freedom of thought of the right of all individuals to decide for themselves. But this was not what Luther meant. . . . Whereas for Staupitz a conscience could be mistaken, and could be troubled with matters that were unimportant, for Luther it was the seat of certainty and could never be wrong."¹⁰³ Did Luther mean that the conscience could not be wrong? This seems on the face of it to contradict what he said in his speech: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason . . ." He seemed to specifically say that he could be wrong. So, what did Luther mean?

In his work, "The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," Luther provided a definition of the conscience:

For the conscience is not the power of acting but the power of judging which judges about works. Its proper work (as Paul says in Romans 2) is to accuse or excuse, to cause one to stand accused or absolved, terrified or secure. Its purpose is not to do, but to speak about what has been done and what should be done, and this judgment makes us stand accused or saved before God.¹⁰⁴

It is a faculty of judging whether something is right or wrong and whether or not an action or thought is right or wrong before God. However, this does not mean that it is

¹⁰³ Roper, *Martin Luther*, 172–173.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Micah S. Meek, "The Development of the Concept of the Conscience from Luther to Anglican Puritanism," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (2018): 48.

always right. As Micah S. Meek summarizes in his article on conscience in Luther:

“However, because the conscience is a fleshly component of man and influenced by the mind, the natural law is not always fully or correctly understood. This leads conscience to conclusions which are valid logically but not morally. . . Luther is severely suspect of the conscience because of this limitation.”¹⁰⁵ Robert Rosin explains it this way: “And I always am ready to take another look at rethink, even as Luther said he was willing to do—to retract what he had written if others could show his thinking was wrong.”¹⁰⁶

Luther did not believe that the conscience was always right.

Luther reflected on this very issue in his treatise, “On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Must Be Obeyed.” Luther made very clear that he believed that the secular rulers had the right to command believers in regard to body and goods. However, he said, “No one should or can command the soul, unless he knows how to show it the way to heaven. But this is something no man can do, only God alone. Therefore, in matters that concern the salvation of souls, nothing but God’s word should be taught and accepted.”¹⁰⁷ He went on to say that if you believe something or embrace something simply because the prince says it, you imperil your soul. “[I]f you do not contradict him and yield to him, letting him take from you your faith or your books, then you have truly denied God . . .”¹⁰⁸ Luther took conscience very seriously. If someone had concluded a teaching was

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 49–50.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Rosin, “Luther at Worms and the Warburg: Still Confessing,” 162.

¹⁰⁷ “On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Must Be Obeyed,” in Tryntje Helferrich, ed., trans., *The Essential Luther* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2018), 134–135.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 138.

from God, she had to believe it. However, this did not make it infallible. It just meant that she had to believe and do what she heard from God.

In this way, Luther's understanding is in line with the modern conception of "freedom of thought." In fact, it is not only in line with the modern conception, it is a source of it. As Rosin says, it is a "hinge of history, a turning point in the relationship of faith and authority."¹⁰⁹ For the Protestant Church, this speech provided tremendous clarity and a rallying cry. As Schilling put it: "Luther's speech has been called the key text of Protestantism, and for good reason."¹¹⁰

For the purposes of this project, we can also see Luther's speech as an illustration and example of differentiation of self. As Robert Rosin noted, "Luther did not take his stand simply to be contrary, to be different from Rome. And he was not out to build a personality cult. It gave him no pleasure to have to say that . . ."¹¹¹ Not only was this a speech that was not reactive to Rome, it was also made in the face of real threats and emotional pressure. It was in this context that Luther declared his own position. It was a speech born out of deep thought and careful consideration of his own principles. It was a statement of his own views without necessarily seeking to win others or condemn them. It simply stated who Martin Luther was. This falls in line with Kerr's description of an "I-position": "He is not attempting to influence or change others, but simply stating,

¹⁰⁹ Robert Rosin, "Luther at Worms and the Warburg: Still Confessing," 162.

¹¹⁰ Schilling, *Martin Luther*, 186.

¹¹¹ Robert Rosin, "Luther at Worms and the Warburg: Still Confessing," 162.

‘This is who I am; this is what I believe.’”¹¹² We might even summarize the goal of BFST as enabling people to say in a non-reactive way: “Here I stand.” The shape of Luther’s doctrine is in line with and supportive of the concerns of BFST’s emphasis on differentiation of self.

The Seventeenth Century Reformed Spirituality Writers on Living Rightly in the Face of Emotional Pressure

The seventeenth century witnessed a large increase in writings on the spiritual life of the Christian from Protestant writers. This includes the Puritans in Britain beginning with William Perkins and the writers of the Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*) in the Netherlands beginning with Willem Teellinck as well as French Reformed writers.¹¹³ Brian Cosby gives a good overview of the meaning of Puritanism. He notes that Puritanism was a diverse movement, but is characterized by several common features including “striving for personal holiness, a practical faith, communion with God, and the glory of God in all things.”¹¹⁴ The Further Reformation was similar in its emphases. Joel R. Beeke says, “The Dutch Further Reformation preachers, like the Puritans, excelled in linking biblical truth with personal experience and practical application.”¹¹⁵ This short

¹¹² Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: The Role of the Family as an Emotional Unit that Governs Individual Behavior and Development* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1988), 105. Note that most of this book is written by Michael Kerr and the epilogue is written by Bowen.

¹¹³ See Joel R. Beeke, “Introduction,” in Willem Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness*, trans. Annemie Godbehere, ed., Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003), 11–12.

¹¹⁴ He also notes that they were united by a reaction against the Elizabethan Settlement, preaching and teaching of the Bible, and a commitment to the *solas* of the Reformation. Brian H. Cosby, “John Flavel: The ‘Lost’ Puritan,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011):114. Cosby cites Joel R. Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xv-xix.

¹¹⁵ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, “Wilhelmus à Brakel’s Biblical Ethics of Spirituality,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 108.

discussion will explain how these writers approached the issue of emotional pressure. How does one live rightly in accordance with God's will in the face of emotional pressure to conform to the world? In BFST terms, how does one see the emotional process and act in accordance with reason and principle? We will consider portions of the writings of William Ames, Wilhelms à Brakel, John Flavel, and Francis Turretin as examples of the continuing development of this idea in church history. Their expositions are in continuity with that of Aquinas.

William Ames

William Ames (1576-1636) was an influential Puritan thinker who labored in both England and the Netherlands.¹¹⁶ Billy Kristanto says that William Ames was “critical of the sufficiency of mere theoretical knowledge” and saw theology as the foundation “living well that finally leads to true and eternal happiness.”¹¹⁷ This aim fits well with the characterization of the Puritans noted above.

Ames wrote a short work summarizing his theology published in English as *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*.¹¹⁸ While there is no specific chapter dealing with fear, courage, or emotional pressure, Ames does deal with these matters in the second part of the work in his chapter on virtue. We will consider this section briefly.

¹¹⁶ On his influence see Billy Kristanto, “William Ames and his Contribution to Evangelical Theology,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 4 (2015): 343–355. See also Allen Stanton, “William Ames and the Westminster Assembly,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 14 (2018):51–62. Kristanto’s work also includes references to most of the current scholarly work on Ames.

¹¹⁷ Kristanto, “William Ames and His Contribution to Evangelical Theology,” 255.

¹¹⁸ William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Printed by Edward Griffin for Henry Overton in Popes-Head-ally, 1639).

Ames believed that theology was about living well. Part of his theology of living well is his view of virtue. Ames believed that virtue was found in the will not in the intellect. Thus, Ames wanted to use the word virtue in a way that would encompass what philosophers might call the “moral virtues” as opposed to excellence in any skill or practice or the intellectual virtues.¹¹⁹ Ames does qualify this to some degree, however, because knowledge of the revealed will of God is necessary for the exercise of virtue.¹²⁰ He accepts the idea of the cardinal virtues, but he prefers to call them conditions “which are necessarily required in that disposition which deserves the name of virtue.”¹²¹

In this context, Ames brings up courage or fortitude. He defines it as “a firm persisting in doing rightly, enduring and overcoming all those difficulties which may arise either from the continuance of the act which is required or from other impediments, whatever they may be.”¹²² This general virtue includes a variety of subsidiary virtues: confidence, which is opposed to fear; perseverance and constancy; and patience. He believed that these virtues were gifts of divine grace, but that they were degrees of virtue in individuals based on differences of basic natural disposition, habit, judgment, or greater gifts from God.¹²³ Consequently, it was necessary to seek to develop the virtues, for “[b]y however much the acts of virtues, or the contrary vices, are more intent, more

¹¹⁹ Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 2.4. For the distinction between virtues and the moral virtues, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 181–203.

¹²⁰ Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 2.13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.25. He sees them as being expressed in Peter’s list in 2 Peter 1:5–7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.30.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.41.

frequent, and more continual, they will prevail that much either to increase or diminish virtues.”¹²⁴

Thus, Ames saw that virtue was necessary for the moral development of the Christian. He held to a version of the cardinal virtues and believed that the virtue of following one’s convictions in the face of challenges was a virtue that a Christian should develop. He places all of this in the context of a Protestant soteriology, which is the foundation for the development of these virtues.

Wilhelmus à Brakel

In light of Ames’ emphasis and the general challenges the Puritans and Dutch Reformed faced in their political context, it is somewhat surprising that there is not more discussion of following one’s own convictions in the face of emotional pressure or courage. A notable exception is found in the writings of Dutch preacher Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711).¹²⁵ Lydia Kim-Van Daalen notes that while the virtues were important to the Reformed spirituality writers of the seventeenth century, they did not seem to make extensive use of these categories in their writings. She suggests that Brakel’s “exposition of virtues is unique and of great value for Christian soul care.”¹²⁶ She provides a helpful overview of Brakel’s discussion of virtue. Brakel believed that it

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2.44.

¹²⁵ For more on Brakel, see the biography by Willem Fieret in Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 4 Vols. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), 1.xxxi-cxi.

¹²⁶ Lydia Kim-Van Daalen, “Wilhelmus à Brakel’s Spirituality of Virtues and Its Implications for Soul Care” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 280. She also writes, “While they considered virtues to be of great importance, they, with notable exceptions, did not focus their attention on them nor did they define, explain, or apply them for believers to the extent that à Brakel did.” Ibid., 297. She suggests that Brakel’s *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* could be a sort of handbook for Christian counseling and soul care, especially with an index geared toward that end. Ibid., 299. For a somewhat different perspective on Brakel, see Beeke and Smalley, “Wilhelmus à Brakel’s Biblical Ethics of Spirituality,” 107–124.

was only by grace that a person could exercise virtue but that the person who was spiritually alive would “exercise many virtues.”¹²⁷ In fact, she counts 50 virtues that Brakel mentions in the context of his discussion of the 10 Commandments.¹²⁸ While these virtues are the gift of God’s grace, we have a part to play in their development, for they are “strengthened by way of much exercise.”¹²⁹

Brakel writes extensively about the emotional challenges that Christians face in seeking after godliness. We are interested here specifically in the challenges that come from the opposition or emotional pressure of other people. Brakel deals with this issue most directly in his discussion of spiritual strength or courage. He says that there are two main issues that require spiritual strength or courage. The first is the lapse of time between the promise and its fulfillment and the second is the opposition of enemies.¹³⁰ Brakel defines spiritual strength this way: “Spiritual strength is an undaunted steadfastness of heart, given by God to His children, whereby they, while entertaining a lively hope of acquiring the promised benefits, overcome fear for all danger and opposition, unyieldingly engage in warfare, and courageously persevere in obedience toward God.”¹³¹ The context is that in seeking to do what God commands, there is much “resistance:” “loss of honor, possessions, and even life. One will encounter shame, contempt, ridicule, hatred, opposition from every perspective, poverty, illness, and all

¹²⁷ Cited in Kim-Van Daalen, “Wilhelmus à Brakel’s Spirituality of Virtues and Its Implications for Soul Care,” 289.

¹²⁸ See the chart in *ibid.*, 291.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹³⁰ Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 3.331.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

manner of adversity.”¹³² According to Brakel, the response contains three elements: hope, victory over fear, and continuation in doing one’s duty.¹³³

In seeking to do all this, God gives us aid. He does this not merely by an infusion of power but also by secondary causes. These include the fact that He enables us to see things correctly. He enables us to see beyond the immediate challenge and fear and see God’s aid, our glorious end, and the weakness of our opponents.¹³⁴ Brakel believed that believers have a part to play in the development of these characteristics. Consequently, he concluded his chapter with advice. He warned against resting on good intentions as well as giving up.¹³⁵ He also warned that in these matters, we need to guard against presumption of our own strength. Flee to Christ! He warned, and be continually engaged in prayer.¹³⁶ This was Brakel’s commendation for the development of spiritual strength or courage in the face of opposition.

John Flavel

John Flavel (1627–1691) was a prominent Puritan writer of the seventeenth century. Brian Cosby suggests that in his own day, he might have been more esteemed than some of the more well-known Puritans today.¹³⁷ In this section, we will discuss his

¹³² Ibid., 3.332.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3.334.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3.346.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 347.

¹³⁷ Brian H. Cosby, “John Flavel: The ‘Lost’ Puritan,” 113-132. On Flavel’s life, see also Brian H. Cosby, *John Flavel: Puritan Life and Thought in Stuart New England* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014).

Treatise on Fear.¹³⁸ Cosby's article demonstrates that Flavel himself certainly knew what fear was. After the Act of Uniformity, he could no longer preach publicly in Dartmouth where he had served as minister. Sometimes he would be allowed to preach, but then ". . . the fires of persecution would send him into hiding again. Many times, he fled persecution and attempted arrest for preaching the gospel without license. At one point, while holding meetings near Slapton, he was pursued by those out to arrest him and escaped by riding his horse into the sea and swimming to safety."¹³⁹ One wonders if Flavel had some of these experiences in mind when he wrote his treatise.

In his treatise, Flavel notes at several points that while fear can cause problems, it is not all bad. In fact, it can be a positive good. Flavel writes: "There is indeed an excellent use that God makes of our fears, to stimulate our sinful hearts to greater vigilance and preparation for evils. . ."¹⁴⁰ Fear also restrains evil in the world.¹⁴¹ The problem is not fear in itself. The problem is with immoderate fear. We fear "more than we ought."¹⁴² This can rob our hearts of peace and keep us from doing the duties we ought to do.¹⁴³

We need to conform our fears to reality. Flavel's text for this treatise is Isaiah 8:12–14a. It warns the godly against fearing what others fear, namely, the Assyrian

¹³⁸ John Flavel, *A Treatise on Fear in The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, Vol. 3 (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 239–320.

¹³⁹ Cosby, "John Flavel," 119.

¹⁴⁰ Flavel, *A Treatise on Fear*, 240.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 253–254.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 251.

invasion. Flavel makes an interesting point about this text. On the face of it, they ought to have feared Assyria. Indeed, “their danger seemed to exceed their fears; for it was the invasion of a foreign and cruel enemy, even the Assyrian . . .”¹⁴⁴ So, what was the problem? They did not have the filial fear of God in their hearts. They saw the Assyrians, but they did not see the God above the Assyrians who was to be feared even more. He provides a parallel example in the New Testament:

It was in the disciples themselves, Matth. Viii. 26, ‘Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?’ A storm had befallen them at sea, and danger began to threaten them, and presently you find a storm within, their fears were more boisterous than the winds, and had more need of calming than the sea; and it was all from their unbelief, as Christ tells them; the less their faith, the greater their fear.¹⁴⁵

Fear tends to keep us from seeing reality properly. We do this when we forget God, but it is a general phenomenon that causes us to make small matters worse, take things in the worst extreme, not see the “comforts” in the bad, and simply make things up.¹⁴⁶ We also tend to value lesser things more than we should. There are things that are more important than our lives and our comforts.¹⁴⁷ If we can do this, “we may enjoy the comfort and tranquility of a resigned will, when others are at their wit’s end.”¹⁴⁸

According to Flavel, fearing what we should and not fearing what we should not is not easy. However, we have resources. First, the ability to fear rightly in light of God’s

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 242.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 248.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 262. An interesting example of the third in this list from Flavel’s list. Cosby notes that the Puritans’ loss of churches enabled them to write. Cosby, “John Flavel,” 120.

¹⁴⁷ Flavel, *A Treatise on Fear*, 268.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 240.

majesty is a gift of God.¹⁴⁹ In Chapter six, he provides ten rules for helping us exercise our faith and see things in a way that will keep us from immoderate and wrong fear. For example, remember God’s commitment to us in the covenant of grace; think about the suffering you could experience and prepare for it;¹⁵⁰ commit every person in your life and everything you own into the hands of God;¹⁵¹ be on your guard against inordinate and immoderate love of every enjoyment of the world.¹⁵² Flavel answers objections to developing a proper fear in his last chapter. The sum of the objections is it is hard and difficult. He reminds us, however, that “Our sufferings and bearing abilities are not from nature, but grace.”¹⁵³

Francis Turretin

The French Reformed world saw a similar movement to emphasize spirituality in the seventeenth century. As the biographer of Francis Turretin, Eugène de Budé explains concerning the development of preaching in the seventeenth century that there was a remarkable change at this time. He writes: “They abandoned the well-beaten path of the older method in order to stick more closely to the edification of souls and to morals, while at the same time remaining very strict in the area of dogmatics.”¹⁵⁴ Turretin was

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 252.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 288.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 291.

¹⁵² Ibid., 295.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 314.

¹⁵⁴ Translations are my own. *Eugène de Budé, Vie de François Turrettini, Théologien Genevois (1623–1687)* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel Éditeur, 1871), 185. Concerning Turretin himself, he writes: “His contemporaries with the grand style that ordained this high manner of speaking compared his expressions to the milk and nectar. Pastors and professors alike marveled at it and, far from being jealous, recognized in him a master preacher.” Ibid., 186. On French Reformed preaching, see J. Wesley White, “Jean Claude (1619–1687): Huguenot Pastor and Theologian,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 195–205.

part of this development. This may be surprising to those who are only familiar with Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*.¹⁵⁵ It is very much a "school" (i.e., scholastic) or university theology. However, As J. Mark Beach concluded upon an analysis of one of Turretin's sermons, "we may conclude that Reformed orthodoxy was aware of and receptive to the interchange between theology and the church. Theology was done as a labor of ministry to the church, and in fact the academic theology of polemical disputation and dogmatic textbooks was not delivered to the laity in an undiluted form."¹⁵⁶ Turretin, as other scholastics, knew how to make the distinction between the university and the pulpit.¹⁵⁷

We will consider here two of Turretin's sermons: "The Choice of Moses," which is in two parts and based on Hebrews 11:24–26, and "The Calling of Abraham," which is a sermon on Hebrews 11:8.¹⁵⁸ In these sermons, he presents two possibilities: obeying or disobeying God. He notes the specious reasons for disobeying God and not acting out of faith. Then, he explains how thoughtful reflection based on faith enabled Moses and Abraham to do what God was calling them to do.

¹⁵⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 Vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ J. Mark Beach, "Preaching Predestination—An Examination of Francis Turretin's *Sermon De l'Affermissement de la Vocation et de l'Élection du Fidèle*," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 147.

¹⁵⁷ See Willem Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

¹⁵⁸ Francis Turretin, *Recueil de Sermons sur Divers Textes de l'Écriture Sainte pour l'État Présent de l'Église* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1686), 1–126 and 536–596.

In regard to Moses, Turretin notes that the major challenge was the high position he had as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and the treasures of Egypt that it made available to him. This would have been hard for anyone to give up. As Turretin explains it:

What? Does he esteem it nothing to be in the court of such a powerful king and to be known as the son of such a great Princess? Does it appear as such a small thing to see himself come to such a high degree of glory and magnificence, honor and respect, not only by all in the Court, but by all in the kingdom? Does he not understand the honor that that this illustrious Princess has given him to be adopted as her child, and should he not have had all the gratefulness that he could possibly have for such an extraordinary favor?¹⁵⁹

The problem, however, was not only what he had to give up. It is, as the text explains, that he gave it up “to be mistreated along with the people of God” and experience the “disgrace of Christ” (Hebrews 11:25–26).¹⁶⁰ Turretin gives a lengthy explanation of what the flesh would say to that. For example, he says, “Would you be so foolish and have such poor thinking to make such a bad choice and leave what so many others look for with so much eagerness? You are in honor and glory, and with this people you can only expect reproach and disgrace.”¹⁶¹ That is the reaction of the flesh to the idea of leaving Pharaoh's household.

Faith, however, would enable Moses to overcome these objections. Turretin moves on to explain this by giving a lengthy “speech” that could have taken place in Moses' head urging him to join with the people of God:

You will find there, I assure you, many pleasures and delights of the world. But remember that these are only the delights of the flesh, which, far from satisfying your passion, will only enflame them more, far from giving you any rest or any

¹⁵⁹ All translations of this work are my own. Turretin, *Recueil de Sermons*, 15–16.

¹⁶⁰ All Scripture quotations taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc., unless otherwise noted. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

¹⁶¹ Turretin, *Recueil de Sermons*, 46.

peace to your soul, are always accompanied with a worm eating away at your conscience and a thousand regrets and sorrows. You will find riches in abundance there above and beyond what you can desire, but remember that riches here are the treasures of impiety and perishable riches that the hand of the robber can steal and the teeth of the moth can ruin. They cannot deliver you from any evil nor bring you any contentment of spirit.¹⁶²

These reflections based on faith empowered him to make the better choice.

In “The Calling of Abraham,” Turretin explains what Abraham did in a very similar way. He notes that it was particularly hard for Abraham because he had to leave the comfortable surroundings of family and friends and put himself in the danger of an immigrant in a foreign country.¹⁶³ He had to do this without even knowing where he was going. As Turretin puts it:

It’s already a severe thing to a man, who naturally has great passion and love for his homeland, parents, and friends, to obligate him to leave to go to a strange country, which he is not used to and in which he has no acquaintance. But it’s even greater when the commandment is made to a man who has an abundance of every sort of goods, who lives in honor and esteem among them, and who sees himself deprived of all these advantages and driven to lead the life of sorrow and misery that pilgrims and strangers are normally exposed to. Finally, the hardness of this commandment appears in that it not only obligates him to leave his homeland and his house but to leave his country without knowing yet where he had to go and uncertain of the place in which he had to live. Certainly, if Abraham had no other thought than that of reason and the flesh, he would not have been able to resolve to obey.¹⁶⁴

However, he did not only have the reasoning of the flesh. Turretin contrasts this with the reasoning of faith. He puts these words in the mouth of faith in the conversation going on in Abraham’s head:

¹⁶² Ibid., 48.

¹⁶³ Note that the context of this is the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes where many Huguenots had to flee France. Turretin’s own family had to face a similar experience. They had left their ancestral home in Italy to find refuge in Geneva. See De Budé, *Vie de François Turretini*, 5–25.

¹⁶⁴ Turretin, *Recueil de Sermons*, 562–563.

Finally, I admit that it is very difficult to leave my country, when I do not know where I am going. But what difficulty is there, when I am persuaded that I have to do with an all-good and all-powerful God, who had promised me a comfortable and profitable rest, and who will not fail to give it to me, even though I do not know yet precisely where it is? I abandon myself to His providence, and I am assured that he will take care of me in whatever place that I go and cause me to arrive in the place that He has promised, since it is only under His order and direction that I am going.¹⁶⁵

Like Moses, Abraham was able to reflect on the issues and see with the reasoning of faith that it was better to leave than to stay.

In analyzing these cases, Turretin speaks of them in a couple of different ways. Sometimes, he will say that grace was above reason. For example, Turretin speaks of faith in Moses: “Grace brought him above nature, and faith prevailed over reason, to give him a counsel that was incomparably more beneficial.”¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, when explaining the choice of Moses, he also describes this phenomenon another way: “He speaks of choice, not only to contrast it with the refusal that he made to be named the son of the daughter of Pharaoh but, above all, to make clear that nothing had constrained him to make this resolution, that he made it voluntarily and without constraint, that it was not a simple action of his nature but an effect of his reason illuminated by grace that made him understand that he could do nothing better or more advantageous for himself.”¹⁶⁷ What Turretin is saying is that reason by itself is not sufficient for us to make the proper choices in matters of religion. We need reason aided by grace and faith in order to do them. In other words, our reason makes use of the additional data that faith provides to

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 566.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 47. For Turretin, it was important to say “above” reason and not contrary to it. “For a thing to be contrary to reason is different from being above and beyond it; to be overthrown by reason and to be unknown to it.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.8.18.

¹⁶⁷ Turretin, *Recueil de Sermons*, 33–34.

make a rational choice based on what is available to it. As he says in the *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, “Reason is an instrument which the believer uses, but it is not the foundation and principle on which faith rests.”¹⁶⁸ Revelation supplies the truth, but reason perceives it and then uses it to think clearly about a matter related to it.

Turretin, then, notes the importance of careful reflection in the life of faith. We must not merely react or even go by the specious thoughts of the reasoning of natural man. We must think clearly and in the light of revelation to develop the correct principles on which to base our actions. This is differentiation of self but with an important qualification based on Christian theology.

Conclusion to the Reformed Spirituality Writers

The Reformed writers we have surveyed recognize the challenges that believers face from the emotional pressure of the world. In the face of this, they commend acting out of faith and careful consideration rather than merely reacting out of our emotions. They all admit that this transformation is neither easy nor quick. It requires courage to act in accordance with faith and reason in the face of emotional pressure. However, this ability is in itself a gift of divine grace implanting the virtue within us, and God is there to help believers in their journey to live out of principle and Scripture. There is continuing grace not only from God Himself but also through His Word, His people, and the new man. In these ways, the believer can obtain the victory and overcome the tremendous emotional pressure of the world. These insights are similar to those of Aquinas, while they interact very little or not at all with Aristotle or philosophical virtue ethics.

¹⁶⁸ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.8.7.

In regards to differentiation of self, their views are similar to BFST. They believe that there is significant emotional pressure. This emotional pressure should not be taken at face value as an accurate gauge of reality. They agree that we need to see the truth of reality by an exercise of our reason and thinking, but they also add that this must be done in light of the information contained in Scripture. Francis Turretin explains this in detail and emphasizes that we must not merely reject our natural emotional response, we must also test our reasoning by the Word of God. We need to analyze our real threats. We should develop our principles and act in accordance with them rather than merely reacting emotionally. This is a process that takes time. These writers emphasize, in contrast to BFST, that the goal must be the glory of God and that proper action and spiritual courage is developed by the grace of God and the means of grace. In this way, they differ from BFST in a way similar to the way in which Thomas Aquinas does.

Conclusion to Church History Section

John Chrysostom gives a powerful description of the emotional struggles of the ministry in his book *On the Priesthood*. He also delivers a clear challenge to all those in the ministry to not let themselves get sidetracked or swallowed up by these forces. However, he offers little advice on how to do so.

Thomas Aquinas is much more helpful in telling us how we can act above our basic emotional reaction. He explains that it is rooted in the grace of God. He also shows how we need to think clearly about the threats we face and rationally calculate where we should avoid things on the basis of fear and should not. This is based on thoughtful reflection on the risk each threat poses to our lives, our neighbors, and the work of the kingdom of God.

In Martin Luther, we find an example of Aquinas' view of courage working itself out. Luther gave us vivid descriptions of his own emotional struggles. However, he calculated that it was better to act in accordance with his conscience, even if it meant prison or the loss of life. It is important to note that this was not just Martin Luther showing bravado. He struggled intensely with his decision. This was based on careful reflection, as his writings demonstrate. There were many other things that we could give up rather than lose our lives, he suggested in his other writings, but conscience was not one of them. By his actions and writings, Luther demonstrated that he believed that we should act according to reason, principle, and Scripture rather than merely reacting on the basis of emotion.

All of this comes to sharp focus in the Reformed spirituality writers of the seventeenth century. William Ames commends the development of virtue in the face of fear. Wilehlmus à Brakel does the same. Both Ames and Brakel advocate virtue without showing any explicit reliance on a reflection of the history of Christian virtue ethics. They seek to develop these themes primarily from the Scripture. Flavel's writings on fear are much more extensive, and they show much greater parallel with the tradition. Flavel has detailed explanation of when to fear and not to fear as well as considerable advice on how to overcome fear and act in accordance with Scripture and reason. Turretin addresses other emotional issues, such as desire for honor, riches, and the comforts of family. Turretin recommends careful thoughtful reflection on the basis of faith rather than simply going with what natural affection or automatic emotional response might dictate.

In all of these writers, we have seen an awareness of the tremendous emotional pressure that people place on us to act in a certain way. However, all of these writers

emphasize that we must not simply do what is easy or what seems right in the moment. We must move beyond the emotions to thoughtful reflection about what is right in light of reason and the revealed Word of God. This ability is not something that happens immediately or easily but must be developed by repeated action. From this perspective, these teachings are very close to BSFT's idea of differentiation of self. In both cases, it begins by moving from emotion to a different way of thinking about the situation. Then, change is produced by repeated implementation of that way of thinking. Where these writers differ from BFST is, first, in the specific way in which BFST describes emotional pressure in the context of society and family (based on the fact that no one had ever explained it in this specific way!). Second, they also would differ in the goals and purposes of differentiation of self. BFST leaves the use of differentiation rather undefined. These theologians would always place the purpose of acting in terms of thinking in service of God and His Word and the good our neighbor, not merely for personal growth or freedom. Third, they would differ in the means of obtaining greater differentiation of self. Because the purposes are so different, these theologians would all agree that the ability to think not just in an intellectual way but in a morally good way is a gift from God and His grace. In addition, the means and considerations that motivate one to act in accordance with principle and reason are quite a bit different than those suggested in the context of BFST. They are rooted in consideration of the Scripture and the Gospel.

In the next section, we will see how modern Christian writers critique BFST in a similar way to the theologians discussed in this chapter critiqued it implicitly. There is one significant exception to this implicit critique. Being aware of BFST's way of

analyzing emotional systems, the modern writers take a positive approach to BFST's explanation of emotional functioning.

CHAPTER FOUR

Critique of Differentiation of Self in Ministry in Recent Scholarship

A Brief History of Bowen Family Systems Theory

Murray Bowen recognized that the patterns in the family reproduce themselves in other relationships and organizations. He writes:

Basic relationship patterns developed for adapting to the parental family in childhood are used in all other relationships throughout life. The basic patterns in social and work relationships are identical to relationship patterns in the family, except in intensity. Over-all, the emotional process in social and work systems is less intense than in the original family. However, there are exceptions to this in which the intensity of relationships in work systems approximates the intensity to the original family.¹

Bowen describes his own experience of this in his chapter “Toward the Differentiation of Self in Administrative Systems.” He demonstrates the challenges of the emotional system in his own experience and clinical practice.² In light of these observations, it was natural for those who were involved with a church or synagogue to apply Bowen’s insights to their ecclesiastical situations, especially when church can often be one of those intense relationships outside the family.

¹ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1985), 462.

² *Ibid.*, 461–465.

The first person to apply these insights to the clergy and the life of religious organizations in any major publication was Rabbi Edwin Friedman.³ Friedman disseminated this through his personal contacts with pastors as well as his book *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. According to Mike Aufderhar and Ron Flowers: “Friedman’s (1985) landmark work, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, is what really started the wealth of literature we now have on Clergy Family Systems.”⁴ The influence of Friedman has been extensive. According to Leroy T. Howe, Friedman’s personal influence has been so extensive and admired that “Bowen’s distinctive views of systems thinking and therapy seem to be quietly assuming almost a canonical status.”⁵ Norman Thomasma has a similar evaluation: “A case can even be made that Bowen Theory has become the dominant theoretical framework informing the philosophies and strategies of church consultants and congregational theoreticians today.”⁶ Why has this theory become so popular? Robert Creech in his article, “Generations to Come,” offers a lengthy list of reasons. It is available, understandable, compatible with biblical and theological categories, helps the clergy focus on their own functioning rather than others over whom they have no control, does not require expertise, fits with what they encounter on a daily

³ For an explanation of how this worked out in Friedman’s own life, see Edward W. Beal, “A Retrospective: Edwin Friedman, His Life and Work,” *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer 2005): 407–423.

⁴ Mike Aufderhar and Ron Flowers, “Learning to be Calm in the Storm,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 58. See Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

⁵ Leroy T. Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” *Pastoral Psychology* 46, no. 5 (1998): 348.

⁶ Norman Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations: Murray Bowen as Teacher of Congregations,” *Reformed Review* 58, no. 2 (2005): 119

basis, and makes a practical difference.⁷ These reasons have led to a broad acceptance and use of Bowen Family Systems Theory (hereafter BFST).

Positive Evaluation and Use of BFST's Concept of Differentiation of Self

In light of that brief history, it is not surprising that the scholarship gives a generally positive evaluation of the use of BFST in church ministry and leadership. The writers on this topic believe that it gives us a greater awareness of the emotions at work in the church. Much of the writing on BFST in ministry relates to what the emotional process is and how differentiation of self helps a minister process emotion more objectively. They explain what that looks like in various ministry contexts and provide help on how to develop greater differentiation of self. However, many writers also warn against some erroneous conceptions that either could or do come out of BFST's view of differentiation of self. We will discuss those negative critiques in the second part of this chapter.

Awareness of Anxiety and Emotional Process

Christian scholars have generally given a positive evaluation of the usefulness of BFST and the concept of differentiation of self for ministry. The difficulty of emotions is that we observe their effects, but much of their structure is hidden from consciousness. Peter Scazzero compares our emotional life to an iceberg. Only a small portion of the iceberg is above the surface. Most of it is underwater. In his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, he says that becoming emotionally healthy leaders and Christians involves

⁷ R. Robert Creech, "Generations to Come: The Future of Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Ministry," *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 28, no. 1 (2015): 73

addressing that large portion of our emotional life that is under the surface.⁸ In terms of BFST, this involves anxiety or emotional intensity. According to Creech, anxiety is “contagious.” As a result, “[t]he pastor can easily catch the anxiety and take it home, spreading it among family members. All this usually happens below the level of our awareness.”⁹ Howe gives a more extensive explanation of how this works in church and family. He writes, “More often than not, family expectations are conveyed in notions that are contradictory to one another, perpetually changing, rarely clarified, and expressive of the best interests of those who hold them rather than of those they purport to guide.”¹⁰ Guidelines for becoming aware of the normally hidden forces of emotional intensity is one of the great contributions of BFST.

Awareness of how anxiety is passed around in a system can help us address it more effectively. In addition, it also explains why common methods for renewal and change in a church do not work. As Friedman says, “Resting and refreshment do not change triangles.”¹¹ For example, if a Pastor is stressed over feeling on the outside of a triangle with his elders on the inside, taking a break will not help. The triangle is still there during the break and when he returns. As Creech says, “A bag of leadership tricks will not address the emotional process that runs behind the scenes while congregations work on ‘managing’ their conflict, discerning a future, or struggling with a budget

⁸ See Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 15–18.

⁹ R. Robert Creech, *Family Systems and Congregational Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 18.

¹⁰ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 349.

¹¹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 218.

shortfall.”¹² The leader needs to address his place in the “emotional process” rather than running away from it in order to be less anxious. In short, he needs greater differentiation of self.

Why should the minister be concerned about high anxiety in a church? Peter Steinke says that it keeps us from thought, which is essential in order to deal well with the work of the ministry and leadership in the organization. For example, anxiety decreases our ability to learn and makes us inflexible. It leads to polarization, conflict, and distancing. All of these hinder the work of the church.¹³ Lawrence E. Matthews says that anxiety often keeps ministers from clear theological reflection about their situation.¹⁴ He observes, “I have come to the conclusion that reactivity plays a major part in the unwillingness, or perhaps inability, of pastors to think theologically. When anxiety and reactivity are high, regardless of the cause, clarity of thinking is lower. Theological reflection requires the ability to think clearly.”¹⁵ This inability of pastors to reflect theologically keeps the church from seeing their situations in light of God’s revelation.

The benefit of BFST for the ministry is that it gives ministers more options. They are able to see what is going on and think about it in terms broader than “you versus me.” As Friedman notes, this ability to see emotional intensity as a manifestation of intensity in the broader system enables “us to reduce our anxiety about such symptoms, thus

¹² Creech, *Family Systems*, 33.

¹³ See Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006). 9.

¹⁴ He defines theological reflection as “a method of considering data that seeks to bring the theological insights of the Christian faith to bear upon every facet of human experience.” Lawrence E. Matthews, “Bowen Family Systems Theory: A Resource for Pastoral Theologians,” *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer 2005): 432.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 434.

making us less defensive even when we have a large personal or philosophical stake in what the congregation decides, or when our own survival as a spiritual leader is in the balance.”¹⁶ He goes on to say, “In fact, the capacity of members of the clergy to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters, both those not related to them, as well as those where they become the identified focus, may be the most significant capability in their arsenal.”¹⁷ In his article, “Generations to Come,” Creech emphasizes the usefulness of differentiation of self in light of rapid cultural and technological changes. He explains that BFST is a tool that is not bound by culture or time. The reason is that it describes human behavior in general. The changes of the future will most likely drive great anxiety, and BFST provides a tool that will help church leaders think and not merely react to these changes.¹⁸ In a Christian context, this ability to think will enable leaders to apply the biblical revelation to new situations. As Matthews puts it, “What [are] the appropriate theological truths she could draw upon as she made decisions about her preaching and teaching? What biblical themes [are] most relevant?”¹⁹

The key benefit of BFST, according to these writers, is that it helps promote clear thinking that gives them more options. Anna Moss says that this emphasis is not only good, it fits in with the Bible’s emphasis on examining everything in light of Scripture. “Bowen theory encourages individuals to do their own objective, mature thinking rather than borrowing others’ thoughts and ideas. . . . As followers of Christ we are encouraged

¹⁶ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 207.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁸ Creech, “Generations to Come,” 76–78.

¹⁹ Matthews, “Bowen Family Systems Theory,” 431.

to be mature in our thinking and to have our character, thoughts, and actions shaped by the Bible, rather than being swept up in worldly ideas and values.”²⁰ Peter Frith compares BFST’s teaching to what the Apostle Paul says to Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy. He cites Ronald Richardson’s description of the benefits of BFST as being able to perceive situations more accurately, know their own views clearly, think through the variety of responses, and act with flexibility. He then writes, “These abilities appear to resemble those that Paul urged Timothy to cultivate.”²¹ He goes on to say, “Paul was undoubtedly unaware of the modern insights of neuroscience, but he knew that Timothy would be the one person in the Ephesian church who would need to exercise the higher, reasoning part of his brain and wrote, ‘But you, keep your head in all situations’ . . . (2 Tim. 4:5).”²²

This ability to think and act rather than merely react provides a context in which the Christian in general and the pastor specifically can engage in greater service to the Lord.²³ Differentiation of self frees us from simply reacting within a system so we can choose those things that are the best for us, our families, and the kingdom of God.

²⁰ Anna Moss, “Can a Focus on Self Be Unselfish?: Evaluating Bowen’s Concept of Differentiation of Self,” in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens* (Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019), 39. Moss also suggests that the orthodox understanding of the Trinity can help us understand differentiation of self, “The ontology of God provides a powerful example of differentiation of self; each person of the Trinity being distinct in individual personhood and purpose, yet existing in intimate connection with the other, without loss of self.” *Ibid.*, 49. Thomasma has sympathy with this perspective but it is somewhat more cautious. “Finally, how does being regenerated and growing up into Christ create a context in which we can move toward self-differentiation that at some level, mirrors the divine wholeness of the tri-personal God?” Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations,” 127.

²¹ Peter Frith, “Anxiety and Differentiation in the Ephesian Church,” in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens* (Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019), 81.

²² *Ibid.*, 82.

²³ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 348.

When people first hear of the idea of differentiation of self in a Christian context, they may react against the idea that one should focus on oneself. However, Yarhouse and Sells explain that increase in differentiation of self actually frees the Christian to live a life of intentional, self-sacrificing service:

The idea of losing ourselves in others through blurred emotional boundaries is an interesting one. To the Christian, we are taught to sacrifice ourselves in relationships. We are to lay down our lives for Christ and to relate to others in a spirit of humility. The ability to be self-differentiated, however, seems to us to provide opportunities to actually make meaningful sacrifices in relationships. We have the freedom to obey God. If a person is never differentiated emotionally from others, that person loses himself or herself in others and is not truly offering a sacrifice or living sacrificially. The choice to do so is made for that person. In contrast, differentiation of self prepares the Christian for emotionally healthy relationships, not only by helping establish a sense of self but also because that very self can then make meaningful decisions about the nature of the sacrifices made on behalf of the Christian.²⁴

Christian self-sacrifice involves the deliberate choice of the self to give oneself in service to others. This intentionality involves thought and an ability to move away from mere emotional reaction, which is what BFST calls differentiation of self.

Aufderhar and Flowers report on research to confirm the value of BFST for the work of the ministry. They examined clergy who studied BFST and did the work of applying it to their lives. Their study was the result of a training program offered by Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary entitled “Family Systems Seminar.” It was a continuing education seminar for clergy from a variety of denominations. Three years later, Aufderhar began work on his doctorate, and he decided to study this topic. He did

²⁴ Mark A. Yarhouse and James N. Sells, *Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 78.

extensive interviews with 14 of the 17 participants in the seminar.²⁵ All of those who had taken the seminar reported that “Clergy Family Systems Theory provided a way of looking things and dealing with challenges that they would continue to value throughout their lives.”²⁶ In particular, they note that the participants reported numerous changes. “These changes showed up in their being *Less Reacitve, Less Anxious, Less Entangled, Less taking Things Personally, Less Blaming, More Understanding, More Calm,* and even *More Calming to Others.*”²⁷ They conclude based on this study that “it would seem obvious that this is an experiential education that has great potential to dramatically improve the health of clergy leadership and the health of the congregation as well.”²⁸

While the study of Aufderhar and is the only empirical test that I have seen in the literature specifically on BFST in ministry, other writers confirm this by examples and anecdotes. In all of these cases, it would seem that embracing a BFST approach and the pursuit of differentiation of self is embraced to a significant degree because they believe it truly helps the minister function better.

Differentiation of Self in General

So, what do these authors understand by the concept of differentiation of self? Yarhouse and Sells explain the understanding of differentiation of self in BFST, “the critical issue for Bowen [in differentiation of self] is the degree to which people are able

²⁵ See further parameters of these interviews in Aufderhar and Flowers, “Learning to Be Calm in the Storm,” 62. He produced composite stories to hide the identities of the pastors but illustrate the results. You can read one of the stories in their article in *ibid.*, 62–68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷ Emphasis theirs, *ibid.*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

to distinguish between feelings and reason so that they are free to choose to be guided by either feelings or reasoning.”²⁹ This is the most crucial aspect of differentiation of self.³⁰

This does not mean that people should not act out of feeling. Differentiation of self allows a person to choose to act out of their feelings. It means that “neither the person’s feelings nor those of others dictate their behavior.”³¹ Again, BFST is not anti-feeling.

Ronald Richardson emphasizes this point:

It is good to be aware of our feelings, and even to be able to express them when need be, and not to repress them. But it is not useful to let them run us and to feel compelled to express them whenever the urge hits us (such as when facing that angry church member). Contrary to some psychological theories, such actions are not healthy. Behind our negative feelings in our relationships is anxiety, the issue we need to focus on and develop an ability to manage.³²

The crucial thing is the ability to distinguish between feeling and thinking and choose how one acts. One way to get at this is to ask, “To what degree does the anxiety of another upset me? How much do I depend on another’s calmness or happiness to make me calm or happy?”³³

Differentiation of self allows people a freedom in relationship to others. It means on the one hand that they can define their own positions “without the kind of anxiety which generates either rigid defensiveness or concessions of principle for the sake of specious harmony and goodwill.”³⁴ At the same time, the more differentiation of self a

²⁹ Yarhouse and Sells, *Family Therapies*, 66.

³⁰ Compare this to the explanation of Kerr and Bowen’s views in Chapter 1 of this project..

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³² Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor’s Own Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 65.

³³ Aufderhar and Flowers, “Learning to be Calm in the Storm,” 61.

³⁴ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 353.

person has, the less they will anxiously demand that others conform to their own perspective. Instead, as Herrington, Creech, and Taylor put it, “[d]ifferentiation of self at home means courageously talking about what we truly think and feel . . . [and that we] allow our partners and children . . . to do the same.”³⁵ It is important to see that “There is a difference between telling people what *we* think and what *to* think.”³⁶ In addition, because a person is not bound to feel a particular way based on who they are with, they can freely get close to people and also be fine without being close. As Richardson says,

One simple way of defining differentiation is an ability to be closely connected with just about anyone we choose and still be a self, still maintain a sense of one’s own functional autonomy within the close relationship. It is the ability to be close to an emotionally important other while neither being dependent on gaining the other’s acceptance and approval nor fearing the other’s disapproval, rejection, or criticism.³⁷

Differentiation of self makes it easier to be on the outside of relationships, but it also makes it easier to be close.

One can also understand differentiation of self by contrasting it with other ways of dealing with anxiety. These two ways of dealing with anxiety are fusion and cutoff. Fusion is when someone’s emotions are nearly completely tied to the system of which they are a part. Cutoff is refusing to connect with people or a person in the system either by distance or emotional withdrawal.³⁸ Peter Steinke describes people with low levels of differentiation of self this way: “On the lower (immature) side, people are reactive. They

³⁵ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey* (n.p., 2016), 115.

³⁶ Emphasis theirs, *ibid.*, 117.

³⁷ Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, 56.

³⁸ Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, “Introduction,” in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens* (Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019), 5.

blame more often; they criticize harshly; they take offense easily; they focus on others; they want instant solutions; they cannot see the part they play in problems.”³⁹ In this way, writers on BFST in ministry explain what lack of differentiation of self looks like as well as its presence.

These writers also seek to show the continuity between the Bible’s description of maturity and the BFST conception of maturity. Richardson applies the promises of God as means for gaining differentiation of self. He notes that it requires courage and thus “assumes a confidence in God’s invitation, given often and in many ways in the Bible, to ‘Fear not, for I am with you.’”⁴⁰ He compares the idea of differentiation of self to Paul’s description of Christians as being in the world but not of it.

This could be a way of speaking about differentiation in the emotional system of our families. How do we remain in good emotional contact with our family and remain outside of it, so that we are not run by it, and without reflection, take on its values and beliefs or simply react to the people in it? In my thinking, Paul and Bowen were on the same wavelength here.⁴¹

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor describe differentiation of self in terms of being able “to do the right thing regardless of the pressure in our lives to do differently.”⁴² In their view, Jesus is the best example of differentiation of self. “To the very end, the Father’s will was the wind that directed Jesus’ course, not the tides of human opinion and threat.”⁴³ He was able to resist the emotional pressures around Him because He was focused on and committed to the will of His heavenly Father.

³⁹ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 1.

⁴⁰ Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴² Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey*, 131.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22.

Differentiation of Self in Leadership

One of the most unique and intriguing applications of differentiation of self in the scholarship is its application of the concept of differentiation of self to leadership. The concept of leadership by differentiation of self was first articulated by Friedman and then developed and expanded by subsequent writers.⁴⁴

The key to understanding leadership from the perspective of BFST is the concept of homeostasis. Emotional systems are systems because they maintain a particular way of relating to one another, a homeostasis. BFST predicts that any change to the system will result in a reaction, even if the change is for the better. This explains one of the most common aspects of ministry, namely, that any attempt to change things produces resistance. If the leader recoils in the face of resistance, then those who are least tolerant of change will rule the congregation. As Peter L. Steinke says: “With tranquility and stability reigning as supreme values, congregational leaders adapt to their most recalcitrant and immature people, allowing them to use threats and tantrums as levers of influence.”⁴⁵ This is what Friedman calls leadership by consensus. While he notes that consensus is a good goal, he warns that if this becomes an ironclad method, then the actual result will be that a vocal minority will have a disproportionate place of power.⁴⁶

So, what is one to do? Friedman proposed leadership by differentiation of self. Friedman explains: “If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as ‘head’ and work to define his or her own goals and self, while staying in touch

⁴⁴ See the explanation by Friedman in *Generation to Generation*, 193–219.

⁴⁵ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 102.

⁴⁶ See Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 227.

with the rest of the organism, there is a more than reasonable chance that the body will follow.”⁴⁷ Ronald Richardson gives a good explanation of what this looks like: “Rather than asking the question, ‘How can I change the church?’ Bowen family systems theory suggests that the minister should ask, ‘What do I need to work on to improve my functioning within the emotional system of church so that I can better represent the Gospel?’”⁴⁸ This means that the minister is clear on his own positions, his own goals, and his own views of what the congregation should do while allowing others to do the same.

When the minister defines himself and says, “We ought to do this differently,” he should expect resistance. As Creech puts it, “Leaders are necessarily agents of change. And change never fails to generate anxiety among those we lead.”⁴⁹ Peter Steinke says that the more that the minister leads amid “high tension,” the more he should “expect behavior to be substandard for a while.” The thing to note is that resistance “is part of the leadership process.”⁵⁰ This is so important to recognize and so universal that Friedman says, “From the point of view of leadership through self-differentiation, the resistance in leadership is not simply some obstacle to be overcome. It is, rather, the key to the kingdom.”⁵¹ This means that the reaction to the minister’s differentiation provides him the opportunity to maintain that differentiation and establish a new homeostasis.

The key thing in leadership by self-differentiation is to hold steady. One has to work through the resistance in order to bring about a new homeostasis. In addition to

⁴⁷ Ibid., 229.

⁴⁸ Cited in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, “Introduction,” 9.

⁴⁹ Creech, *Family Systems*, 35.

⁵⁰ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 109.

⁵¹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 225.

maintaining differentiation, a leader also has to stay connected with the body. It is this connection that gives a leader the opportunity to spread calm through an anxious system. Of course, this is not at all easy. As Friedman says, “Many leaders have the capacity to stay in touch, fewer leaders have the capacity to differentiate their selves, fewest have the capacity to remain connected while maintaining self-differentiation.”⁵² It takes courage and strength to keep connected and keep differentiated.

The good news is that the initial resistance will generally dissipate. This is the basic therapy of BFST applied to leadership. When one member of a system can change their way of interacting and maintain it, then the rest will generally follow because of their connection to the system. This is especially true if the member of the system who differentiates him or herself is a particularly important member of the system (i.e., a mother has a greater chance of changing things than a youngest child). Roberta Gilbert explains this BFST “magic” in regard to leadership: “Bowen theory further predicts that if the leader stays on track, not reacting back and not retreating, and stays in contact with important others, the reactivity will die down in time.”⁵³ What seems daunting at first becomes surprisingly good news. The leader doesn’t have to change anyone but him or herself, and that is the person over whom the leader has the most control.

This method of leadership, according to these writers has some significant advantages. In many ways, as Friedman notes, this method of leadership is “far less burdensome,” even though, ironically, “it considers leaders to be more important than is

⁵² Ibid., 230.

⁵³ Roberta M. Gilbert, “Societal Regression and the Clergy,” *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer 2005): 455.

usually assumed.”⁵⁴ The leader can let go of many of the things he is inclined to worry about and focus on the leadership function. Friedman notes several other advantages: it produces less dependency on the leader, less guilt among the followers, clarity on the distance a leader should keep in relation to his or her followers, and a minimization of those factors that lead to burnout.⁵⁵

Differentiation of Self in Relation to Specific Emotional Patterns

In order to understand how differentiation of self works out in practice, it is important to understand the ways in which Bowen believed anxiety and emotional intensity were passed around a system. He said that there were only four: conflict, distance, overfunctioning/underfunctioning, and triangles. While many writers besides writers on BFST have understood the systematic influence of emotions on groups, Bowen was the first to categorize that phenomenon into these four basic categories. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor sum up the thought of writers on BFST in ministry when they write, “This observation is one of the most insightful contributions for those who study living systems.”⁵⁶ We will consider these four ways illustrating their usefulness for understanding various ministry situations.

Everyone who has led or served as a minister for any length of time knows that attacks can sometimes come out of nowhere and from surprising quarters. It is one of those things that causes a minister’s self-doubt, sleepless nights, and anxiety. Since conflict is one of the four ways of processing or “binding” anxiety, BFST predicts that

⁵⁴ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 220.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁶ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey*, 57.

times of anxiety will inevitably result in conflict and attacks. This is a normal and expected phenomenon. The key thing to recognize is that the recipient of the attack is not necessarily the actual source of anxiety, which is generally manifold. Friedman suggests that when an issue is not easy to resolve or won't go away, the issue is not the issue. It is about a person's way of processing anxiety. That anxiety could come from changes in the church family, the extended church connections, the family of the minister, or the family of a lay leader.⁵⁷ So, a key question from a BFST perspective is, "why now?" or "what has gone out of balance?" In *Generation to Generation*, Friedman provides an example from his own consultation with churches:

A heated struggle developed between a female minister and the head of the woman's auxiliary over this clergywoman's stand on a number of woman's issues. Every nodal point in the fight—its onset, its climax, and its conclusion—coincided with a similar nodal point in the life of the lay leader's daughter: her initial involvement with a man, the time she first brought him home, the engagement, and the breakup of the engagement.⁵⁸

Distinguishing the recipient of an attack from the sources of anxiety can help the minister differentiate. He can see the attack in a different light other than as a personal attack. This can aid in producing calm in a difficult situation.

The pattern of distance is moving away from a relationship where someone feels uncomfortable. Ronald Richardson explains that this effects church life in a variety of ways. Often, people distance by being only slightly involved or lessening their involvement in the church. Then, someone pursues them by telling them what they should do or trying to make them feel guilty for not being involved. Then, the person

⁵⁷ See Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 202.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

distances further by leaving the church. Richardson notes that “[p]eople have to believe they can comfortably say no to requests made of them before they will comfortably say yes and then actually do what they agree to do.”⁵⁹ Again, a key thing is to see these patters as systematic. It is not the pursuer’s fault. People distance for a variety of reasons and often multiple reasons. This understanding can help us attain “a major quality of mature leadership,” which enables us to “feel comfortable with others’ distancing from us and not . . . become anxious about their ‘abandoning’ us or abandoning our view of their responsibilities.”⁶⁰

The third anxious pattern is overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity. Overfunctioning is trying to do for others what they can and should do for themselves; whereas, underfunctioning is not doing what a person can or should for him or herself.⁶¹ Overfunctioning may be the most common pattern by which ministers bind their own anxiety. After all, ministers serve as ministers because they want to help others. It’s easy to let that help become doing for others what they could and should do for themselves and attempting to solve issues for others that they could but do not wish to solve themselves. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain the common way that this is viewed within the church: “Everyone knows that chronic underfunctioners need to change. . . . In contrast, if we overfunction, we may truly believe that God is on our side.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and the Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 76–77. See this whole chapter for numerous examples (*ibid.*, 66–79).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶¹ For a good popular discussion of this issue, see Geri Scazerro and Peter Scazerro, *Emotionally Healthy Woman: Eight Things You Have to Quit to Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 61–70.

⁶² Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey*, 118.

Overfunctioning can feel like it is good and right. However, as Howe warns, “For overfunctioning pastors, pastoral actions are dictated more by the necessity of reducing their own anxiety rather than by any objective discernment of what their parishioners might truly need.”⁶³ When a minister spends more emotional energy seeking to solve the issues of the congregation, then they do themselves, it is likely that he is overfunctioning. Pastors can also underfunction, too, however, even though it is a less common problem. When a minister refuses to visit his people or prepare for sermons or meetings, he is underfunctioning. Both are ways of dealing with the anxiety, the former by getting himself involved with others and the latter by getting others to get involved with him.

The final method of dealing with anxiety is triangles. When someone is uncomfortable with a person or situation, they seek out another person or situation to help them feel comfortable. Ronald Richardson provides some diagnostic questions for understanding our participation in triangles, “Do you talk in depth with everyone who plays a part in the process, or do you get together with only the people whom you agree with, who are on your side, or whom you think you will get along with and won’t feel too uncomfortable with?”⁶⁴ This is extremely common in counseling. A husband feels uncomfortable with his wife, so he seeks to get the minister on his side and “counsel” them. Such “counseling” is more about releasing emotional anxiety than solving issues.⁶⁵ At the same time, it is important to remember in all of these cases that these four patterns are not “bad.” Triangles are not “bad.” They can be helpful. However, as Yarhouse and

⁶³ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 357.

⁶⁴ Ronald Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, 28.

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, 30–32.

Sells explain, “Triangulation is a common experience in a lot of relationships; it becomes a problem to the extent that the two original persons need to resolve problems but are unable or unwilling to do so.”⁶⁶ One simply needs to be aware of these phenomenon and so maintain the choice of when and how to enter and exit triangles.

Developing Differentiation of Self

If a minister sees the value of BFST for their ministerial functioning and leadership, how should they develop a higher level of differentiation of self? These authors insist that it is one’s relationship with God that is most crucial to developing greater differentiation of self. Stepping outside of our human relationships and into a relationship with God can help us differentiate ourselves from these emotional situations. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor write: “An intimate relationship with God is the center of gravity that keeps our lives in balance when the pressures of the system threaten to topple us.”⁶⁷ And Howe writes, “The possibility of pastors’ becoming a non-anxious presence and guide in such a process of family and congregational self-discovery will depend heavily upon their becoming a non-anxious presence to themselves through the power of their own personal faith and of the spirit of God at work within them.”⁶⁸ It is the minister’s relationship with God that will determine his emotional maturity in relationships with others.

Several writers suggest that this relationship with God is maintained through the classic Christian spiritual disciplines. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain, “Spiritual

⁶⁶ Yarhouse and Sells, *Family Therapies*, 68.

⁶⁷ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey*, xvii.

⁶⁸ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 361.

disciplines are the means by which these automatic reactions are ultimately changed. The disciplines work to rewire our automatic reaction, offering us options about how to respond in a given situation. We no longer have to react as we once did.”⁶⁹ They recommend particularly the work of journaling and the reading of the Psalms because of their emotional content. Creech, in his latest book, sums up these disciplines when he says: “Practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, silence, solitude, and meditation.”⁷⁰ These writers believe that the classic Christian disciplines can help us gain emotional health and greater differentiation of self.⁷¹

In addition, these writers are writing on the subject of BFST because they believe that studying BFST and learning it is a helpful way to gain greater differentiation of self. Study of the theory enables one to see one’s emotional interactions more objectively, which is a large part of differentiation of self. Many of the writers quote Roberta Gilbert’s dictum: “If you know theory, you can use theory. If you don’t know theory you can’t use theory.”⁷² However, as Brown and Errington warn, “It is critical to point out that awareness alone does not result in improved functioning in relationships. Change occurs in very small steps of practising being more autonomous while in meaningful connections with others.”⁷³ This is a crucial part of BFST, as noted in Chapter 1 of this project.

⁶⁹ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 134.

⁷⁰ Creech, *Family Systems*, 81.

⁷¹ Peter Scazzero has come to similar conclusions in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 139–163.

⁷² See, for example, Roberta Gilbert writes, “If I know theory, I can use it. If I don’t, I can’t.” Roberta Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Pompano Beach, FL: Leading Systems Press, 2004), 112–113.

⁷³ Brown and Errington, “Introduction,” 7.

These writers also suggest that learning differentiation of self in one's family of origin is extremely important. Roberta Gilbert explains, "If one can make emotional contact with the family of origin (where, of course, the repetition originated) and change the reaction in that context, over time, it will remain fundamentally changed."⁷⁴ Ronald Richardson makes this work central to developing greater differentiation of self in his book *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*. He says, "The fact is that we don't grow up and become mature by staying away from those people. We gain emotional separation and maturity by getting closer to them and working at being a self in their presence."⁷⁵ Richardson provides detailed instructions on how to do this in chapter 7 of his work.⁷⁶ However, Creech summarizes it nicely when he says: "Choose to be an important person to your family. Show up for key events—weddings, funerals, reunions, and holidays."⁷⁷

Finally, all of these writers stress that this sort of growth takes time. Peter Steinke says, "Experience has taught us that healing has its own timetable. Being hasty is low-road functioning."⁷⁸ However, they are optimistic that the consistent study and application of this theory can lead them to greater differentiation of self.

Negative Evaluation of BFST's Understanding of Differentiation of Self

In spite of the positive appreciation of BFST, many of these writers like Thomasma want to consider areas of "incongruence with the tenets of the Christian

⁷⁴ Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking about Human Interactions* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992), 84.

⁷⁵ Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, 61.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 87–102.

⁷⁷ Creech, *Family Systems*, 81.

⁷⁸ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 61.

church.”⁷⁹ Indeed, he finds it somewhat surprising that BFST is so widely embraced. He explains, “the insights of Freud, Skinner, and the social scientists have been less widely embraced, so the strong connection between Bowen Theory and congregational life is noteworthy.”⁸⁰ Not every psychological theory is widely embraced. It is worthwhile considering why this particular theory has been so popular with ministers. While still urging caution, Thomasma suggests that comparing BFST to other secular psychological theories may suggest that “Bowen Theory alerts us to aspects of the family of God that might otherwise be overlooked or misunderstood.”⁸¹

Need of the Right Goal

The first major critique of BFST is that it does not necessarily have the right goal. The right goal for emotional maturity is always service of God and His kingdom and the good of our neighbor. Differentiation of self can be a helpful means to that end, but there is nothing in the method itself that demands it. Howe refers to these goals as a “vision” that people give themselves to. Differentiation of self can serve the vision because it enables us to follow that vision and love others “on the basis of decision and not compulsion or fear.”⁸² At the same time, differentiation of self requires a vision; otherwise, “whatever self-differentiation may occur in families and in congregations will

⁷⁹ Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations,” 120.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Andrew Errington makes the same point in “A New Teaching—And with Authority!” in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens* (Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019), 86–100.

⁸¹ Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations,” 120.

⁸² Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 354.

most likely be conscripted to the service of self-centered goals of limited benefits to people outside the circles of the self-differentiating few.”⁸³ He concludes that

it is necessary to carry the discussion of non-anxious presence further than Friedman did. The kind of leadership needed by parish families is grounded not only in the psychological integration of their pastors but also in the integrity of their pastors’ commitment to a God-inspired vision that challenges both its purveyors and its hearers to a deeper, more authentic, faith. Self-differentiation of pastors is important as a means to the end of effective leadership. More precisely, it is important as a means to carrying out a transforming vision by posing in timely fashion the challenges necessary to bring parishioners under the sway of the vision itself and the transformation that the vision can make possible.⁸⁴

For the Christian, it is not enough to seek emotional maturity, we must seek to use that maturity for the good of others and the kingdom of God. There is nothing in BFST itself that would necessarily lead us to this conclusion.

David Waanders makes similar points in his article on differentiation of self in marriage. He addresses the question, “Does a healthy marriage in Bowen’s terms mean the same thing as a healthy marriage in the covenantal understanding of the family in Israel’s history or in the Pauline epistles? What are the differences and are they substantive differences?”⁸⁵ Waanders notes that there is an implication of an ethic in BFST in that differentiation is something to be encouraged. However, he concludes that “[w]ithout a more clearly articulated ethical framework than this . . . pastors using this model run the risk of presenting differentiation to parishioners as an end in itself, and

⁸³ Ibid., 356. On the problem of the “self-differentiating few,” see Andrew Errington, “A New Teaching—and with Authority!,” 98.

⁸⁴ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 361–362.

⁸⁵ David D. Waanders, “Ethical Reflections on the Differentiation of Self in Marriage,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 41, no. 2 (June 1987): 101.

then selfhood tends toward becoming its own moral reference point.”⁸⁶ He then goes on to say that one could see that there is a fusion for self and a fusion for others as well as a differentiation of self for the self and for others. In a Christian ethical framework, differentiation of self must be put into the service of others.

Moss would probably want to nuance Waanders’ bare distinction of differentiation of self into self for self and self for others. She writes, “Integral to the process of differentiation is the establishment of a self, yet to equate this process with self-enhancement, self-assertion, or egotism is to misunderstand the foundations of the theory.”⁸⁷ However, she also makes a similar critique about the use of differentiation of self:

Bowen theory emphasizes the benefits of making self-directed choices and expressing one’s own values and principles. However the process of establishing substantive, worthy values is less clear. . . . From a biblical perspective, an expression of self, anchored in values and principles which are rooted in God’s own character and self-revelation is one that is authentic, life-giving, and truly purposeful.⁸⁸

Any use of BFST’s concept of differentiation of self must be put into services of Christian “values and principles.”

This is similar to the Christian critique of pagan and philosophical virtues. It is similar to what Aquinas, Brakel, Flavel, and Ames said about courage. Courage has to have the right goals. We shall consider this further in the conclusion, but mere ability, excellence, or virtue is not a Christian virtue unless it is subordinated to God and His kingdom as well as the most important Christian virtues.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁷ Moss, “Can a Focus on Self Be Unselfish?,” 39.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 44–45.

Christian Virtues

It is somewhat interesting to note that several writers discuss faith in relationship to BFST as if it were integral to the theory. However, in BFST itself there is nothing that demands the Christian virtues of faith hope, and love. As Howe says: “Self-differentiation serves the God-appointed end for all relationships: loving self-giving on others’ behalf, on the basis of decision and not compulsion or fear. In the Kingdom of God, now and in worlds to come, the loving will of God is the intention in and of all human acts.”⁸⁹ Note, however, that this is in the context of the “Kingdom of God,” a concept which is alien to BFST. Yarhouse and Sells put the issue squarely:

In these comments we are beginning to see what is perhaps the greatest criticism of Bowenian family therapy; that is, it does not recognize a real and meaningful relationship with a living God, and so the concepts developed by Bowen do not reference transcendent reality, an aspect of life that is fundamental and profound to the Christian.⁹⁰

Any Christian definition of maturity must include a mature relationship with God. This is something BFST does not address directly.⁹¹

Since BFST in itself says nothing about God and His kingdom, it is not surprising that Christian writers would reject the idea of excluding God’s grace and God’s means of grace from the transformation process. Ruth Schroeder summarizes this issue well: “Both

⁸⁹ Howe, “Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective,” 354.

⁹⁰ Yarhouse and Sells, *Family Therapies*, 82.

⁹¹ Note that many of these writers refer to what they call the ninth concept (in relation to the eight concepts of BFST [on which, see Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*]), “the supernatural.” For example, Gilbert writes, “Bowen briefly thought about adding a ninth. He called it ‘The Supernatural.’ He did not continue the work, he said, because of the intense reactivity of the profession to it . . .” *Ibid.*, 118. What this means, though, is not clear, since it remained undeveloped. This might make it easy to see BFST as more “Christian” than it is. Bowen’s idea was probably that the phenomenon of religion contributes to emotional functioning. A helpful exploration of this idea is found in Israel Galindo, “Exploring the Ninth Concept: Faith and BFST in Dialogue” in Israel Galindo, ed., *Leadership in Ministry: Bowen Theory in the Congregational Context* (Middleton, DE: Didache Press, 2017), 217–241.

views consider maturity to be a process, a gradual inward change with outward consequences. As a humanist, Bowen locates the potential for change in human effort, whereas the Christian view is that ‘Christlikeness’ is first and foremost the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit enabling human cooperation rather than depending on it.”⁹² The Christian faith does not reject human effort in transformation, but it does subordinate it to the grace of God and His work (see Philippians 2:12–13).

Excluding the grace of God as a means of developing emotional maturity, BFST does not emphasize the role of the means of grace in personal transformation. Thomasma explains:

This in turn leads us to recognize some of the unique practices of Christ’s followers both as individuals and as a group: Prayer as a key aspect of relating to the God who made and redeemed us. Worship, both personal and corporate, as a purposeful focus on another in such a way that Christians believe they again find themselves having the mind of Christ as a picture of maturity. These are all strategic aspects of the Christian life that could be seen as less than helpful from a narrow understanding of Bowen Theory.⁹³

Many of the writers on BFST in Christian ministry emphasize the means of grace and traditional Christian disciplines as important to developing greater differentiation of self. However, this is an addition to BFST, not something demanded by the theory itself.

Finally, the emphasis on the intellect may lead to an elitist and reductionistic view. Yarhouse and Sells state that “we see no need to embrace the view that this drive is as primary and fundamental as Bowen treats it.”⁹⁴ Moss is more cautious, suggesting that

⁹² Ruth Schroeder, “Critiquing Bowen Family Systems Theory as an Approach for Pastoral Care” in Jenny Brown and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens* (Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019), 28.

⁹³ Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations,” 126.

⁹⁴ Yarhouse and Sells, *Family Therapies*, 77.

BFST is “arguably reductionistic.”⁹⁵ Andrew Errington warns that this reductionism may lead to an elitist perspective that gives up on those at lower levels of differentiation.⁹⁶ Along these lines, BFST posits only the possibility of small changes in differentiation of self not large ones. For those at lower levels differentiation *and* for those at higher levels, the Bible indicates a greater possibility for transformation than that of BFST. As Thomasma states, “The biblical record and our own observations with the Christian community would suggest a more optimistic picture.”⁹⁷ A reliance on the possibilities of the grace of God opens us up to greater expectations for transformation while still appreciating the realism of BFST.

Conclusion to the Literature Review

As Christians continue to make use of the insights of BFST and grow in differentiation of self, they will no doubt continue to develop further critiques and nuances in their appropriation of BFST. At the same time, there is a general consensus in the evaluation of BFST. All these writers see BFST as generally helpful for the work of ministry. They emphasize the usefulness of Bowen’s explanation of how emotional systems work, the importance of growing in awareness of those systems, the necessity of distinguishing the intellectual and emotional systems, and the methods that BFST employs to develop greater emotional objectivity. They believe that it is a helpful tool for developing higher levels of Christian maturity and leadership.

⁹⁵ Anna Moss, “Can a Focus on Self Be Unselfish?,” 40.

⁹⁶ Andrew Errington, “A New Teaching—and with Authority!,” 98.

⁹⁷ Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations,” 126.

Still, they also warn against using it independently of Christian goals, perspectives, and means of development. As Thomasma put it, “As we benefit from the insights of Bowen Theory, we need to recognize it as a window through which we can see important aspects of individual and communal life, but not as the front door into that life.”⁹⁸ It is a tool that is helpful but very far from a complete perspective on the Christian life. Above all, every aspect of growth in our emotional maturity or leadership must be subordinated to the work of God and His kingdom.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 127.

CHAPTER FIVE

Practical Outcome: A Seminar in Bowen Family Systems Theory and Ministry

The Context and Format for the Seminar

Teaching someone to have greater differentiation of self is not something one can do in a day. It is like teaching listening skills or developing joy, courage, or love. It is something that must be implemented in practice over time. However, there is a teaching element, and this seminar is designed to help ministry workers see the value and ramifications of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) as a helpful tool for their work in ministry.

There are two settings where this seminar would work best. The first is a gathering of ministers at a conference or church meeting. It is preferable that they be ministers from different churches for reasons to be explained in a moment. The second would be ministry workers more broadly. My experience has been that those who work in ministry contexts experience similar emotional pressures to those who are pastors of churches.

One caution is that this may not be best for those from the same church. The reason is that they are all part of the same system. It is difficult to break through the dynamics of that system to help people look at this emotional matter more objectively.

Roberta Gilbert warns against hasty and thoughtless application of BFST:

Caution is necessary: Many people have heard Bowen's idea of going back home, but they forget the goals going there and the principles for how to conduct themselves when they get there. Too many people go back home and make

accusations, or attempt to do therapy that only ends in more intense family emotional processes (and often in cutoff). In some cases, families have been virtually blown apart by attempts to work on the others instead of the self.¹

This observation arises from two observations of BFST practitioners. The first observation is that seeing communities as a system requires something of a paradigm shift. It is hard to look at this objectively in the context of the intense pressure of the emotional system of which one is a part. It is not easy to move to a systems view of actions from a view of simple cause and effect.² Secondly, when BFST practitioners teach someone to develop greater differentiation of self, they commend the context of the family of origin. The reason is that the pressures of own's own nuclear family are too great. One is too dependent on them, and it is much more difficult to alter patterns of emotional functioning.³ A similar observation is in order concerning one's ministry context. If people from the same church are present, it would be best for them to be in different small groups during the seminar.

This outline is designed to be used as a one part or three part seminar. Each of the three parts concludes with a small group activity designed to aid further reflection on the material. If the group hearing the seminar is small, these activities might be done by the whole group. If this material is covered in one seminar, one could spend half the time lecturing on the theory. In this case, emphasis should be placed on the “examples of

¹ Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992), 120–121. See Murray Bowen says: “Discussion about family issues seemed to make the family system calmer, but they made the fusions more intense and it was more difficult to get back to objectivity later.” Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1985), 492–493.

² See Bowen's own experience of this in his account of his family of origin work and interactions with other practitioners of family systems therapy after it in *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 467–528.

³ See Michael E. Kerr, *Bowen Theory's Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 178.

being blindsided” and the four ways in which anxiety is passed around in the system and then a brief overview of how to observe emotional functioning. One half to one-third of the time would then be spent in Part 5, which is a group activity applying the material to any emotionally intense ministry situation.⁴

If the seminar is given in three parts, it should be divided as Session 1 (Parts 1 and 2); Session 2 (Part 3); and Session 3 (Parts 4 and 5). Sessions 1 would have the small group in the middle, following Part 1. Session 2 would conclude with the small group activity listed at the end of Part 3. Session 3 includes Parts 4 and 5 and provides a plan for developing greater differentiation of self through observation of one’s own and others’ emotional functioning. Half or more of Session 3 would be the capstone, a small group activity designed to help people think through emotional reactivity using the questions provided during the seminar.

The goal of all of this is that people would take up the study of BFST themselves to develop greater differentiation of self. Toward this end, there is an annotated bibliography attached to the outline.

Explanation and Analysis of the Session(s)

Part 1 – The Problem

The goal of Part 1 is to arouse curiosity and interest in the content of BFST. It begins with an overview of emotional struggles familiar to anyone who has served in a ministry context. The goal is to help people remember the struggles they have faced in

⁴ Note that this material was originally prepared for a seminar at the Presbyterian Church in America’s Mission to North American Church Planting and Renewal Conference under direction of Flourish in Nashville, TN. I was able to go through most of this material and lead a discussion of an emotionally intense ministry situation in the context of about an hour and a half. The presentation was well-received with very active participation by the ministry leaders (both ministers and lay leaders) in attendance.

the context of ministry. The second section contrasts the emotional struggles we face with the goals of ministry outlined in 1 Tim. 4:12–16 and 2 Tim. 4:5. The goal here is for them to feel the contrast between Paul’s ideal and the reality of their situation.

The first small group activity is designed to build community and common concern over the challenges of ministry. The question for sharing is: how are you doing at loving your congregation well and maintaining your joy? Often the answer is, not very well. Rather than seeking to solve these problems, this exercise is designed to allow people to share their own struggles and pray for one another.

Part 2 – One Tool: Bowen Family Systems Theory

After the small group activity, the speaker can then present BFST as a tool for helping ministers in their emotional functioning. It is important to note that this is simply one tool. It is not the heart of a philosophy of ministry. It is a tool to help.⁵ Other tools can also help to encourage better emotional functioning.⁶

The goal of this section is to introduce BFST to the attendees. This involves explaining the history. The key thing to note in the history is the credibility it receives from its extensive observation of the emotional functioning of families. Once that is demonstrated, the speaker can go on to explain the basic concepts in a very brief form. The point is to give an overview here not to explain each concept. The outline highlights

⁵ As Norman Thomasma puts it, “As we benefit from the insights of Bowen Theory, we need to recognize it as a window through which we can see important aspects of individual and communal life, but not as the front door into that life.” Norman Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations: Murray Bowen as Teacher of Congregations,” *Reformed Review* 58, no. 2 (2005): 127. See also Lawrence E. Matthews, “Bowen Family Systems Theory: A Resource for Pastoral Theologians,” *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer 2005): 425–444.

⁶ For a variety of others, see Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

how someone moves to greater differentiation of self through the therapy of BFST. The goal here is to hold out the hope that changing one's emotional functioning can have a profound effect not only on oneself but also on the other members of the system of which one is a part. Understanding that there is a system can help one see the part that one plays within it.

Part 3 – The Seven Advantages of BFST

This is the key content of the seminar. Here is the place where the speaker explains the unique observations of BFST. The most important section is # 4.⁷ Here is where the speaker explains the four ways of functioning based on the observations of Bowen and his colleagues. These four ways provide a tool for thinking about the way people bind anxiety or deal with emotional intensity. Unbeknownst to the attendees, the speaker will have already introduced these concepts. Each of the four examples in the introduction represent one of these four ways of functioning.

The small group activity is designed to further understanding of these four ways of functioning. It is an activity where people try to think of how they and others have engaged in the past. They try to see these interactions in light of these four ways of functioning. The goal is to them the tools for further reflection on these matters.

Part 4 – A Model for Greater Differentiation of Self in Life and Ministry

This section provides one way to develop greater differentiation of self. The goal of this section is to teach the attendees how to observe emotional functioning and patterns so that they can have greater awareness that can lead to greater options. This method

⁷ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor state: “This observation is one of the most insightful contributions for those who study living systems.” Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey* (n.p., 2016), 57.

derived from BFST is placed in the context of the spiritual disciplines.⁸ It commends turning to God and seeking the ideals of proper emotional functioning from His Word.

While the spiritual disciplines will be familiar to the attendees, they may not be as aware of how to think through emotional functioning. For this purpose, a number of questions are provided that give examples of the things that one should look for when considering emotional functioning.

Part 5 – A Small Group Activity for Developing Emotional Awareness

The heart of differentiation of self is learning to see one's normal emotional reactions and considering alternatives to those reactions. Toward this end, it is crucial that one gain awareness of those reactions. This activity provides a context for beginning to do that. One person should share an emotionally intense experience that they have had in life or ministry. The other participants then use the questions provided in Part 4 or ones like them to stimulate reflection. The goal here is to teach people how to reflect on emotional process. Once they have developed that skill, they can look at various options for different functioning. Toward this end, this exercise is limited by forbidding advice. The only thing other participants can do is ask questions seeking awareness of emotional process. It is anticipated that this will be challenging for those whose life is centered around giving advice, but it is beneficial in helping people learn to think through the emotional process.⁹

The Outline for the Seminar

⁸ I owe some of my reflection on this to Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, 129–142.

⁹ Edwin Friedman suggests: "Actually it is probably very effective to conduct entire sessions where all we do is ask questions, and never point out things, that is, if our anxiety will permit it." Edwin Friedman. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 72.

Stop Getting Blindsided! Family Systems Theory and Ministry

Part 1 – The Problem

Examples of Being Blindsided

1. You have an encouraging, long-time supporter who sends you a blistering email attacking everything you've ever done.
2. You have someone start attending your church who loves your church and your teaching. Then, they completely disappear. They won't respond to your attempts to contact them.
3. An elder comes up to you and tells you that he wants to coach you in how to become a much better preacher. He says that he has lots of good ideas that will really help you.
4. You present an idea for change, and everyone seems to be on board. Then, you get attacked, even by people who agreed to the change.

The Scriptural Standard for Ministry

1. Continuing to love and serve well while maintaining our joy.¹⁰
2. Not obsessing about others but working on our own growth (1 Tim. 4:12, 8, 15; 2 Tim. 4:5).
3. How do we do it? A lot of ways and tools

Optional Small Group Activity – Share your response to the following question: how well am I doing at loving and serving well while maintaining my joy? At this point, let each person share without responding with advice. Close the group in a time of prayer for one another's ministries

Part 2 – One Tool: Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST)

1. A brief background
 - a. Murray Bowen (January 31, 1913 in Waverly, TN to October 9, 1990) - <http://thebowncenter.org/theory/murray-bowen/>
 - b. Ended up at the National Institute for Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland from 1954–1959. There, he studied adult schizophrenics with their whole family being hospitalized.
 - c. The result – he could observe whole families and their interactions. His conclusion: the family is an “emotional unit” and “system.” The behavior of any individual is connected to the system.
 - d. He continued to develop this at Georgetown University.
2. A brief description – BFST
 - a. Eight Interlocking Concepts

¹⁰ I am indebted to Dr. Steve Childers for this way of thinking about the goal of ministry. In his class, “Applied Theology,” he said: holiness is loving God and others well while seeking to maintain my joy. I have returned often to that definition in my reflection on life and ministry.

- b. There is a nuclear family emotional system that consists of the position of the family members, emotional interactions of conflict, distancing (and at the extreme, emotional cutoff), overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity, and triangles. This pattern is passed on to future generations (the family projection process) and extends through many generations (the multigenerational transmission process). This process in the family affects and is mirrored by the emotional process in society and other organizations and communities.
 - c. The ability of any individual to act outside this process is differentiation of self. Differentiation of self is the ability to see emotional process objectively and to think and act out of principle rather than automatic emotional reaction.
 - d. The therapy in BFST is to help people increase their level of differentiation of self through a change of mindset and an implementation of these new thoughts in difficult situations, preferably in one's family of origin.
 - e. A key thought: a change in one person can affect the whole and change the system.
 - f. The "magic" of BFST: symptomatic children saw more symptom relief by seeing the parents and never seeing the child than traditional therapy. Those who only went occasionally to therapy and spent time working on self-differentiation in their families of origin saw much more progress than those in traditional therapy.¹¹
3. Application to ministry
- a. Edwin Friedman (May 17, 1932–October 31, 1996) was a student of Bowen, and he saw the value of BFST for ministry. Through his personal instruction, counseling, and books, many ministers saw the value for the work of ministry.
 - b. Since then, various writers including Robert Creech, Peter Steinke, Ronald Richards, and Israel Galindo have written and taught on the application of BFST to congregations.

Part 3 – Seven Advantages of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST)

- 1. Understanding that there is an emotional system, and we part of it
- 2. Understanding that the church is one system among many: the church family, the pastor's family, and the families of the congregation all have an effect on the church
- 3. Multiple analogies for the work of ministry
 - a. You are father – for good and ill
 - b. Other leaders can be seen as another parent
 - c. The anxiety that occurs when people leave the system, etc.
- 4. A framework for understanding how people contribute to spreading emotion around a system. There are four ways (refer back to examples in Part 1)
 - a. Conflict
 - b. Distance

¹¹ See Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, xvi, 237.

- c. Over/Underfunctioning
 - d. Triangles
 - 5. An explanation for the activation of these patterns – emotional intensity or anxiety
 - 6. Good news: you can change your pattern of functioning! (see below)
 - 7. This will have effects on the whole congregation
- Optional Small Group Activity: where have you observed the four patterns of emotional interactions (conflict, distance, etc.) in your church? What about in yourself?

Part 4 – A Model for Developing Greater Self-Differentiation in Life and Ministry

1. Give prayerful attention to your own emotional reactivity
2. Ask questions about your emotional reactivity – the who, what, when, and where. Here are some examples:
 - a. Who is upset here?
 - b. What is going on in their family?
 - c. What is going on in the broader church family?
 - d. Has anything unusual happened recently in your family, the church family, or the families of the members of the congregation?
 - e. Are there any exits from or entrances into the system?
 - f. When did these feelings begin?
 - g. If you feel emotional intensity, what is going on in your life, relationships, health, etc.?
 - h. What is it that you are specifically fearing? What do you feel are the real threats?
 - i. How real are the threats that you are concerned about?
 - j. What are the close relationships in the congregation? What is going on in these relationships?
 - k. When did you get emotionally reactive?
 - l. What did you do when you got emotionally reactive?
 - m. How did the other person respond to your emotional reactivity? How did you respond to that? And so on.
 - n. What did you do after an intense emotional encounter?
 - o. What were the emotional reactions in your family life growing up?
 - p. What is your relationship with your grandparents like?
 - q. How did your parents relate to their grandparents?
 - r. What is your relationship with your aunts and uncles?
 - s. How do your parents relate to their siblings?
3. Consider journaling about emotional situations.
4. Prayerfully consider through the Word of God what a healthier and holier emotional response might look like and seek to implement that in the next emotionally intense situation. Then, evaluate how things went and journal and pray about it.

5. Changing your pattern and reactivity is hard. So, ask: how does the Gospel enable you and empower you to live out a different emotional reaction?

Part 5 – A Small Group Activity for Developing Awareness of Emotional Process

1. Invite one participant to reflect on an emotionally intense issue/situation in their family or church.
2. The other participants should ask questions related to emotional process along the lines of Part 4, # 2.
3. This activity is designed to increase awareness of emotional process, so **refrain from giving any advice** during this activity.

CHAPTER SIX

Afterword: Teaching Bowen Family Systems Theory in Light of the Bible and Church History

In the course of my oral exam, one of the professors asked me about the term “differentiation of self.” He asked, if we use this term, don’t we risk letting it be the driver of our thinking in ways that might be inconsistent with the biblical revelation? This question helped me reflect on the way I have handled the content of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) in the context of my own ministry and how my thinking has developed on the use of BFST.

First, while the concepts have enriched some of my readings of the Bible, I have not used the terms regularly in my preaching and teaching in the church. So, I think that in doing this, I probably subconsciously recognized the validity of the concern expressed in the professor’s question.

Second, my enthusiasm for teaching this material even to ministers or other leaders has also lessened. The reason is that I have found biblical words and concepts that get me to the same place. Instead of speaking of differentiation of self, I speak of a life of joy and peace as in Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit?” While I may still ask people what is causing them anxiety, I am more apt to ask them, what is robbing you of your joy right now? Or, what is robbing you of peace right now? I find that these types of questions cover the same ground that BFST covers. I have also

found that increase in joy and peace gets them to the same place (or even to a better place) in terms of being a calm or less anxious presence. In addition, there is less of a learning curve because you don't have to introduce them to a whole new set of terms. There is less resistance to the teaching because it is clearly biblical. It is also easier to move into greater emphasis on joy and peace in their spiritual life because there is greater continuity with what they have already learned and what they are already doing in their devotional life. Even in regard to church ministers and leaders, I have found that this approach seems to be more effective than introducing BFST to them in addressing the emotional issues involved.

Third, in regard to living a life that carefully distinguishes emotional reactions from a response informed by God's Word and reason, I have found the Christian tradition of virtue ethics to be a far richer, far more inspiring, and far more helpful aid in living a less anxious and more deliberate, rational, and godly life. Let me illustrate this by one example. One of the things I began to think about in studying BFST was the need for a careful analysis of real threats. Some things are scary that are not real threats. We need to understand what scary things are real threats to life and well-being and not simply react to what seems scary or difficult. Consider the following quote from the Roman Catholic theologian Josef Pieper in his discussion of fortitude:

To be brave is not the same as to have no fear. Indeed, fortitude actually rules out a certain kind of fearlessness, namely the sort of fearlessness that is based upon a false appraisal and evaluation of reality. . . .

It is only possible to be genuinely brave when all those real or apparent assurances fail, that is, when the natural man is afraid; not, however, when he is afraid out of unreasoning timidity, but when, with a clear view of the real situation facing him, he cannot help being afraid, and indeed, with good reason. If in this supreme test, in face of which the braggart falls silent and every heroic gesture is paralyzed, a man walks straight up to the cause of his fear and is not

deterred from doing that which is good; if, moreover, he does so for the sake of good—which ultimately means for the sake of God, and therefore not from ambition or from fear of being taken for a coward—this man, and he alone, is truly brave.¹

This type of thinking is much more helpful in making the fundamental points that BFST wants to make. A careful study of courage in the Christian tradition would help clarify our thinking on the subject of fear and anxiety and provide us with resources to live a courageous life in the fear of God or “to be truly brave,” as Pieper puts it.

This is not to say that we cannot learn good lessons on how to live and how to think about life from non-Christians. Pieper cites the Athenian Pericles on the issue of fear, “For this too is our way; to dare most liberally where we have reflected best. With others, only ignorance begets fortitude; and reflection begets hesitation.”² This is an inspiring statement of the same principle that Pieper enunciated in the paragraph just cited. I have realized that many of the same emphases in BFST can be found in ancient philosophical writers such as Aristotle and Seneca. This has given me a greater appreciation for these ancient writers.

In fact, there seems to be a continuity of the critique of BFST by modern writers with the historic critique of the pagan and philosophical writers on virtue. Christians throughout the ages have seen value in the explanation of virtue by such men as Aristotle and Seneca (while a minority has been more skeptical of their usefulness). They have seen that these philosophers provide helpful ways of thinking about the ethical life and provide tools for growth in Christian maturity and service. However, they have critiqued

¹ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 126–127.

² Cited in *ibid.*, 124.

them in regard to the purpose of developing virtues, the virtues to be developed, and the means of developing those virtues. It is worth considering in future studies whether we may not see BFST as sort of a philosophical/scientific virtue ethic that provides helpful insight into the Christian life but whose use can be guided by the historic Christian analysis of other philosophical perspectives on virtue.

All that said, I continue to be very appreciative of the things that I have learned from BFST. Bowen's unique insights into the function of groups has proved to be an extremely valuable tool to myself and to many other ministers. I suspect that this will continue to be true. For people who deal week in and week out with the sorts of issues Bowen raises, his insights will prove illuminating and helpful. I hope that this project can make even a small contribution to helping them think through how to incorporate this into their lives and ministries. I also hope that this brief chapter can point them to a place to go for further reflection once they have digested Bowen's insights, namely, the many works in the Christian tradition on virtue ethics. Of course, they may also go straight to the Scriptures and reflect on how the Bible speaks of courage, joy, peace, and self-control. There is great opportunity here for continued growth and enrichment.

APPENDIX A

Alternative Outline Without Detail for Seminar

Stop Getting Blindsided! Family Systems Theory and Ministry

Part 1 – The Problem

Four Examples of Being Blindsided

The Scriptural Standard for Ministry

Small Group Activity – Share your response to the following question: how well am I doing at loving and serving well while maintaining my joy? At this point, let each person share without responding with advice. Close the group in a time of prayer for one another's ministries

Part 2 – One Tool: Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST)

Part 3 – Seven Advantages of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST)

Small Group Activity: where have you observed the four patterns of emotional interactions (conflict, distance, etc.) in your church? What about in yourself?

Part 4 – A Model for Developing Greater Self-Differentiation in Life and Ministry

Part 5 – A Small Group Activity – developing awareness of emotional process

1. Invite one participant to reflect on an emotionally intense issue/situation in their family or church.
2. The other participants should ask questions related to emotional process along the lines of Part 4, # 2.
3. This activity is designed to increase awareness of emotional process, so **refrain from giving any advice** during this activity.

APPENDIX B

Emotional Process Questions Handout

1. Who is upset here?
2. What is going on in their family?
3. What is going on in the broader church family?
4. Has anything unusual happened recently in your family, the church family, or the families of the members of the congregation?
5. Are there any exits from or entrances into the system?
6. When did these feelings begin?
7. If you feel emotional intensity, what is going on in your life, relationships, health, etc.?
8. What is it that you are specifically fearing? What do you feel are the real threats?
9. How real are the threats that you are concerned about?
10. What are the close relationships in the congregation? What is going on with those folks?
11. When did you get emotionally reactive?
12. What did you do when you got emotionally reactive?
13. How did the other person respond to your emotional reactive? How did you respond to that? And so on?
14. What did you do after an intense emotional encounter?
15. What were the emotional reactions in your family life growing up?
16. What is your relationship with your grandparents like?
17. How did your parents relate to their grandparents?
18. What is your relationship with your aunts and uncles?
19. How do your parents relate to their siblings?

APPENDIX C

Annotated Bibliography for Seminar

- Brown, Jenny and Lauren Errington, eds., *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and Its Application Through a Biblical Lens*. Neutral Bay NSW: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019. Should Christians use BFST? How can we understand this use in light of biblical revelation? Brown and Errington edit this book that contains numerous articles exploring these questions.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985). This was the first book that applied BFST insights to ministry. It is filled with interesting ideas and includes multiple examples from his own life and his consultation with churches and synagogues.
- Gilbert, Roberta, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group*. Pompano Beach, FL: Leading Systems Press, 2004, This is a short, clear introduction of BFST from the standpoint of the eight concepts of BFST. Very accessible for a good, short introduction.
- Herrington, Jim, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Tayler, *The Leader's Journey*. N.p., 2016. A very helpful introduction to BFST from a Christian perspective. It integrates BFST into the context of the historic spiritual disciplines of the Christian Church. This is probably the best all around book on BFST from a ministry perspective.
- Kerr, Michael E. *Bowen Theory's Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019. This is Murray Bowen's protégé. It is one of the most recent statements of BFST by one of its leading authorities. It is a non-technical introduction to the concepts of BFST.

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