

Living Theology:
The Discovery, Understanding, and Critical Revision of
James Wm McClendon Jr.'s Biographical Method

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Attestation of Authorship.

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Abstract

James McClendon is a theologian with a small loyal following. His *Biography as Theology* contained the suggestion that the practice of theology could be improved by attending to narratives of current faithful lives. This method was fuelled by the notion that images (metaphors) were of special significance in the connection between convictions (the subject of theology) and how that life is embodied. The implications of this suggestion are the focus of this thesis.

The methodological approach of having empathy and imagination as guiding approaches to hermeneutics and rationality is taken throughout this study. This project seeks to explore McClendon's thought by applying his own convictions as to how theology should progress. After a biographical study of McClendon himself his biographical method is examined – first through its initial form via *Biography as Theology*, and then in the implicit metaphoric manifestations present in his later work. Image-based thinking is found to be present throughout, although McClendon himself avoids wading into the waters of metaphor theory and its implications for this type of thinking. Following McClendon's own understanding that critical revision is necessary within the task of theology, I respond by allowing a reading of McClendon to be informed (and transformed) by Mark Johnson.

Johnson, a leading philosopher within conceptual metaphor theory suggests that metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively linguistic. This has significant implications for McClendon's image-based method. Proposals are made for the potential integration of Johnson's proposals and McClendon's approach. These are tested in a critical re-examination of McClendon's treatment of Christology. Conclusions are then drawn concerning the study of McClendon, the application of Johnson, and theological method in a wider context.

Chapter One. Introduction and Methodological Considerations

Theology must re-imagine itself if it is to remain relevant in both the academic and social realms. James McClendon (1924-2000) knew this and offers a theological perspective that, if yielded, can offer a way forward. Today, with the acceptance of pluralism and recognition of thousands of sub-traditions and denominations within Christianity, the options available to a theologian are greater than ever, while the ability to say something about Christianity (or Truth) in general (as a universal) has become not only unpopular, but accepted as impossible. Yet, it is still an incredibly fruitful area of academic inquiry. The possibilities that current philosophy and science have brought together in order to re-think ancient faith have produced many great publications and conversations in these latest generations. McClendon saw these challenges, and formed a theological perspective that is able to contribute to the future of theology in a meaningful way.

The study of McClendon's work has been limited, in part due to his unique location within the theological world and his particular, and at times radical, convictions about theology and how it should be practiced.¹ Nonetheless, his work calls for critical examination and response. McClendon's writing has been well received and respected by many reviewers and students over the years, but there remains a lack of secondary literature on this worthy theologian.² This project seeks to fill that gap.

¹ McClendon called himself an "alienated, left wing, Southern Baptist." See James William McClendon, *Biography as Theology : How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Eugene: Trinity Press International, 1990), 69 (hereafter cited as *Bio*).

² There are notable exceptions to this such as: Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations : Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) which is a festschrift in honor of McClendon. Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings* (London: SCM, 2001) has a chapter on McClendon. A number of McClendon's former students engage with his work as well, see: Michael Goldberg, *Theology And Narrative : A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Terrence W. Tilley, *Postmodern Theologies : The Challenge Of Religious Diversity* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2005); and

In this chapter, I introduce McClendon and his approach to theology. Encountering McClendon through his practice of, and approach to, theology leads to a particular kind of methodological response which I will introduce. The response, which I will be calling an ‘empathic imaginative method’, will be shown to be apt not only for the study of James McClendon and his work, but will also establish a trajectory for the rest of the project. After the introduction of McClendon’s understanding of theology, I will explore empathy and imagination from both theoretical and theological perspectives, commenting on how these will influence this study. The chapter concludes by briefly introducing McClendon’s biographical method, and discussing why this kind of investigation of McClendon is warranted. The primary question that is explored through this thesis is to how McClendon’s method of using biography as theology can be revised to be applied in the current context.

1.1 James McClendon’s Understanding of Theology

It is necessary to locate this research in terms of the academic tradition in which I am participating. The task and scope of theology is something that has been widely debated, and the differences in approaches to its practice are astounding across the traditions. To clarify how one is approaching and setting out to practice theology is of utmost importance to avoid misunderstanding and to provide a context for the work to be understood in, in relation to what has come before. In a world where objectivity and absolute universal truths are no longer assumed, an understanding of theology that accepts a plurality of convictions is paramount if theology is to maintain respect in the academy. James McClendon saw this as early as the 1970s, and his work from that point pursued an understanding of theology along those lines.

One of the distinctive features of McClendon’s work is how he conceived the theological task. A version of McClendon’s definition has appeared in nearly all of his works, from *Biography As Theology* in 1974, and *Understanding*

Nancey C. Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives On Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).

Religious Convictions in 1975, to the first volume of his systematic theology trilogy, *Ethics* in 1986. McClendon referred to theology (or theoretics for non-religious thinkers) “the science of convictions”.³ He understood convictions to be the subject of what is studied, without requiring any specific convictions about a divinity to be held in order to partake in its practice. A thorough understanding of convictions is necessary to understand how McClendon practiced theology.

Convictions

McClendon was influenced by Wilem F. Zuurdeeg, for whom ‘convictions’ are a vital category. Zuurdeeg claims “we are our convictions.”⁴ McClendon (working initially with James M. Smith) understood a conviction as “a persistent belief such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before.”⁵ According to McClendon, convictions are not merely consciously formed beliefs and can be distinguished from principles, which are “a product of reflective thinking, have often a rather academic flavor, and are perhaps more often weapons for attacking rather than guides,”⁶ and from opinions “which are the stuff of debate and discussion... are acquired quickly and shed just as quickly. They [opinions] may require thought, but they involve little or no commitment.”⁷

Convictions, however, “are our persuasions, the beliefs we embody with some reason, guiding all our thought, shaping our lives.”⁸ McClendon nuanced this by claiming that “they are cognitive, but they are also conative and affective –

³ James McClendon and James M. Smith, *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*, Rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), chapter seven. (hereafter cited as *Con*).

⁴ Willem F. Zuurdeeg, *An Analytical Philosophy Of Religion*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 58.

⁵ *Con.*, 5.

⁶ *Bio*, 19.

⁷ James William McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Revised. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 22 (hereafter cited as *Ethics*).

⁸ *Ibid.*

convictions are about what we think as well as what we hope or feel.”⁹ Put plainly, convictions are “the gutsy beliefs that I live out—or in failing to live them out, I betray myself.”¹⁰ Determining what one’s convictions truly are is a part of the theological task, and McClendon gave two requirements to aid in delineating between convictions and merely important held beliefs.

Persistence and significance are two requisite characteristics that beliefs must have in order to be true convictions.

1. Persistence: This implies not only the belief being continuous or being held for a significant duration, but also the “capacity to resist attack, to overcome, to continue in the face of difficulties.”¹¹ A belief that has been held for a long time but falls in the face of adversary is not a conviction; on the inverse, a new belief that dictates action, and holds in the face of struggle, may be a conviction despite being new.

2. Significance: If a belief is persistent and steadfast, but has little or no bearing on how that person (or community) lives his or her life, then it cannot be considered a conviction. McClendon and Smith explain that, “by ‘significant’ beliefs, we mean those that exercise a dominant or controlling role over a number of other beliefs held by their believers, or those that govern (or correspond to) broad stretches of their thought and conduct.”¹² A conviction must have an identifying mark on its bearer. If a belief is challenged and then changed (even if it is after a great deal of struggle, and thereby passing the test of persistence), but no noticeable difference in that person’s life is seen, it has failed the test of significance.¹³

McClendon and Smith sought to make their definition of the term ‘convictions’ and its two requirements as conviction-neutral as possible, but acknowledge that “its application can be affected by the convictions of the applicant...[which] must be recognized [as] one of the complexities with

⁹ *Con*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ethics*, 22.

¹¹ *Con*, 87.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ McClendon and Smith’s discussion about significance explores the inevitable conflict of deciding what indeed is considered significant, which draws upon existing convictions.

which pluralism confronts us.”¹⁴ They recognized the inter-determinacy of convictions (which they call ‘conviction sets’), especially when it comes to their justification, which is precisely what they set out to discuss in *Convictions*.¹⁵ McClendon insisted on two further comments on this concept before presenting his understanding of theology. The first is that “convictions are commonly shared, held by communities that are [as] formed by them as individuals are. And the second is that the beliefs that do form human beings are not restricted in topic.”¹⁶ If these requirements are met, a person (or community) could have convictions about gold, coffee, and sports, or God and neighbor. McClendon’s use of conviction has become a defining feature of his theology and is central to how he understood its task and purpose.

Theology as the Science of Convictions

McClendon described theology as “the discovery, understanding, or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and whatever else there is.”¹⁷ This is a descriptive understanding, and McClendon acknowledged that an initial challenge which theologians have to overcome with this type of understanding is to recognize it as being a description of the practice in which they are all involved. He was not satisfied with a definition that describes only the work of a small branch of theologians (e.g. Baptist theologians), while excluding all others. Today’s theology must not be defined by the specific subjects of convictions, but by the presence of convictions themselves.¹⁸ This type of definition is intended to apply to theologians across time and space so that it could be applied to Augustine at the turn of the fourth century and his discovery and revision of the convictions of his day, as well as to Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth. It should be just as accurate in describing the work of contemporary

¹⁴ *Con*, 90.

¹⁵ See *Con.*, 157.

¹⁶ *Ethics*, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid. There are also variations of this definition in *Bio*, 20, and *Con*, 184.

¹⁸ *Con*, 184.

theologians, including atheist theoreticians or thinkers in other religious traditions.¹⁹

McClendon viewed the history of theology with great respect. This is alluded to in his description of theology in the “discovery and understanding or interpretation”, which he says “points to what theologians do in homage to what is handed on to them.” The current practice of theology will always be connected to how theology was treated in the past. His idea of the “transformation” of convictions necessitates a creative aspect to theology. In this way, he held theology to be both “descriptive and normative.”²⁰

McClendon further elaborated on this understanding by emphasizing that theology is (in part due to the nature of convictions) to be distinguished from the descriptive sciences because of its self-involving nature. He gave the example that “one need not *be* a criminal to teach the science of criminology; on the other hand it makes no sense to think of a theologian who has no convictions at all.”²¹ A particular theologian’s context (community and narrative) determines the subject of his/her convictions. This point is clarified by McClendon when he says that the definition of theology should merely “[stake] out theology’s playing field, and it is up to each theological side ... to settle on a game plan.”²²

For McClendon, the game plan is decidedly baptist (note the lower case “b”).²³ His whole systematic theology was written from, and for, the baptist community.²⁴ The convictions dealt with in his trilogy were formed and

¹⁹ This definition could also be applied to other religions including the convictions of a Muslim scholar, or an atheist thinker. For example, an atheist who is involved with the same type of work, but without holding convictions involving a deity, can still be doing theology. Convictions come in a wide array of subjects and as long as they pass the tests of being true convictions there will be theologians who study them.

²⁰ Normative in the sense that it argues for something.

²¹ *Ethics*, 24.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ ‘baptist’ in the lower case is, for McClendon, a specific category or tradition within the larger Christian tradition. This will be unpacked and expanded below.

²⁴ His systematic project includes: *Ethics*; James McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology Volume 2*, (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1994)

treated from this perspective. A guiding vision for how he accomplished this is what he called the “baptist vision”. This hermeneutical and temporal guide was a guiding principle for McClendon, and a large part of what he considered unique and uniting for those considered ‘baptist’. While a more thorough treatment of this will be offered in Chapter Four, some initial comments are warranted here.

Baptist Vision

McClendon saw baptists as the heirs of the Radical Reformation, and distinct from both the Catholic or Protestant traditions.²⁵ The hermeneutical side of the vision, McClendon argued, is the way Scripture reads itself, and is expressed as a “shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community.”²⁶ Taking his cue from Peter’s use of the prophet Joel in Acts 2, McClendon saw this as the familiar pattern of how Scripture is used in the Bible. It can be summed up in the phrase ‘*this is that*’, a direct quote from Acts 2:16. Peter is using a passage from a former time (Joel 2:28-32) to understand and describe what is currently taking place. McClendon commented that “we are here in the presence of a regular motif in biblical literature in which language about one set of events and circumstances is applied under guidance to another set of events and circumstances.”²⁷ This is how the Bible should be read, he argued, and the way in which those in the ‘baptist’ tradition have commonly read Christianity’s book.

The temporal aspect of the vision can be labeled ‘*then is now*’. In this movement, the thinking and logic from other (scriptural) times are applied to the current time. One implication of this ‘then is now’ aspect is the foreshortening of time: this vision not only applies to the past, but also to the

(hereafter cited as *Doctrine*); and James McClendon, *Witness: Systematic Theology Volume 3*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000) (hereafter cited as *Witness*).

²⁵ *Ethics*, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

prophetic future.²⁸ McClendon's desire was to use this vision consistently and fully, saying that "by this vision disciples live by the faithfulness of Christ who *was* and *is* and *is to come*, the first and the last."²⁹ It is, for McClendon, the faithful way of understanding time in relation to the story of Christ.

This baptist vision, he proposed, can be seen throughout the Christian tradition, beyond those labeled as Baptist. McClendon frequently used those from outside his Baptist³⁰ tradition such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran) and Dorothy Day (Catholic) as examples of people embodying the baptist vision in their lives. It is this baptist vision and its implications that McClendon claimed are "a necessary and sufficient organizing principle for a (baptist) theology."³¹ As such, it locates him in a tradition of other baptist theologians. McClendon names Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Humbmaier, Menno Simons, Isaac Backus, Alexander Campbell, Walter Rauchenbusch, Edgar Mullins, Martin Luther King Jr., and John Howard Yoder as his forebearers in this baptistic theological tradition.³² There are obvious points where this (lowercase) baptist tradition overlaps with the Baptist denominations as they have come to be. He cites some of the convictions that set these traditions apart from either the Catholic or Protestant traditions: biblicism, liberty, discipleship, community, and mission. These are common highlights in the identification of baptist communities. McClendon argued that it is these distinctive, combined with the application of the baptist vision, that give this tradition shape and should be considered a third major strand in the current Christian demographic.

²⁸ *Doctrine*, 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis his.

³⁰ I follow McClendon in his use of Baptist with a capital B to refer explicitly to Baptist denominations or groupings. McClendon prefers the lower case 'b' baptist to refer to the broader approach to and practice of the Christian faith.

³¹ *Ethics*, 33.

³² This is not the complete list of persons and resources that McClendon sees as preceding him in this tradition. The complete list can be found in *Ethics*, 35-36.

Up to this point I have shown how McClendon understood the practice of theology, and I have also provided a glimpse of his perspective and vision, and the convictions about which he was concerned. In the biographical chapter of his life (Chapter Two) his 'baptist-ness' and the particularity of his perspective will come into a much clearer view. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will explore the ways this understanding of theology works with his baptist perspective to connect with a few methodological necessities for the practice of theology.

1.2 McClendon's Methodological Convictions

McClendon lists four necessities that his brand of theology must include. These are broad strategies that can then be filled with specifics, depending on the vocation and particular community at hand. McClendon names them as the "web in which [convictions] adhere and breathe together."³³ These requirements are that theology be: 1) **contextual**; 2) **narrative based**; 3) **rational**; and 4) **self-involving**. These four requirements are evident throughout McClendon's work, shaping both its style and content. Although these categories are largely self-evident, a few words on how McClendon used them will be helpful.

1. Theology is contextual. McClendon gives up the Enlightenment project's attempt to do theology as God knows it, and claims that if theology is a science of convictions, the practice of theology will naturally vary as much as the people who are practicing it. He asserts that "our theologies must represent us as we are, as well as representing God as God."³⁴ He acknowledged that this may lead many to suspect a *laissez-faire* subjectivism, but provides two reasons why this is not the case: "(1) because Christian theology is always the theology of a community addressing the gospel in a particular time and place, and (2) because theology is the very means by which those in one context encounter those of others for mutual witness and critical correction."³⁵ McClendon presents the metaphor of

³³ *Ethics*, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

theology as a *loggia*; a shelter open to the public (as in Renaissance Italy), or a gallery (as attached to a U.S. Southern houses) which acts as a meeting place without constraints. Here, theology is understood as a safe place for dialogue and discussion among a varied and likely diverse group of people. This is perhaps an idealized view of theology which has not always been enacted. These two points do, however, emphasize the position that while one can only see from one's own eyes, they must realize that "theirs are not the only eyes."³⁶

2. Theology is narrative based. The narrative approach that McClendon used is surely one of his most distinguishing features, providing for him a unity and a trajectory for his whole work. Many consider McClendon to be one of the most influential and ambitious theologians who have worked within the narrative tradition.³⁷ Narrative allowed McClendon to let go of foundationalism.³⁸ He united the Bible and experience in narrative, understanding experience to be "what we have lived through together."³⁹ McClendon could, via his baptist vision, see "the narrative the Bible reflects, the story of Israel, Jesus, and of the church, [as] intimately related to the narrative we ourselves live."⁴⁰ To grasp this story, McClendon is pushed into scripture, and fruitful exegesis is produced. Because the narrative continues past scripture, he also saw a wider variety of sources as rich resources. Practices, life stories, hymns, histories, confessions of faith, and theological

³⁶ *Con*, 173. This is printed in a chapter on the process of justification of convictions, where McClendon and Smith outline their perspectivist position. They deal at length with issues of plurality and justification. Robert J. Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theology* was also very influential in McClendon's understanding of contextuality. See, Schreiter, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985.

³⁷ See Amos Yong, "The 'Baptist Vision' of James William McClendon, Jr.: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Response," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 39; and Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative?: Reading in Narrative Theology* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997) 4 n.3.

³⁸ Non-foundationalism is one of the distinctive features of McClendon's work and legacy. See, Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

³⁹ *Ethics*, 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

essays are all used in the science of the discovery and understanding of the story and revision of the convictions that follow.

3. Theology is rational. McClendon understood the rationality of theology in a different light than that of other disciplines of study. Theology must, by its nature of being concerned with humans in relation to each other and whatever else there is, take heed of what these other disciplines are saying. Social sciences, the humanities, and philosophy all provide vital information that informs the theologian for their task. What is not required, he warned, is to allow one of these disciplines to produce a foundation that is more certain than theological certainty itself.⁴¹ One aspect of theology's unique rationality is the control it has over its internal organization: for a conviction must not be isolated, but known and justified in relation to the other convictions it is connected to, within a given community.⁴² Ethical convictions inform, and are shaped by, doctrinal convictions and vice-versa. McClendon viewed the logic of a theologian in a similar way to that of a mathematician, who, in transforming an equation, "leaves everything the same, yet creates possibilities the original formula had not conveyed... the theologian receives the heritage and by transforming it creates new possibilities for reclaiming inherited convictions."⁴³

4. Theology is self-involving. McClendon's understanding of 'convictions' necessitates that they involve the deepest parts of a person. Self-involvement is therefore natural, inevitable, and appropriate.⁴⁴ Here, we begin to see how, for McClendon, theology is about life. He says, "one of the necessary characteristics of convictions is that we live by them -- not just in our private lives, our home lives, but the whole of our lives including our intellectual lives."⁴⁵ This was a common theme for McClendon, who claims that "the

⁴¹ Ibid., 38.

⁴² See, *Con*, 91.

⁴³ *Ethics*, 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁵ *Con*, 145.

truth of faith is made good *in the living of it* or not at all.”⁴⁶ This is a tenor that is evident throughout McClendon’s work and was the impetus for his early work on biography as theology. Following from these convictions, he claims that “one’s own story must be part of the common story; the theologian’s proposals require confirmation by way of his or her participation in the common life.”⁴⁷ This self involving (living) aspect of theology continued to play a significant role in McClendon’s work and is paramount for how it should be read. Theology cannot be separated from the theologian.

These four theological necessities are crucial to an interpretive framework for McClendon’s theology. They are fundamental to understanding how he perceived the type of theology he practiced, as well as how his work should be accomplished if a true understanding is to be reached. Using McClendon’s playing field metaphor (cited above), it is as if these are the four basic guiding rules for the game he participated in.⁴⁸ These are specific and purposeful categories McClendon laid out for his work. However, although crucial, these methodological proposals are not sufficient for understanding his work. Implicit in them is an understanding of what it is to be human which further shaped McClendon’s theology.

McClendon’s anthropology is demonstrated in the first volume of his systematic theology, which identifies three inseparable “strands” in ethics. McClendon borrows Wittgenstein’s image of a cord to illustrate his anthropological view.⁴⁹ McClendon, in both his article *Three Strands of Christian Ethics* and in the first edition of *Ethics*, used this image to explain his holistic understanding of ethics and anthropology: “a rope [is] composed

⁴⁶ *Bio*, viii.

⁴⁷ *Ethics*, 39. This is one of the reasons why a biographical chapter on the life of McClendon is necessary.

⁴⁸ McClendon spends significant time exploring the concept of game. He places games in the realm of a social practice. As a concept, ‘game’ is used broadly to describe a wide variety of practices. See, *Ethics*, 169-172 for this treatment.

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein uses the image as follows: “The strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fiber runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibers.” See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 67. McClendon alters this image slightly.

of many strands. No one strand is the rope or can do the work of the rope, and there is no unseen center strand which holds all the rest together. Nevertheless, the rope holds.”⁵⁰ McClendon viewed humans in this light and the three strands delineate the full human experience.

Humans are *embodied* creatures. This means we are a part of the material world and partake in the natural process of having the type of bodies we have. This includes needs and desires such as food, shelter, and so on. Our bodies determine much of how we operate and make meaning. They shape and filter the world to our minds, creating an embodied way of thinking which overcomes the traditional dichotomy between the body and the mind.⁵¹ This first strand of our humanhood is related to what literary theorists call character, and is explained in narrative terms by McClendon, albeit with a slight change in emphasis. McClendon explains the differences: “They (literary theorists) emphasiz[e] the self that is embodied, we the embodiment of such a self; but their ‘character’ is nothing without (real or fictive) embodiment, and our ‘body’ is nothing without the actual self thus made incarnate.”⁵² As is evident, McClendon took very seriously the embodied existence of humanity, and it played a prominent role in shaping his anthropological perspective.⁵³

The second strand of his anthropology is the *social* or communal reality. People, of course, do not exist in isolation, but in relationship with individuals and communities. This social realm has a series of ‘practices’ and ‘games’ which structure the way communities function.⁵⁴ These practices and

⁵⁰ James W. McClendon, “Three Strands of Christian Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no. 1 (1978): 56. Interestingly in the revised edition of *Ethics*, the emphasis of this cord metaphor was removed.

⁵¹ The dichotomy between mind and body is challenged by Mark Johnson. Johnson’s thinking in this area and its implications for McClendon’s theology will be explored in the second half of this thesis.

⁵² *Ethics*, 329.

⁵³ See *Ethics*, Chapters 3-5 for the treatment of embodied ethics. The embodied reality has often been looked down upon, or treated as lesser than the mental or spiritual world. This trend towards accepting the body is something that McClendon was aware of before it became vogue.

⁵⁴ Both ‘games’ and ‘practices’ are used in a technical way and are explored in *Ethics*, 167-176.

games exert social forces (for good or for ill) upon people. They influence desires, hopes, fears, etc. McClendon parallels this with the social setting within a narrative. In every story, there are relational contexts that characters find themselves within; social and communal forces they must face. The Christian narrative has a long strain of deep concern with this social world. God chose a people, not a person. Through how those people live, the world will be blessed or saved.⁵⁵

The final strand is the anastatic (resurrection) realm. McClendon equates this with the new world that is available in Christ, post-resurrection. An interesting, and perhaps unexpected, connection McClendon makes in this realm is between human transformation and what in literature is called “incident”, or “circumstance”. We live in a world where “all the circumstances of our lives are finally seen to be in the hand and under the eye of a providential God.”⁵⁶ This is a difficult connection to make, but the point of it remains, that there are events in our daily lives, large and small, which create opportunities and challenges to living a particular way. McClendon acknowledged this, asking, “How can all circumstances be counted as God’s own action?”⁵⁷ This is a question to ask for many people, but McClendon acknowledged this to be a Christian conviction, citing H. Richard Niebuhr who writes, “God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.”⁵⁸ Despite the differences in understanding how God interacts with the world here and now, many Christian communities live in a way that accepts the possibility of God’s constant interaction in some way. The anastatic category will be explored in greater detail throughout this thesis, but for now, however, this literary allusion serves as an appropriate introduction.

⁵⁵ cf Genesis 12:3. That God would use the people as his conduit to the world is a common theme throughout the biblical narrative. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are taken from Michael Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, Augm. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ *Ethics*, 329.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁵⁸ *Ethics*, 330, and. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, ed. James M Gustafson (Harper & Row: New York, 1963), 126.

Throughout his ethics, McClendon displays what can be understood as a narrative anthropology (he highlights this himself). Within each strand of his ethics (bodily, social, and anastatic), McClendon chose a biographical character who illustrates how it may be embodied. Dorothy Day is one example of this, and will to be explored in Chapter Four. In each case, the baptist vision is seen. As stated, this baptist vision involves a form of projection that allows people to construct their own experiences by way of the Christian narrative. It is by understanding experience through narrative as “what we have lived through and lived out in company with one another”, that this narrative anthropology directly implicates biography. For Christians, each life story is actually participating in the one great narrative: the story of God and humanity joined in Christ.

McClendon can thus be seen to be pursuing a deeply integrated vision for theology. If theology is about convictions, then it is irreducibly about the authentic living of life. Baptists (with a small ‘b’) share a particular set of convictions which link their communal and individual lives to the scriptural narrative of God’s action in the world, especially as embodied in Jesus of Nazareth. The very method of theology will reflect this understanding. This in turn both generates and reflects a particular view of humans as embodied, social and anastatic creatures.

McClendon’s practice reflects this holistic approach to humanity represented by the image of the three-stranded rope. The first half of this thesis will aim to highlight the image-based thinking displayed throughout his work; a pattern revealed through the rope image. We will see that McClendon’s approach finds expression in the use of biography as a theological method. However, in order to fully understand the nature and significance of this unique approach, it is necessary first to explain some key concepts in the methodological approach of this thesis.

1.3 Some Methodological Convictions of my Own

In this theological project, I am studying McClendon according to his own understandings or, in other words, to see McClendon’s work “from the

inside”.⁵⁹ I propose to approach McClendon on his own terms. Given, for instance, the four methodological convictions mentioned above, it will be necessary to grasp his context, his narrative, his rationality, and how he has involved himself in his work. This is not merely a creative attempt to glean minor insight into McClendon’s work. It is, rather, a considered, methodological response to the very methods and style of his own theology. This will surely present its share of challenges, but will yield much fruit in the evaluation of McClendon’s corpus.

An Empathic Imaginative Approach

I propose an “empathic imaginative” approach to McClendon. Recent insights from both theological and Anglo-American postmodern traditions have highlighted the potential of empathy and imagination in the theological enterprise. Much (though not all) of this work goes beyond the immediate concerns of McClendon, but will be seen to be deeply consonant with his work. Indeed, I will suggest that this enriched theoretical dialogue enables significant insights into McClendon’s vision for theology.

1.4 Empathy

Empathy is a concept which is increasingly the subject of academic discussion, and appropriately so, as it is of paramount significance in the field of anthropology, ethics, and the social sciences. In a thorough treatment of the current state of empathy research, Jean Decety and William Ickes have brought together many perspectives around the nuanced concept of empathy. They set out not to bring a final word on the subject but to “provide the reader with a representative sampling of the current, state-of-the-art knowledge about empathy.”⁶⁰ Drawing on the growing fields of neuroscience and social sciences, they explore many implications of this concept. In his

⁵⁹ James William McClendon and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 147. This is the original publication of *Con.* Here, McClendon and Smith are discussing convictions in relation to objects knowable by natural science. They note that while there are certain objects in the natural world which may be known by following the scientific method, convictions cannot be known in this way. Due to the contextual and narrative surroundings of convictions, they must be known, “from the inside.”

⁶⁰ Jean Decety and William Ickes, eds., *The Social Neuroscience Of Empathy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).

opening chapter, Daniel Baston presents eight distinct ways that the word empathy is used in contemporary research.⁶¹ These eight variations are: 1. Knowing another person's internal state. This includes his or her thoughts and feelings; 2. Adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other; 3. Coming to feel as another person feels; 4. Intuiting or projecting oneself into another's situation; 5. Imagining how another is thinking and feeling; 6. Imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place; 7. Feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering; 8. Feeling for another person who is suffering. These eight concepts are related to one another, and are often felt or experienced simultaneously, while remaining somewhat distinct.

Baston highlights that most of these are "familiar experiences", but that "their familiarity should not, however, lead us to ignore their significance."⁶² He gathers these eight concepts around the two main questions that empathy seeks to answer: 1. How do we know another's thoughts and feelings? 2. What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another?⁶³ All eight of the variations on the use of the word empathy are evoked when thinking about these questions. A unified definition, however, is not reached, nor even sought. This is not necessarily a vice, however. It is what W.B. Gaillie calls an "essentially contested concept" which is necessarily complex and diverse. This can be applied to a wide spectrum of concepts, such as Christianity, truth, and war, or any concept which is intrinsically complex.⁶⁴ This notion provides a way to accept diversity and even

⁶¹ See, *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, and Daniel Baston, *These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena*, 3-12.

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ Ibid., 8-9.

⁶⁴ McClendon himself draws upon this idea when discussing Christianity as a whole. He concludes his thoughts on this subject by saying that "both my readers and I must be alert to the inherent contest, ready to hear the other side of the argument." See, *Doctrine*, 43. Gaillie uses championships as a prolonged example in his treatment of this idea. See, W. B. Gaillie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (January 1, 1955): 167-198. Gaillie includes five conditions which must be met for a concept to be considered essentially contested: 1. It must be appraisive; 2. This achievement must be of an internally complex character; 3. Any explanation of its worth must therefore include reference to the respective contributions of its various parts or features, or the accredited achievement is initially variously describable; 4. The accredited achievement

disagreement within a particular concept, by affirming that the tension increases the significance through what may appear to be ambiguity.

Empathy is a nuanced and contested concept with uses varying depending upon context and need. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (who will become exceedingly important to this project) explicate empathy as a concept that is understood metaphorically as “the capacity to project your consciousness into other people, so that you can experience *what* they experience, the *way* they experience it.”⁶⁵ This understanding evokes many of the eight variations that Baston highlights, and adds an important (albeit obvious) insight, namely, that this is a metaphorical phenomenon because “we cannot literally inhabit another person’s consciousness.”⁶⁶ Lakoff and Johnson explain that the logic of empathy entails taking up another’s perspective and allowing their values to become your values. In terms of morality, this leads to a variation on the Golden Rule which says “do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”⁶⁷ For the purposes of this research, this manifests as an attempt to read McClendon as he intended; to seek an interpretation of his work that he would affirm which is consistent with the logic internal to his method and style, or to read him according to his own convictions.

Natalie Depraz reflects on the methodological use of empathy.⁶⁸ She argues for continuity between the traditionally firm and polarized first, second, and third person perspectives. She suggests that instead of being held in oppositions, they form a “gradual dynamic of intersubjective validations.”⁶⁹ Depraz proposes that the concept of the second-person is not a “formal

must be of a kind that permits considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances; and such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance; 5. Each party must recognize the fact its own use of a concept is contested by those other parties.

⁶⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: The Embodied Mind And Its Challenge To Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999) 309 (hereafter cited as *Philosophy in the Flesh*.).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Natalie Depraz, “Empathy And Second-person Methodology,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 45, no. 3 (September 2012): 447–459.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 454.

instance, but a relational dynamic of different figures in mutual interaction.”⁷⁰ This second person perspective bridges the traditional quantitative third person perspective and the qualitative first person perspective. She highlights here a firmness in traditional methods of inquiry, and questions if a relational dynamic would be beneficial in a methodological sense. If a scholar who is not present is conceived of as a distinct “other”, or an “individual singularity”, or any other separate untouchable entity, the question arises: “is the very relationship with such an other put to the fore, or is it merely the other as a singular individual that is put to the fore?”⁷¹ She insists, “never do you experience the relational linkage proper if you are only primarily interested in the individual persons themselves, be they understood as subject or as object.” Even in scholarship, the relational dynamic must not be diminished if we are to avoid the objectivist tendencies of the past. What comes to be seen in research, as Depraz sees it, is the “very linkage of the relationship”, which avoids reductionist accounts of either perspective and embraces an empathic second-person account. This type of second person account, which acknowledges the relational dynamic and seeks to read McClendon empathically, is what is practiced in this thesis.

With respect to the theological tradition on empathy, there is not as much work done. Empathy in the realm of ethics and in practical theology, such as pastoral theology, is a common concept. The command of Jesus Christ to “love your neighbor as your self” (Mark 12:31), evokes empathy as a vital aspect of what love is. At the very least, it entails the kind of empathic projection that is required to achieve love. Due to this implication from Scripture, empathy has made various, albeit implied, appearances throughout the theological tradition. It has not, apart from a few exceptions, become a defining concept in systematic theology. One such exception is found within Edward Farley’s doctrine of God, which illumines how empathy can (and should) be used as a theological category.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Divine Empathy

Farley, who draws quite heavily on phenomenologist philosophy,⁷² uses empathy as a kind of paradigmatic metaphor, which facilitates the meaning of redemption, the event of Jesus Christ, and the symbolics of God.⁷³ He sees this metaphor coinciding with terms such as the Hebrew word *chesed*,⁷⁴ the Greek term *agape*, along with sympathy, and compassion. Farley's particular understanding of 'empathy' points to an awareness of its varied meanings and the contested nature of the concept. He includes words and ideas such as, concerned suffering, participation, fellow feeling, co-operation, and mutual enhancement as terms explicating empathy. While all of these terms are reminiscent of what has been stated above concerning empathy, Farley brings his own perspective to bear.

He locates empathy in the realm of the interhuman. Farley contends that it is "not just a subjective, interior phenomenon. Rather, empathy... is a kind of activity and even efficacy, not in the sense of an external force, but something that evokes response."⁷⁵ This responsive empathy is an interhuman phenomenon that is also a theological phenomenon. This is precisely because of two related Christian convictions: 1) As fully and actually human, Jesus embodies the general agential structures of human existence;⁷⁶ and 2) God was 'in' Christ.⁷⁷ From the person of Jesus, it is appropriate to infer information about humanity and about the nature of God. Through looking at the life of Christ, Farley observes that "something about Jesus' relation to

⁷² Particularly the work of Edmund Husserl.

⁷³ Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy : A Theology Of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 295. Each of these has a particular meaning for Farley which he presents in his other publications, see especially: Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Man : A Social Phenomenology Of Faith And Reality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), and Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols : Their Postmodern Effacement And Reclamation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

⁷⁴ *Chesed* is usually translated into English as "mercy", "loving-kindness", or "compassion".

⁷⁵ *Divine Empathy*, 282.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

God orients Jesus empathetically and as such to any and all he meets.”⁷⁸ It is this phenomenon that Farley calls the divine empathy.

The divine empathy has no qualifiers or restrictions. It is, as Farley states, repeatedly, ‘*as such*’.⁷⁹ It works in a person, exemplary in Christ, to “enlarge the capacity to receive it and promote the conditions pertaining to that capacity. Thus the divine empathy coincides with creativity itself.”⁸⁰ For Farley, Jesus was ultimately aware of this capacity and was entirely empathetic in his being *as such*. The divine empathy directs life outward on the individual level, and on the corporate level. This is one of Christ’s major accomplishments. Namely, it universalizes the faith of Israel through this empathic relation to the world. Farley says of empathy that it “cannot arbitrarily restrict its reach or scope. It cannot say, thus far and no farther...It cannot desire a good for one aspect of the other and not another aspect...Empathy thus is ever an operation of enlargement, a universalization.”⁸¹ For Farley, then, this approach to understanding the person of Christ addresses many of the questions that arise in seeking to understand the relation between Jesus and God. Jesus was an entirely effective empathic embodiment of God’s nature.

Divine empathy is, to a lesser extent, found in the followers of Christ who participate in the divine empathy, restoring and forming people who are more ‘other-focused’. This focus on the other evokes a response which is empathetic and creative and, for Farley, demonstrates how redemption is brought about.⁸² Farley comments that if human empathy is true, it “desires the other to remain itself and retain its integrity; it refuses to control and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 281.

⁷⁹ Farley uses ‘as such’ in a very particular way to refer to how empathy is only responsive. Farley explains the relation of Jesus to God as ‘as such’ that is “in such trust and faith that the mediating paraphernalia of religion and the social conditions of grace are pressed into the background or are revealed in their demonic potentialities.” 276. For further discussion on this ‘as such’ see *Divine Empathy*, 276-285.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁸¹ Ibid., 296.

⁸² *Divine Empathy*, 304.

manage. Accordingly, empathy assists rather than suppresses the other's self-initiation and freedom."⁸³ In this empathic living, people participate in the way of God.

Farley uses empathy as a category which is useful for providing an insight into theological methods in general. My use of empathy will primarily be as a hermeneutical practice. It will attempt to facilitate a reading of McClendon which initiates and frees rather than manipulates and controls. In order to do so, empathy requires an ally. If one is to see McClendon's perspective and glean insights from his view, an active and faithful imagination must be exercised. Here too, there have been profound developments.

1.5 Imagination

Imagination is a vital part of everyday life: from children playing in a sand box, to the physicist hypothesizing complex possibilities of the universe, and creating a method to go about proving it, imagination plays a central role in the lives and experiences of human beings. It is readily accepted in the realms of art, but (counter-rationalist movements like Romanticism notwithstanding) is less recognized for its role in more 'rational' enterprises. The dichotomy between rationality and imagination is firmly entrenched in our (western) social vocabularies and conceptions of reason. This has slowly been questioned as the insights of science and philosophy have made us aware of the indivisible connections between our minds, our bodies, and our social contexts. How we think and reason is a product of the type of beings we are, physically and socially.

In the world of theology, the realization that God's view of things is not a perspective we are able to know outright is becoming commonplace. This has been responded to by various sub-traditions, and has involved the acceptance that theology has an innate hermeneutical or interpretive task.⁸⁴ This

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981) 107, and Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology : God, Scripture & Hermeneutics*. (Leicester: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2002). McClendon himself affirms this in his definition of theology, where he includes interpretation, and transformation of convictions as part of its task. See *Ethics*, 23.

acceptance allows creativity, and indeed imagination, to begin to be accepted as an inevitable and often beneficial attribute to theology's role, especially when it comes to being contextually relevant in our pluralistic world.

David Tracy

This line of thinking leads David Tracy to claim that “an understanding of all authentic understanding as a hermeneutical event, therefore, seems an appropriate way to interpret the nature of the task of a systematic theologian.”⁸⁵ Tracy insists that in order for theology to be relevant in this age, it must remain in the public sphere. Using the schema of conversation, Tracy understands hermeneutics as a similar phenomenon to that which takes place in a conversation. He explains:

For every event of understanding, in order to produce a new interpretation, mediates between our past experience and the understanding embodied in our linguistic tradition and the present event of understanding occasioned by a fidelity to the logic of the question in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation. We constantly mediate, translate, from our past understandings to our present one. We consistently find that understanding happens in precisely this deeply subjective yet intersubjective, sharable, public indeed historical movement of authentic conversation.⁸⁶

Tracy highlights how theology on a broad scale within society must be involved in a conversation about its convictions. It must engage truthfully, both from within and outside of its tradition, to be pertinent to the world. He later argues that by using the ‘analogical imagination’, that theologians creatively interpret ‘the classic’ to ‘re-present’ it in a meaningful way.⁸⁷ For Tracy, the analogical imagination is a matter of reflection on the similarity-in-difference of the “major classical symbols, texts, events, images, persons, rituals”, which will reveal creative re-interpretation.⁸⁸ Tracy admits that his is not a risk free enterprise. Rather, he insists that it is a necessity if the

⁸⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981) 107.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 424.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 405, 410.

theologian is to avoid the “false security of mere repetition”, which he attributes to ‘fundamental theologians’.⁸⁹

Garrett Green

Tracy successfully introduces how the imagination is needed for the theological task, but falls short in explaining how this can be done. Garrett Green, another advocate of religious imagination, says, “perhaps the greatest disappointment of [Tracy’s] *The Analogical Imagination*, stems from the expectations it raises.”⁹⁰ Green gives credit to the task that Tracy has undertaken, and many of the questions he raised. Yet he ultimately decides that it is disappointing that Tracy’s book “sheds so little light on either analogy or imagination.”⁹¹ Green, on the other hand, has accounted for this, and his work is fruitful for the current task.

Green takes seriously the role that imagination plays in understanding. His *Imagining God: Theology and The Religious Imagination* explores insights into imagination, rationality, recent scientific advancements, and how these work together to be used in theology.

Green begins by looking at how, in the past, imagination was much more common in understanding what religion is about. He notes that interpreting religion as a form of imagination was a commonly held notion in the past, citing Kant, Hegel, and Coleridge, as using imagination to consider the very nature of religion and theology.⁹² Green chooses one of the longest standing and most disputed debates in twentieth century theology - the Barth-Brunner debate over natural theology - as a location for an imaginative approach to theology.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 405.

⁹⁰ Garrett Green, “The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism,” *Zygon* 17, no. 4 (1982) 421.

⁹¹ Ibid., 421.

⁹² See, Garrett Green, *Imagining God : Theology And The Religious Imagination* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), Chapter 1, “Religion as Imagination in Modern Thought”.

Green frames the debate between these two prominent theologians as a matter of nature and grace. On the one hand, he considers whether there is something intrinsic within the makeup of humanity that allows us to see and experience revelation (Brunner's perspective), or, on the other hand, whether it is completely an act of grace from God (Barth's perspective). Paraphrasing Barth, Green says: "We do not understand revelation by learning how people are able to receive it, but rather by learning that it comes precisely to those who are unable to receive it."⁹³ To Brunner, this seemed to isolate theology from all else, and limited its ability to address the world. Brunner wrote an essay nuancing some of his ideas specifically around (as Green frames it) "distinguishing aspects of nature and grace: general and special revelation; the grace of creation and the grace of preservation; the 'ordinances' of creation; and the relation of old and new creation."⁹⁴ Barth rejected any treatment of nature that could be separated from the revelation in Jesus Christ.

Green proposes to overcome the dilemma between natural and special revelation or nature and grace, by making the imagination a common ground for these two perspectives,⁹⁵ and by his naming of the ability of humans to live according to the word of God as 'imagination'. More plainly, "imagination is the anthropological point of contact for divine revelation."⁹⁶ It is, for Green, the medium of revelation, or where revelation takes place. This allows Green to do justice to two aspects of revelation: 1. as a divine act of grace, reducible to no human ability, attribute, or need; and 2. as a human act of faith, comparable in significant respects to other forms of human

⁹³ Ibid., 32. For more on how Green sets up this problem see chapter two: "A Theological Dilemma: 'Natural Theology' or 'Positivism of Revelation'".

⁹⁴ *Imagining God*, 32. Brunner (1889-1966 was a Swiss theologian and ordained minister in the Swiss Reformed Church, and is a leading figure in Neo-Orthodox category of theology) does this in his essay "Natur und Gnade", which resulted in Barth's famous response "Nein".

⁹⁵ It is worth noting that Green displays an active imagination in his hermeneutics for making this commonality work.

⁹⁶ *Imagining God*, 40.

experience.⁹⁷ With the stage set for imagination to play a leading role, Green makes the case that imagination, as a human activity, and rightly employed as a theological concept, need not lead to reductionist conclusions. Rather, it is indeed an essential aspect of living and thinking faithfully.

Green uses philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn to explore the concept of a paradigm, and makes linkages from Kuhn's use of this language to religious thought. A paradigm, which is the structure of models and images that form the logic of a scientific theory or method, is similar to how the imagination functions. Throughout his work, Green uses the example of Ludwig Wittgenstein's iconic duck-rabbit.⁹⁸ The *gestalt* can be seen as a rabbit or a duck, depending upon the paradigm of the seer, and Green argues that it is imagination that makes seeing both possible. Green proposes that we understand imagination as "the paradigmatic faculty, the ability of human beings to recognize in accessible exemplars the constitutive organizing patterns of other, less accessible and more complex objects of cognition."⁹⁹ Green works extensively to provide credibility to this view from both within and outside of the theological realm. What I want to highlight here, however, is how he argues from *within* the theological tradition.

One interest for Green is the development of a distinctively Christian imagination that plays a paradigmatic roll in the lives of its bearers. A point that is important for him to clarify about this type of imagination is the distinction between image and imagination. "One does not image God", which Green says, would be a form of idolatry, "but imagines God."¹⁰⁰ This is the distinction between constructing some picture of God, and thinking of God according to a paradigm. This is an important insight that must not be forgotten, for idolatry is easily achieved. To attempt to say what God *is*, instead of saying what God is *like*, is an act of a very different venture.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 40. Green notes 1. as being what Barth fought so hard to maintain, and 2. as recognizing Brunner's question as legitimate and beneficial to our lives here in this world.

⁹⁸ This can be found in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 194.

⁹⁹ *Imagining God*, 66. This is also what McClendon achieves with his biography as theology, See more on this in Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 93.

Green furthers his task by presenting what this paradigmatic imagination may look like according to Christian faith. Through choosing faithful paradigms to structure the imagination, one can have freedom and authority in living truthfully and realistically.¹⁰¹ This is not merely a personal reality and, to be truly authentic to the faith it confesses, it must be a communal imagination. Green is convinced that the paradigms that shape people's imaginations and their experiences in the world are more apt for revealing the uniqueness in a person or a group, rather than the experiences themselves. He says that "what is given to the believer, and therefore to the theologian, is not a foundational experience, but a religious paradigm: a normative model of 'what the world is like,' embodied in a canon of scripture and expressed in the life of a religious community."¹⁰² People experience life in different ways, but what will be the same is the imagination through which they experience it. The communal imagination of a given group will be constituted by the metaphors, symbols and images that are enacted in their rituals and language. A communal imagination that is employed in this way will give the particular group a particular perspective. It is the imagination which is ultimately more telling than the experience.

The question of truth is another important issue that Green addresses within this approach. He contends that a given imaginative paradigm should not be deemed true or false as an abstraction from how that imagination is being used. "Truth", Green observes, "is not a property of the model or the narrative text per se, but rather a function of the use to which it is put."¹⁰³ Imagination is not an end in itself, but rather a human faculty which must be faithfully employed in order to be truthful.¹⁰⁴ Green continues along this vein,

¹⁰¹ See, Ibid., 119.

¹⁰² Ibid., 133, emphasis Green's.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁴ This is along the same lines of Stanley Hauerwas' approach to truth. See, Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness And Tragedy : Further Investigations In Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 79-81. This concept is often used by both Hauerwas and McClendon, and is drawn from Wittgenstein's insights on meaning being in the use of the word instead of the word itself. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

arguing that “imagination is thus the organ of faith: neither its ground nor its goal or perfection, but rather a penultimate means of grace in a world whose final redemption remains the object of hope.”¹⁰⁵

This has a lot to do with the form and method that theology will take. For Green, theology is a matter of interpreting the “manifold aspects of that imaginative unity in order that its logic, the coherence of its elements, may be intellectually comprehended.”¹⁰⁶ Using the imagination in theology is not only beneficial, but also essential for its faithful practice. Green makes the case that not only is imagination central to human rationality, but that it is especially apt in the discussion of theological method. Imagination has recovered from its time in the background of rationality and is ready to be recovered and utilized to new potential.

Mark Johnson

Green is not alone in his thinking. Other contemporary thinkers are concluding similar things in their own fields of study. Mark Johnson, for example, has written extensively over the years on how the imagination is essential to rationality and meaning-making.

Johnson works within the Anglo-American post-modern tradition and he joined with George Lakoff in a ground breaking and challenging book on the nature and role of metaphor in our everyday language. *Metaphors We Live By* challenged the common view of metaphor as a fundamentally deviant use of a word, usually based on similarity. They argue instead, that metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of speech. This has major implications for the way that people think, and the implicit, often pre-conscious, metaphors that structure our concepts and categories for cognition.¹⁰⁷ This was a pivotal book in changing the way that metaphor was used in linguistics and philosophy of language. It raised many

¹⁰⁵ *Imagining God*, 144.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁷ A further look at metaphor theories and their implications for theology will come in Chapter Four and in looking at Johnson’s work in greater detail in Chapter Five.

interesting questions about understanding, imagination, and meaning-making. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff have each pursued these questions in various publications since that time.

In *The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Johnson argues for an increased awareness and appreciation of the role of imagination in our reasoning. He is fundamentally concerned with proposing three main claims: 1) that without imagination, nothing in the world could be meaningful; 2) without imagination, we could never make sense of our experience; and 3) that without imagination, we could never reason toward knowledge of reality.¹⁰⁸ In a similar approach to Green's understanding of imagination, Johnson is concerned with the ways that imagination structures how we understand and experience our lives. Johnson, however, delves deeper into the details of how the imagination forms such structures.

The two main ways that imagination structures experience, in Johnson's view, are via image schemas and metaphoric projections. Johnson describes image schemas as "a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience."¹⁰⁹ A commonly used example of this throughout Johnson's writings is the verticality¹¹⁰ schema; the human tendency to structure things according to our experiences in the world where an up-down orientation is prevalent. This is encountered daily in many ways, from pouring liquid into a cup and watching the level 'rise', to the feeling of standing tall or climbing stairs. This vertical notion surrounds and structures much of our experiences, and, therefore, our language as well.

¹⁰⁸ See, Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind : The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) ix.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., xiv.

¹¹⁰ It is the convention of Johnson and others to use small caps when citing explicit image schemas or conceptual metaphors. I will follow him in this use.

The other main structure that Johnson argues for is metaphor. Metaphor is broadly conceived by Johnson as “a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind.”¹¹¹ This broader understanding of metaphor presents a wide spectrum of possibilities. With metaphor, the structure of one kind of experience, say, the role of a coach on a rugby team, is projected onto, and influences the experience of a different domain, such as the role of a minister in a church. For one has mainly experienced being around a rugby team and has limited knowledge and experience of a church, this metaphor will lead to a particular understanding and experience of church leadership which is rooted in the experiences of a rugby coach (while obviously highlighting some aspects and diminishing others). This phenomenon is ubiquitous but not usually at a conscious level.

Johnson is indebted to Immanuel Kant, whose insight into imagination is the starting point for much of this thinking. Johnson claims that Kant was limited by the dualisms that his system of thought is based upon. The metaphysical split between the physical and the mental is an overwhelming force for Kant. It is this duality Johnson sees as the main limiting factor in Kant’s conclusions on imagination.¹¹² Johnson views himself moving beyond Kant’s thinking in ways that Kant’s method would not allow. Johnson sees Kant’s work on imagination as the greatest contribution to our understanding of meaning and rationality, but acknowledges that this is a conclusion that would have been impossible for Kant to make.¹¹³ Instead of seeing the metaphysical and epistemological dichotomies as absolutes, Johnson proposes to see dichotomies not as either/or categories but as different ends of a continuum. The imagination determines one’s location along the continuum.¹¹⁴ Johnson sees meaning as more complex and less univocal than Kant, and as such it is much more difficult to come to firm categories or

¹¹¹ *The Body in the Mind*, xiv-xv.

¹¹² See, *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, especially 165-172.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹¹⁴ This is a very important move on Johnson’s part and one which could have been made clearer.

propositions. Rationality is the product of all of these imaginative structures taken together, each part bringing its own constraints and possibilities.¹¹⁵

Johnson goes on to list five components that are requisite for a fully adequate theory of imagination.¹¹⁶ The five components are: 1) Categorization: A sort of prototype categorization is what Johnson has in mind, rather than one that would seek a minimal amount of requisite conditions; 2) Schemata: Both in terms of the image schemas Johnson proposes and in the sense that it is used in cognitive science, much of which still needs to be explored in more detail;¹¹⁷ 3) Metaphorical projections: Much of this thinking has been explored by Lakoff and Johnson, as well as their colleagues, but more insight is needed into the relationships between domains, as well as the constraints upon metaphoric projections; 4) Metonymy: Similar in many ways to metaphor, Johnson highlights both synecdoche (part-for-whole) and metonymy proper (salient or related attribute-for-whole) as being especially important; and 5) Narrative structure: The notion of narrative unity is crucial for an adequate account of imagination due to both the complex communal narratives people take part in, and also to the phenomenon of using story to remember one's life. Much more can and will be said on this point, but for now it will suffice to say that Johnson recognizes this important aspect in human understanding, and the role it plays in structuring thought.

These five components are crucial to Johnson's account of imagination and are fundamental for understanding how his use advances the notion of imagination for this research. Johnson holds that "imagination is central to human meaning and rationality for the simple reason that what we can experience and cognize as meaningful, and how we can reason about it are both dependent upon structures of imagination that make our experience

¹¹⁵ The chief differences between Kant and Johnson in this area are methodology and priority. How knowledge is achieved for both men is very different. So, while Kant deals extensively with imagination, it is relegated to a role on the periphery. Johnson, on the other hand, gives it a central role.

¹¹⁶ See *The Body In The Mind*, 171.

¹¹⁷ There have been advances in this area since that time, some of which are highlighted in Mark Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body: Aesthetics Of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

what it is.”¹¹⁸ Our imagination structures how we experience. In theology, as Green points out, there is a specific way that our tradition dictates how our imagination is formed.¹¹⁹ Due to the work of Green, Johnson, and others across a variety of disciplines, imagination is beginning to be acknowledged as playing a vital role in how people think. Imagination acts as a uniting feature of all people (operating in every human as a part of having the human body), despite the diversity in their conviction sets. For McClendon, this notion is implicit throughout his work. His imagination was formed through his Christian and baptist convictions, and he freely explored and reinterpreted theology within the boundaries they provide for him.

The work of Farley, Green, and Johnson in particular, provide theoretical underpinnings to the “empathic imaginative” approach to studying McClendon which will be employed in this thesis. This will yield an approach to McClendon which is faithful to his own writings and his convictions. It is, moreover, a reading that is not merely desirable but *necessary* in order to fully appreciate McClendon’s project. His biographical method of living theology entails that the person (character), their convictions, and the narrative(s) they live, are inseparable things. An introduction to these ideas and an account of why this method is uniquely suited to this study is now needed to bring a close to the introduction to this project.

1.6 Biography as Theology

The first major constructive work that James McClendon produced was *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology*. This work used real life exemplars who, although non-theologians, lived a theologically potent life. McClendon interpreted their lives to see their convictions, and how they have lived as exemplars of what the Christian story may look like. It is, as such, a study in imaginative living, recognizing the convictions that structure imagination and how the embodied possibilities are actualized.

¹¹⁸ *The Body In The Mind*, 172.

¹¹⁹ See *Imagining God*, ., 126-152.

McClendon viewed ethics and theology as inseparable. It is within the character of a person that these things combine. For McClendon, to have character “is to enter at a new level the realm of morality, the level at which one’s person, with its continuities and interconnections, its integrity, is intimately involved in one’s deeds.”¹²⁰ The character is the cause and consequence of deeds, and the vessel of convictions. There are doctrinal convictions and ethical convictions. These are related and often are a part of the same conviction set.¹²¹ The person or character is, therefore, the manifestation that unites a person to his or her convictions. As McClendon put it, “the glue that binds convictions into a single set is their mutual relation to the life of the person or (normally) the life of the community in which he or she shares. The unity of conviction sets is the rough but vital unity of a shared life, the narrative in which they cohere.”¹²² A life is a story of a character in a particular time and place.

McClendon studies those who live the vision of their community, but in some superlative way; those who embody the convictions of the community, but with a new scope or power.¹²³ It is these lives that McClendon sees serving as data for the theologian and as being adequate to “reflect upon the tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all.”¹²⁴ These reflections lead McClendon to look to lives and discover theology embodied in the community which allows him to see that when, Christian beliefs are not so many ‘propositions’ to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer, but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one that begins by attending to lived lives. *Theology must at least be biography*. If by attending to those lives, we find ways of reforming our own

¹²⁰ *Bio.*, 16.

¹²¹ Convictions do not occur in isolation. They are related and therefore are justified in relation to other convictions held by that person and or community. See, *Con.*, 91- 100.

¹²² *Con.*, 99.

¹²³ *Bio.*, 22.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

theologies, making them more true, more faithful to our ancient vision, more adequate to the age now being born, then we will be justified in that arduous inquiry. *Biography at its best will be theology.*¹²⁵

This powerful passage highlights McClendon's strong and active conviction that Christianity is a living faith, or it is nothing. This was the impetus for his study of lives, which he then reflected upon and used in order to reform theology to become more apt for the present, and more faithful to its ancient vision.

How McClendon performed this kind of study is of utmost importance, as it determines my methodological response. McClendon displayed both empathic and imaginative tendencies in studying these paradigmatic lives.¹²⁶ McClendon suggested that the key to unlocking the theological potential in the lives of his subjects lies in "the dominant or controlling images which may be found in the lives of which they speak."¹²⁷ He continues by stating "I take it that the convergence of such images in a particular person helps to form a characteristic vision or outlook. (Moreover I believe that the living out of life under the governance of such a vision is the best way to conceive of 'religious experience' insofar as the latter can be a datum for theology.)"¹²⁸ To come back to the image of the cord highlighted earlier, what I am doing is highlighting a distinctive pattern or strand that runs throughout McClendon's methodology.

In Johnson's terms, McClendon looked at the image schemas and patterns that structured his subject's imagination in a paradigmatic way. This reveals that their convictions, and theological reflections, are therefore, the natural response.¹²⁹ McClendon achieves this through looking at their lives

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ These paradigmatic lives, which McClendon labels compelling, will be explored in Chapter Three.

¹²⁷ *Bio.*, 69.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ McClendon's method, including the philosophical and theological moves, will be dealt with in a much greater detail in Chapters Three and Four.

empathetically to grasp the images that shape the uniqueness of their imagination and, through it, their experience of living (a theological) life. Doing theology in this way will “establish it more firmly against the twin threats of superstition and vacuity, and relate it more clearly to the pluralist present world in which together we live.”¹³⁰ It is this method, and the convictions therein, that have guided McClendon’s work throughout his life.

Through his method, McClendon aimed to do theology in a way that can be considered better (both from within and outside of the Christian tradition) than how it has been practiced in the past. Through his theology, he hoped that he might help Christian adherents have a living faith in which they imagine, or structure their experience of the world in a way that is fused to both the stories of the past and the world that we face today (with its unique challenges).

This is a goal of mine too. This methodological response comes from one who seeks faithfully to pursue studying a theologian with the same concerns and methods that McClendon displays. It will involve practicing the kinds of methods McClendon practices in his theology, but applying them to himself as the subject. I view this empathic imaginative response as contextual, self-involving, rational, and narrative based. As such, this methodological response is uniquely suited to studying McClendon by his own rules. Empathy is emphasized in the discovery and understanding of aspects of the theological task, and imagination is highlighted in the critical revision or creative part of its practice.

At this point, one further exploration is needed to round out these methodological considerations. The line between allowing McClendon’s theological method to shape my study of him, and accepting McClendon’s method outright as an ideology, could become blurred. David McMillan asks in his article *McClendon/McClendonism: Methodology or Ideology?*, whether the way McClendon practiced theology is rightly seen as innovative within the field of theological method, or as a paradigm through which the

¹³⁰ *Bio.*, 71.

whole subject of theology should be “understood and redefined in terms of McClendonian categories.”¹³¹ McClendon proposed novel ways to practice theology, specifically his detailed method of using biography, and the image-based method that comes with that. I have also stated that the way McClendon conceived of theology is unique, and one of the biggest hurdles he faced was convincing other theologians that they were doing the same kind of work that he was.¹³² There are inclinations, then, that my understanding of McClendon can be seen as either method or ideology. As McMillan puts it, “There is always a tension between adopting a hermeneutic or perspective as the chosen vehicle through which to investigate a phenomenon and the application of a particular hermeneutic or perspective to a particular phenomenon.”¹³³

In the field of theology, and the unique challenges therein, the difference is quite small. Or, as McMillan says throughout his work, “the gap between being 'a' theology or way of thinking theologically and being an ideology that explains and criticizes 'whatever else there is' is wafer thin.”¹³⁴ To accept McClendon’s methodological approach without question or critique, and to judge others’ theology in light of his, would be an ideological use of his theology. And seeking to judge McClendon’s approach by looking at how theology has traditionally been practiced throughout the past two hundred years would require accepting the foundational and rationalistic approach which he rejects.

There must be another option, then, between these uses of his theology. McMillan goes back to McClendon and Smith’s understanding of convictions which goes beyond the cognitive and includes the conative and the affective.¹³⁵ In addition to this, the acceptance that objectivity is beyond our

¹³¹ David McMillan, “McClendon/McClendonism: Methodology or Ideology?,” *Baptistic Theologies* 3, no. 1 (2011): 45–58.

¹³² See, *Con.*, 184.

¹³³ McMillan, “McClendon/McClendonism: Methodology or Ideology?,” 45.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48. The ‘whatever else there is’ in his quotation, is a reference to McClendon’s understanding of theology, explained above.

¹³⁵ cf. *Con.*, 6.

grasp has been widely accepted. There is no conviction-free ground on which to stand. The thinker in any discipline stands within a larger tradition of society, place, and culture. This location must be acknowledged so the self-deception of achieving an objective view is avoided. This is why McClendon settled on the approach he did; it seeks to avoid the pitfalls of objectivity and subjectivity.

My application of an empathic method adds one more challenge to this dilemma. As I seek to read McClendon as closely as he would advocate, I must, to an extent, accept his position and appropriate myself in this reading. The key to keeping my method from becoming an ideological reading is to maintain a critical stance. This involves not merely accepting his position as it is, and shaping my mind around it, but taking a detailed look at his narrative and context to see how his perspective developed in the way that it did.

I will accomplish this through looking at the sources of his biographical method, and finding the (image-based) logic behind it. Once this is displayed, I will be able to progress through the rest of McClendon's work and see variations and implications in how this method emerged. This critical assessment is different from simply judging the validity of his concepts and method based upon logical preexisting criteria. Instead, it requires an empathic awareness of the author and context. For this project, my empathic response includes a biographical chapter (Chapter Two) so that the work of McClendon is understood within the context of his life, and is not abstracted from it. Further, the methodological moves McClendon makes are seen throughout his life and the conflicts and challenges he faced. He resisted the Enlightenment rationality which dominated theology of the past, and sought a more incarnate approach involving the actual experience of Christian believers.

1.7 Outcomes

I propose that by reading McClendon in this way, the strengths and weaknesses internal to his thinking will become clear, and the unity with which McClendon thought and wrote will be highlighted. Within the

Protestant tradition, the important role of living exemplars of the faith is something that has not been fully appreciated. This thesis will draw attention once again to this observation, in the hope that the gap can be minimized between the lives of Christian adherents and academic theology which, at times, seems so distant from daily living. These (among others) are my aspirations for what this research might add to the many voices in the tournament of narratives known as theology's engagement with the world.

1.8 Summary and Conclusion

In this opening chapter I have introduced James McClendon's understanding of theology, and the methodological response that I propose to make.

McClendon centered his understanding of theology around the concept of 'convictions' and filled this concept with a distinctly baptist vision for his community of readers. Based upon these convictions, McClendon highlighted four requisites that theology, from this perspective, will include. A contextual, narrative based, rational, and self-involving theology is the outcome. In order to come to an adequate understanding of McClendon, it is necessary to take into account his distinctive method and understanding of theology. This has led me to respond by seeking to study McClendon 'from the inside'. Or, to state it differently, I will study McClendon according to his own methods, while (empathically) holding his convictions. To achieve this, an awareness of the theoretical and theological potential of empathy and imagination were explored. These concepts inform and direct what I have called the 'empathic imaginative method', which I have argued is fitting for studying McClendon. Considering his biographical method of pursuing theology, this is especially apt. This method will illuminate McClendon's work in a way that has not been achieved previously. Each of these considerations will enable a revision to made of McClendon's biographical method, to enable a revised application for today's context.

The Way Forward

The next immediate step must be to explore McClendon's life. This will situate him in an historical and social context, following the development of his thought. Two related chapters will reveal the origins of the formation of McClendon's biographical method, including the focus on images (Chapter

Three). This analysis will include the impetus for the development of his method, and an examination of Austin Farrer, McClendon's main resource for his use of images. Following on, I will look at McClendon's implementation of images in his book *Biography as Theology*. Chapter Four shows the growth from an explicit use of images to a deeper implication of this type of thinking, seen throughout McClendon's systematic theology. An analysis of his baptist vision, use of picture thinking, and treatment of catachresis will show this development. Chapter Five will look in greater detail at the philosophical insights of Mark Johnson, from his work on metaphor and imagination, to his latest project which look at the more qualitative sources for human meaning-making. The move to include Johnson makes up a significant portion of my contribution to a revised understanding of McClendon, as it builds upon a latent thread in his thought (image-based rationality) which will reveal new possibilities for his work in the current theological climate. In Chapter Six, I move on to describe my response in a more particular way, making the case that incorporating Johnson is fitting in light of what can be seen in McClendon's work. This chapter will highlight some of their mutual concerns, and offer ways that Johnson's work may further McClendon's biographical method for theology. In the final chapter (Chapter Seven), I will look at McClendon's Christology in light of the connections made with Johnson, before moving on to make conclusions about McClendon, how his biographical method of theology may be used in the future, and theological method in general.

Chapter Two. The Life of James W. McClendon, Jr.

James McClendon's contribution to the field of theology was formed as a result of his unique life and context. As McClendon's theology asserts, the convictions held by a person are seen not in their exposition of them, but in their living of them. As such, his convictions cannot be isolated from the context of the life in which they were embodied. This is why biography naturally becomes such a vital part of his theology. To undertake a reading of McClendon without a detailed look at his life would be a blatant disregard for this basic tenet of his thought.¹

As with any biography, not all of McClendon's life can be recounted here. Following McClendon's pattern, I will focus on a few main events and developments which have contributed to the formation of McClendon's theological perspective. This will set the narrative which brings to life his theology and will inform and be responded to throughout my project. I have selected three main events which were formative for McClendon (and his theology). Firstly, I look at the origins of McClendon's life in Louisiana, following through to his education and participation in WWII. Secondly, I examine McClendon's participation in the civil unrest of the 1960s, including the two academic positions that were the cost of this participation. A two part 'conversion' in the sixties through to the early seventies present the third development in McClendon's life. This 'conversion' significantly shaped the direction that McClendon's theology would take from that point onward, both philosophically and theologically. The chapter concludes by exploring the end of

¹ Curtis Freeman includes a brief, and thoroughly referenced biography of McClendon in the republished Baylor Press edition of McClendon's systematic theology. In it, Freeman treats McClendon's life and work as an introduction to the systematic project and McClendon's distinct 'baptist' perspective. See, Curtis Freeman, "A Theology for Radical Believers and Other Baptists" in James McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol. 1*. Revised, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012). Freeman rightly acknowledges that McClendon's narrative theology was not merely an imaginative practice within academic theology, it was, "deeply autobiographical" ix. That is, it developed through the events and relationships in his life.

McClendon's life, and some observations about his narrative and the convictions therein will be highlighted.

2.1 Early Life

Louisiana in the 1920s was a distinctly different place from what it has since become. The changes of such a multicultural state within the twentieth century have been staggering. James William McClendon Jr. was born to, James W. Sr. and Mary McClendon in Shreveport on the sixth of March, 1924. James Sr. worked in corporate real estate, and Mary was the daughter of the Drake family, prominent land owners in the area.² Jimmy (as McClendon was commonly known then) had one sister, Marian Eames McClendon, who was nine years his junior. She does not feature in his writings, autobiographical or otherwise.

The developments of McClendon's early life centered around three locations: home, school, and church. The population of the town at this point was, as he recalls, about one-third black. Due to segregation, however, the only African American people he knew were the domestic workers within his home.³

McClendon recounts his earliest memories from "a large, comfortable, and well-staffed home maintained by [his] parents in Shreveport."⁴ He remembers being sickly as a child, and this came with admonitions from his mother to stay safe and not play too hard, a warning which, he says, "chimed in with my own sissy fear of bigger boys and bullies of whatever size."⁵ This was not a lasting fear, as McClendon was able to make up for his physical disappointments by excelling in the classroom. While attending the top schools in Shreveport (not a large claim, according to McClendon), he was always near the top of the class. He excelled in learning what was asked of him, and enjoyed doing so.

² This information was obtained through personal correspondence with Dr. Thomas McClendon, James McClendon's son. Dr. Thomas McClendon, e-mail message to author, January, 2013.

³ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 371.

⁴ James McClendon, "How My Mind Developed," 1974. Originally for *So It Goes*, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary. McClendon did a number of autobiographical or reflective pieces through the years, the last one being written shortly before his death.

⁵ Ibid.

The church he attended with his mother (his father was a steward in the First Methodist Church) was the First Baptist Church in Shreveport. As a large building in the Byzantine style, this place became “fixed with great clarity in [his] memory.”⁶ The domes and arches were impressive, he recalls, and its communion table “fit for the miracle of the loaves and fishes.”⁷ The pastor, M.E. Dodd, possessed considerable liturgical skill, and was “a widely known denominational leader. He was a leader in a Baptist version of ecumenism, both in Shreveport and beyond, making round-the-world trips and preaching and baptizing on all earth's continents.”⁸ It was in this context that the child McClendon, in his tenth or eleventh year, confessed that he “was inwardly persuaded that faith in Jesus was the way for me; I presented myself to the church in the customary manner and was immersed in the ‘Byzantine’ church baptistry.”⁹ This event remained powerful and vivid in his memory late into life. Every Sunday, he recalls, the church would be filled with many people; male and female, rich and poor, “all sorts and conditions of folk—save only that all were white like me.”¹⁰

In a 1974 sermon entitled “What Is Your Life”, McClendon recounts some early theological thoughts and memories from his childhood.¹¹ Reflecting on the traditional bedtime prayer “Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep”, he remembers it as a comforting prayer despite its morbid tone.¹² Without any notion of the soul that was distinct from himself, he writes, “I was that soul; if I should die before I wake it was me the Lord was to take, me and not some detachable essence or

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 4 (2000): 503.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Doctrine*, 372.

¹¹ James McClendon. “What Is Your Life”, 1974. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹² A very common prayer originating in the 18th Century, which McClendon’s mother taught him: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray thee Lord my soul to keep, If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take.”

element.”¹³ When he prayed to God, the image of an aged masculine bearded man was not one McClendon remembers having. Instead he simply believed that “God was the one to be trusted. No picture was required.”¹⁴

One event which McClendon recalls having a lasting effect upon him involved the southern world of segregation. He mourns that not only did this segregation prevent him from knowing a more black style of Baptist living, including knowledge of its great leaders, but it also engrained in him that this segregated state of affairs was ordinary and proper.¹⁵ He explains that the implied dogma of the time and place was both orderly and just: “‘They’ (i.e. African Americans) had ‘their’ place; ‘we’ had ‘ours,’ and a very pleasant place ‘ours’ was. No message from church or Bible ruffled this European American contentment, at least, none that I heard.”¹⁶ McClendon did not recall feeling discomfort or guilt that the segregation within society had reached this far; it was simply the way the world was.

He recalls an African American cook in his home named Rebecca who enjoyed conversing with his mother (Mary) on Christian themes. A visiting preacher had come to their church and Mary had encouraged Rebecca to witness this inspiring speaker for herself, though she would have to sit in the balcony. The next day, Rebecca arrived at their home distressed. Some boys had told her she was in the wrong place and made her leave. Mary was angry at these unnamed boys and disappointed, likely feeling guilty for her part in Rebecca’s rejection. McClendon recalls his reaction:

I was neither disappointed nor angry—at least not as I remember it—but *I was profoundly ashamed*. Yet how could I have been ashamed of what I had neither caused nor consented

¹³ McClendon, “What Is Your Life” 1. McClendon’s theology later reveals a strong embodied, element to it, and affirms a position quite close to Nancey Murphy’s non-reductive ‘physicalism’. See, James W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics*. Vol. 1. Revised. (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), Chapter 3; and Ched Myers and James W. McClendon, “Embodying the ‘Great Story’: An Interview with James W. McClendon.” *Witness* 83, no. 12 (D 2000): 12–15. Murphy develops her position throughout her work, but explicitly in Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ McClendon, “What Is Your Life” 2.

¹⁵ McClendon, *Witness*, 371-373.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 372.

to, this turning away of God's African-descended child from a Christian house of prayer, away from a church that claimed to be of her own Baptist faith? It was not the boys, it was not even my mother's rather constrained hospitality (sending when she might have escorted Rebecca?). No, though I could not have named it, I was ashamed of the *system*, the whole wrong entrenched system of division in Christ's church. Somehow, uninstructed child though I was, I knew that what happened was wrong. As I sit now in my California home and write, the shame persists.¹⁷

In his piece *How My Mind Developed*, McClendon also draws a theological connection from this early life to the work that was consuming his energies at the time (1974). He asks the rhetorical questions:

Is my present passionate concern with the pluralism of American life an authentic development from the Southern chauvinism of Miss Frances' sixth grade Confederate history? Is my fifteen years' exploration of the language of religion a true development of my way of hearing the Baptist-Methodist-Presbyterian language of 1930s Shreveport? Is my current engagement with life-story as the clue to theological understanding an authentic development of a familial community-centered Southern childhood—the development of a child who often drew back in distaste yet in loneliness from the enveloping (and largely feminine) community of home and school?¹⁸

He concludes that it is too soon to say whether these theological developments were in fact due to his early origins in northwest Louisiana, but affirms a growing conviction that, “I am doing something right, where I sit right now.”¹⁹ In many ways, McClendon attributes his theological trajectory to these early days, giving credit to his parents in the dedication of *Doctrine*, where he says, “they lived the faith I meant to write.” This is how McClendon's narrative begins and sets the context for the rest to follow.

2.2 War and University

After graduating from high school, McClendon enrolled at the University of Texas where he studied physics, with minors in mathematics and English literature. It was here that he experienced his first great teacher; R.L. Moore

¹⁷ Ibid., 373. Emphasis and brackets McClendon's.

¹⁸ McClendon, “How My Mind Developed,” 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

was one of the founders of “set theory”, who also became famous for his “Moore Method” of teaching.²⁰ The ‘method’ consisted of making the students believe that mathematics was not beyond them, that it was easier than it seemed, and that they could do it. McClendon was greatly influenced by this method, and was quite successful in it. McClendon and Moore corresponded through a part of the 1940s after he left the University of Texas, and McClendon recalls how much of an impact Moore had on him.²¹ Years later, McClendon had Moore’s photograph on the wall of his office, commemorating the teachers who had shaped him most.²²

During the first year of McClendon’s university studies, the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. Among American Christian youths, this raised not a question of whether to enlist, but rather, in which service to enlist. McClendon enrolled in the Naval Reserve, who called him to active duty (1943). They acknowledged his academic abilities and sent him to Harvard and MIT to study electronics, training him to become an electronics officer.²³ The day he boarded a ship to head to the South Pacific was the day that the war ended. McClendon’s experience of war, then, was spent first in study followed by transporting soldiers back to America. He attained the rank of Lieutenant (j.g.) and returned to finish his degree, graduating from the University of Texas in 1947.

While in the Navy, McClendon witnessed first-hand the devastation of war. Through a connection in the Baptist church, he met Mr. Soichi Saito, an executive of the YMCA in Tokyo.²⁴ Mr. Saito took him on a tour of central Tokyo, one of the places where fire-bombing was used by the allies in the

²⁰ For information on Moore, see John Parker, *R.L. Moore : Mathematician and Teacher* (Washington: Mathematical Association of America, 2005).

²¹ James McClendon, “On R.L. Moore” (audio interview) by George Csicsery, n.p. January 2000 in Graduate Theological Union Archive, Berkeley, California.

²² Ibid. Curtis Freeman notes the important influence of both Blake Smith and W.T. Connor had upon McClendon as well. See Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014) 93-96.

²³ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 504.

²⁴ Ibid.

preceding year.²⁵ The formerly dense residential area was nothing but asphalt and concrete. He recalls his, perhaps inappropriate, reaction: “I was young, I was callow, and I still had a youth's insensitive exterior... I felt no awkwardness, though, in surveying the devastation my nation had caused in my war. So, I said to myself—this is war. I'm certainly glad our side won. Inwardly I shrugged. Outwardly I thanked my host for his interesting tour.”²⁶ This incident did not incite McClendon to become a pacifist, but it was certainly a lasting experience that he would later draw from in forming that position.

Another important development that occurred for McClendon around this time was put in an early letter to a potential employer: “I surrendered more fully to evangelical truth.”²⁷ Through this surrender and involvement with the I.V.C.F. (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship), he embraced religious conservatism. The more enduring side of these religious experiences culminated in 1946 with a profound sense of personal vocation, or, as he saw it, “the one profound outward crisis of my young life – – I found myself called...to gospel ministry.”²⁸ After he completed his Physics degree, he enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Bachelor of Divinity [B.D.] 1950), Princeton Theological Seminary (Master of Theology [Th.M.] 1952), and back to Southwestern to complete his theological education (Doctorate in Theology [Th.D.] 1953).

During this time, he says that his preoccupation with biblical infallibility kept him from adequate biblical study, but acknowledges that it was under the tutelage of Otto Piper at Princeton that his first ideas of “sound academic work”

²⁵ McClendon mentions that this tactic was developed in Europe during the war as the most effective way to destroy cities, and that it made the atomic bomb nearly redundant. It created a heat so intense that winds could make it a “holocaust of unquenchable fire.” See McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 505.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ This comes in a letter to ‘Brother Decker’ sent on 24, June, 1950. See, James McClendon, “Statement Of My Experience” 1950, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

²⁸ McClendon, “How My Mind Developed,” 2.

appeared.²⁹ His doctoral dissertation was on the doctrine of sin, supervised under the esteemed theologian Walter Thomas Conner.³⁰ Unfortunately, Conner passed away and McClendon was left to finish his dissertation with very little supervision, an outcome, he claims, which may have ironically raised his academic sights. His dissertation entitled “The Doctrine of Sin and the First Epistle of John: a Comparison of Calvinist, Wesleyan, and Biblical Thought” was the outcome.³¹ He notes, however, that if he had named it properly, it might have been called “The Doctrine of Perfection in 1 John and its Reflection in Modern Christianity.”³²

His education was a slow, albeit intense, one. He did not find that physics could engage with the questions he was most concerned with, which ultimately led him to theology. He sought to engage the big questions of life and struggled with them throughout his education. He notes that it seemed to him that his teachers in seminary did not teach much theology in the way he would come to understand it.³³ The tensions McClendon came across in theology were taken very seriously and he participated in the difficulties of the authors he read as if they were his own.³⁴ It was through this practice that he came to view theology as a trial by ordeal discipline, “the very arena of conscientiousness.”³⁵

His theological style, at this point, could be described as “Baptist evangelicalism spiced with whiffs of the then current ‘biblical theology’ and topped with a

²⁹ James McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life and Work to the Present (1969),” 1969. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

³⁰ See, Jesse J. Northcutt, “Walter Thomas Conner, Theologian of Southwestern.” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1966): 81–89.

³¹ James William McClendon, “The doctrine of sin and the first Epistle of John; a comparison of Calvinist, Wesleyan, and Biblical thought,” (Th.D. diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953).

³² McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 506.

³³ *Bio.*, 68.

³⁴ *Ibid.* It was this personal struggle with what theology is about, which likely led to the development of his understanding of “convictions,” and his adoption of them as central to theology.

³⁵ *Bio.*, 68.

(quite antithetical) dollop of Boston personalism – – Bowne and Brightman.”³⁶ His theological heroes were James Denney, P.T. Forsyth, John and Donald Baillie, Austin Farrer, and Reinhold Niebuhr.³⁷ His education was a starting line for McClendon who, theologically speaking, would develop from there on. He stayed true to his original course, maintaining his Baptist identity throughout his life and work. McClendon was also enjoying a time of family life. He married Marie in 1949 in the midst of his studies, and the couple had two sons together, James W. McClendon III (Will), and Thomas McClendon.

McClendon served as Chaplain to Baptist students at Princeton (1950-51) and, upon completing his studies, went on to serve his early church ministry in several churches: Austin, Texas; Keatchie, Louisiana; Sydney, Australia; and Ringgold, Louisiana. These churches housed McClendon’s work and ministry until 1954 when he received an invitation to teach at Golden Gate Southern Baptist Seminary. It was during these early teaching days, McClendon says, that most of his education took place. He found his students were unable to appreciate the main streams of Christian intellectual tradition due to an overarching conversion-theology which focused more on the orthoprax than the orthodox.³⁸ He found the popular neo-orthodoxy of the time helpful for addressing this concern, and adopted this view as his own. Barth, Kierkegaard, Brunner, and R. Niebuhr became important in this shift. McClendon taught at Golden Gate for twelve years. His first book was published during those early years. *Pacemakers of Christian Thought* introduces the thought of nine theologians, and serves as a sort of ‘theological appetizer’ of thoughts which excited McClendon’s own theological taste buds.³⁹

2.3 1960s

The 1960s was a turbulent decade in America, to say the least. As was the case for most people who lived through this decade, it left a lasting mark on

³⁶ McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life,” 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ James McClendon, *Pacemakers of Christian Thought*, (Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1962), v.

McClendon. The decade started with McClendon teaching at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. In response to a growing feeling that his knowledge of philosophy was inadequate, he enrolled in post doctorate studies at the University of California at Berkeley. His earliest lectures (1959) were with J.L. Austin, founder of speech act theory. McClendon heard the lectures and witnessed Austin “mowing down his opponents.”⁴⁰ Impressed by Austin, and his unique and effective methods, McClendon adopted these methods to become an Austinian.⁴¹ During this time, he also became more acquainted with Wittgenstein and Alasdair MacIntyre, both of whom would shape his later work in significant ways.

As McClendon saw it, “analytical philosophy offered inroads for the restatement and solution to many outstanding theological problems: the existence of God, the nature of faith, how God can be said to ‘act’, etc.”⁴² This philosophy had not been applied well to theology, and McClendon requested, and received, a grant to study this further at Oxford University in the 1962-63 academic year.⁴³ Unfortunately, J.L. Austin had died in 1960 but McClendon met with Austin’s pupils and studied under them and Ian T. Ramsey. He also met David M. Armstrong who was influential during this time at Oxford, introducing McClendon to “the new materialism.”⁴⁴ All of this experience and learning led McClendon to develop a particular approach to language, which he set about applying to theology. *Baptism as a Performative Sign*,⁴⁵ *Christian Philosophers or Philosopher Christians*,⁴⁶ *Can There Be Talk about God-and-the-World*,⁴⁷

⁴⁰ McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life,” 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rockefeller grant via the American Association of Theological Schools

⁴⁴ McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life,” 1. It is not clear from McClendon’s notes exactly what this new materialism entails *per se*, but one can see a materialist leaning in much of his work. The main premise that our convictions are known through what we do/how we live rather than being purely conceptual reveals this.

⁴⁵ James McClendon, “Baptism as a Performative Sign,” *Theology Today* 23 (October 1966): 403–16.

⁴⁶ James McClendon, “Christian Philosophers or Philosopher Christians,” *Christian Century* 85 (February 28, 1968): 255–58.

and *How Is Religious Talk Justifiable?* are examples of this work.⁴⁸ Ultimately, this led McClendon to co-write a philosophical approach to the justification of religion within a pluralist society. McClendon's friend and philosopher James Smith, an atheist who had similar philosophical leanings, agreed to write this book with McClendon, despite his initial reaction: "You and I writing a book together would be like horse rabbit stew."⁴⁹ This reaction was appropriate considering their drastic convictional divide on core theological issues. They did, however, share similar methodological convictions which became the starting place for their work.

McClendon and Smith began work on their book in 1966, producing publications along the way. They were unable to receive interest from publishers until 1975, however, once McClendon's *Biography as Theology* had met reasonable popularity. It was eventually published as *Understanding Religious Convictions*.⁵⁰

The philosophical approach that McClendon honed during this time gave him a way of thinking about language which, as he saw it was advantageous to his task as a theologian. This approach led to significant convictions that shaped his practice of theology. So significant was this development that it has become one of the distinguishing elements in McClendon's work. It represents the first half of the conversion which formed the theological task of his life. The second half of the conversion would not be completed for another ten years.

Meanwhile, the civil unrest that marked this decade was underway, bringing with it conflicts with which McClendon engaged. Civil unrest generated a period of personal development and struggle for McClendon. The civil rights

⁴⁷ James McClendon, "Can There Be Talk about God-and-the-World?" *The Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 1 (January 1969): 33–49.

⁴⁸ James McClendon, "How Is Religious Talk Justifiable?," in *American Philosophy and the Future*, ed. Michael Novak, (New York: Scribner's, 1968) 324-47.

⁴⁹ James Smith letter to James McClendon 1966, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁵⁰ James McClendon and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

movement, doctrinal debates within the Southern Baptist Convention, and a war in Southeast Asia, were all growing concerns for McClendon who was still deciding where he stood on these issues. These tensions came to a head in 1966, creating enough disparity between McClendon and the administration of Golden Gate that he resigned. The doctrinal debates and the civil rights activism (both contributing factors in his resignation) will be briefly recounted in turn to show McClendon's strengthening convictions around these issues.

Early in the decade, Ralph Elliot, a professor at the Southern Baptist Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, published *The Message of Genesis*. In it, he advocated that the early chapters of Genesis should be understood as parables. What they spoke of creation was more concerned with *who* created, rather than how creation took place. This was an inciting incident for the conflict between the Southern Baptist Conference's more conservative or traditional Baptists, and the more moderate and progressive ones. Elliot was told to pull his publication. He refused, which led to his dismissal. This so-called "Elliot Crisis"⁵¹ led to power struggles within the Southern Baptist 'family', and the subsequent revision of its confession of faith.⁵² Much of the debate was around the infallibility of the Bible. Many young Baptists, seeing that the conservative/traditionalists would ultimately win this doctrinal battle, chose to leave the denomination and serve elsewhere.⁵³ When the time came, McClendon would not make this choice, remaining faithful to the Baptist community, albeit in a different way.

These doctrinal issues eventually trickled their way down into the local church, which McClendon, along with many of the faculty at Golden Gate, were attending (along with the seminary president, Harold Graves). President Graves was advocating for the conservative/traditionalist Baptist approach not only in the seminary but at the church too. As a result of pressured from the

⁵¹ For more on this "Ralph Elliot Crisis" and implications see, Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles : Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 63-65, and Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 136-137.

⁵² Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 137.

⁵³ Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 66.

conservative cohort within the church, the young pastor resigned. McClendon mentions that the pastor was worn down with financial pressure, personal abuse, and studied indifference.⁵⁴ McClendon and a few other faculty members supported the pastor and his views, trying to get the congregation to refuse his resignation. Three quarters of the members were in support of the pastor, but within Baptist practice, this is not enough. With so many faculty members at the church in clear disagreement over these issues, the problems inevitably overflowed back into the seminary.

A student-organized event where John Killinger (a popular preacher and professor with opinions on the doctrinal issues of the day) preached, was censored by President Graves. In the end, Graves stood up and refuted some of what Killinger had said, apologising for the conference to those in attendance.⁵⁵ He then called a faculty meeting in which he played a tape of the sermon issuing condemnation of his staff if they affirmed Killinger's talk. Rallying the local conference for support, Graves continued his pursuit of his doctrinal agenda. For McClendon, this culminated in a personal lecture from Graves on how to behave appropriately as a church member, and a critique of his image as a member of the faculty.⁵⁶ McClendon would not lie down at this, and he "gave it right back to him...sentence for sentence."⁵⁷ This was only one layer of the tensions between McClendon and President Graves, however. Another significant layer concerned their different responses to the Civil Rights Movement.

Having encountered segregation in his childhood and the shame that this brought upon him, support of the Civil Rights Movement came easily for McClendon. LeRoy Moore, a former student turned colleague, was an ally at

⁵⁴ James McClendon, letter to Prof. Eric Rust. 8 Feb. 1966. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary. McClendon implies the withholding of tithes and offerings in another letter.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ This event was explained to Prof Stewart Newman in a letter. See, James McClendon, letter to Stewart Newman 17 March 1966. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

Golden Gate during this time. He stood by McClendon during the doctrinal debates in the church and the seminary, giving avid support to the Civil Rights Movement. With the passing of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, McClendon wrote an essay which affirmed this time as an opportunity for Southern Baptists to lead the way in support of their black neighbors and the Civil Rights Movement. In this bill, Congress affirmed that all public rights and privileges, including services, employment, education, and accommodation, may not be refused to any citizen based on race. This went against the societal norms of the South. McClendon recalls his experience in the Navy where there was no segregation, an approach not resisted by soldiers from the South. He proposed that there would be a similar response to this bill, advising the church to be leading the way in encouraging this change. He wrote: "I say earnestly my brethren: if we continue the conspiracy of silence, if we fail on this great public issue to speak for justice and love, will we not pass into the oblivion of the Whigs, judged by the consciences of our neighbours?"⁵⁸ He concludes with stating, "We cannot have his Kingdom while Christ in the form of our black brethren vainly seeks justice at our hands."⁵⁹

While the Civil Rights legislation was a breakthrough at the national level, the "Jim Crow" laws were still in effect.⁶⁰ Martin Luther King Jr. was still protesting and advocating change. In 1965, McClendon and Moore had a student who wanted to march with Dr. King from Selma to Montgomery in support of the movement. McClendon and Moore decided to support this student and help raise money for his flights to Alabama. Dr. Moore, who has since become a prominent activist, recalls that they arranged for McClendon to raise funds from the students and for Moore to lobby the faculty and administration.⁶¹ Moore regards this as a mistake on his part because he had not yet received tenure. It was only a couple of months later that Moore learned his three year contract

⁵⁸ James McClendon, "The Civil Rights Bill: A New Opportunity for Baptists?," June 1964, 4. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ These laws which legalized segregation were not completely overturned until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

⁶¹ LeRoy Moore, e-mail message to author, July, 2011.

was about to be terminated after only two years. It is likely that this decision was also related to the doctrinal issues. Moore was unable to express his views to the trustees who were acting on President Graves' recommendation. McClendon empathized with his young colleague and friend, and appealed to some of his contacts to help him find a suitable replacement job.⁶²

In his unpublished essay *A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life and Work to the Present (1969)*, McClendon does not spend much time discussing the doctrinal administrative issues. He merely states that, although based in California, Golden Gate was "dominated by the mores of eastern Oklahoma."⁶³ Likely describing both this involvement, as well as the doctrinal disputes, he records that a "conflict erupted in an academic freedom struggle" and ultimately "freedom lost and I resigned."⁶⁴ At this point, he was only forty-two; young for a theologian who felt that he had good years ahead of him. He wanted to "spend [his] creative years where they are wanted, and where emotion doesn't distract so much from work."⁶⁵ He understated his motives for leaving to the administration in a confidential memo, saying that although it "could not be construed as an expression of confidence in the recent administrative trend, I nevertheless prefer, for the seminary's sake, to leave with dignity and good will."⁶⁶

He had been in contact with Stanford, where he had some connections, and went to teach for a semester as a visiting professor, filling in for Robert McAfee Brown. He was then recruited to teach at the Jesuit affiliated University of San Francisco. This appointment was historic as McClendon was the first non-Catholic professor of theology in a Catholic institution anywhere in the country.

⁶² See letters to Stewart Newman, Eric Rust cited above, among others. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary. Moore received a teaching post at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, eventually leading to a position at the University of Denver, where he still resides.

⁶³ McClendon, "A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life," 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ James McClendon, letter to Prof. Eric Rust. 8 Feb. 1966.

⁶⁶ James McClendon, Memorandum to Harold Graves, and Edwin Skiles, 12 April 1966. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

This had become a possibility in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The appointment was the beginning of McClendon's baptist life away from Baptists.

This move freed McClendon from the obligation to teach neo-orthodoxy, with which he had grown more uncomfortable.⁶⁷ He turned to more empirical, experiential, descriptive, and radical theology, where he drew increasingly from Schleiermacher, Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushel, and Martin Luther King Jr. While here, struggling for a way to connect the theology he had learned and taught with the theology of these young Catholic students, McClendon began to develop a method of using the lives of people who his students knew, and who embodied Christianity in a powerful way, to make this connection. It was a method that he had known as a child, when the hymns would often speak of telling a story of Jesus, or recounting the testimony of believers.⁶⁸ It was, in a way, a recovery of his childhood experience of theology that narrative and biography came to make its way into his pedagogy.

He made an impact in the three years he spent in this position by giving his students, many of whom had no experience with Christianity apart from the Catholic Church, a chance to engage with a wider experience of ecclesial practices and perspectives.⁶⁹ McClendon was also growing in opposition to the war in Southeast Asia, and supported his sons, along with some of his students, who were resisting the draft. While McClendon was not alone in this conviction, he sensed that the faculty needed some organising to vocalise their opposition. Although McClendon notes he was not fully pacifist at this time, he did oppose

⁶⁷ McClendon, "A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life," 2.

⁶⁸ James McClendon, "On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World," 1996, 2. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁶⁹ See, James McClendon, "Catholic University Students At Protestant Worship," *Christian Century* 85, no. 41 (October 1968): 1275–1276. In this article, McClendon recounts how as an assignment for one of his classes he required the students to attend a protestant service, and reflect on the experience.

the war in the Niebuhrian fashion, believing this was the wrong war at the wrong time.⁷⁰

McClendon drafted a letter to President Lyndon Johnson who had recently ordered the escalation of war, including the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops. In the letter, the faculty members identified themselves as members of the Democratic Party (of which the president was the leader) and stated that they were willing to reconsider their allegiances due to the burden of conscience caused by the war.⁷¹ They wrote, "If one sees a bully beating a small boy he may be obliged to help the boy, but if it turns out that the help is hurting the boy even more than the bully was, one is surely obliged to stop 'helping.'"⁷² They continued by stating that, "ideology should not blind us to the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people."⁷³ They admonish the president to admit that the present policies, in this case, were a mistake, and to change them in pursuit of peace and reform. "If you cannot change," they stated, "we will withdraw our support from you in 1968 in favour of some candidate, Democrat or Republican, whose clear and candid convictions about this war can lead us toward a new policy of de-escalation, negotiation, disengagement, withdrawal,

⁷⁰ McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," 505. John Howard Yoder has written compellingly on the difference between Niebuhr's stance and his own. See, John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism* (Washington: Church Peace Mission, 1966). Yoder claims that Niebuhr's anthropocentric theology, which holds that man is entirely full of sin, makes true unselfish love impossible. Niebuhr opposes war for practical reasons, i.e. in pursuit of justice which, as Yoder claims "it goes without saying, will require the use of force and sometimes even war." For Niebuhr, sin forces humanity to have a practical eye on ethics, whereas Yoder sees the resurrection of Christ as creating new possibilities for how ethics may be practiced now (115). Grace, for Niebuhr, allows only the possibility of peace within the existence of sin. Yoder's (and in time McClendon's) position is much more ambitious in its convictions. Yoder states that, "Sin is vanquished every time a Christian in the power of God chooses the better instead of the good, obedience instead of necessity, love instead of compromise, brotherhood instead of veiled self-interest." (116) He continues by stating that "That this triumph over sin is incomplete changes in no way the fact that it is possible, and that if God calls us to deny ourselves, accept suffering, and love our neighbors, that too is possible." (116).

⁷¹ James McClendon et al, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, 1968. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

or some effective combination of these.”⁷⁴ The letter was signed by 35 faculty members.

This letter was not supported by the administration of the University of San Francisco. They were eager not to have their patriotism questioned during these unstable years, and soon asked McClendon to resign his post at the University. He left in spite of his teaching evaluations being the highest in the faculty.⁷⁵ As Moore later commented, they may have been “too steeped in their customary ways to be ready for so radical a Baptist theologian as Jim McClendon.”⁷⁶

McClendon recalls the deep change that he had gone through in this decade by considering these “personal upheavals” as a sharp reorientation of this life, from being a conservative systematitian, to being a participant in the social, theological, and academic revolutions of his time.⁷⁷ This reorientation had cost him dearly, however. He had been forced from two jobs in contentious circumstances, and had to deal with the vocational and familial strain that accompanied. At this point in his life, he saw three main factors as influencing his position in life and academia: his theological development; his involvement in the American unrest; and his philosophical position. They each left permanent markings on the man, and his theology.

This reorientation played a significant role in shaping McClendon’s theology which is of particular interest to this current study. The philosophical ‘conversion’ represents one half of the conversion that I alluded to in the introduction. His approach to language (via Austin and Wittgenstein), although not entirely formed from the outset, is a unique and identifying characteristic of McClendon’s theology. The refining of his convictions through the radical stand taken during the tumultuous 1960s set the stage for the second half of his ‘conversion,’ which set the theological trajectory he would follow to the end of his life.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 505.

⁷⁶ LeRoy Moore, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2011.

⁷⁷ McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life ,” 2.

Over the next few years, McClendon accepted jobs which took him across the country. He taught temporarily at Temple University (Philadelphia, 1969), Saint Mary's College (Moraga, California, summer 1970, 1972, 1978), University of Pennsylvania (1970), and Goucher College (Towson, Maryland 1970-71), before landing permanently at Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Graduate Theological Union from 1971. At this point, McClendon supposes he had the most varied teaching experience of any living theologian in America.⁷⁸

2.4 A Decade of Deeds and Dreams

With the development of his theological approach throughout the sixties, McClendon began to see the Enlightenment, and the theology that it had produced, as a negative. The requirements for historicity, morality and conceivability brought many problems that theology now had to deal with.⁷⁹ The previous two centuries had laid out the possible options to overcome these concerns. For many theologians with similar concerns to McClendon, the response was a withdrawal from the tendencies of modernism.⁸⁰ This was not an option for McClendon who insisted authentic Christianity could not be isolationist, but must engage with the world. McClendon used his idea of biography, which he had developed and taught at University of San Francisco, as a way to explain how this was possible. Through living in a way that surpassed the Enlightenment's ability to fully comprehend them, the lives of innovative and faithful people created a new world in which to do theology.⁸¹ This was necessary to make theology relevant to the present age, while remaining true to the traditions of the past. McClendon delivered the Jeffery lectures at Goucher College in 1970-71 on two such lives: Martin Luther King Jr. and Dag Hammarskjöld. These two lectures would form half of his first creative

⁷⁸ McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," 507.

⁷⁹ James McClendon, "A Decade of Deeds and Dreams: My History Continued, 1969-1978," n.d. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁸⁰ In a chapter on the basis of modern thought, Jerry Gill has identified five of these tendencies as atomism, reductionism, dualism, foundationalism, and intellectualism. See, Jerry H. Gill, *The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi's Postmodern Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 26-7.

⁸¹ Ibid.

theological project, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*.⁸² His first formulations of this approach were published as an article in 1971, eventually becoming a chapter in the finished manuscript.⁸³

This initial article would be the catalyst for a very rewarding theological friendship. On the 18th of February, 1972, Stanley Hauerwas began his correspondence with James McClendon, a correspondence which would continue throughout the remaining 28 years of their friendship. Both men had an article published in the fall issue of *Cross Currents* in 1971. Hauerwas expressed his dismay to McClendon in a letter because “it is embarrassing to find one’s own mediocre attempt beside an article such as yours that is so damn good.”⁸⁴ Hauerwas was pleased to have found a theologian thinking in similar ways, finding them both developing positions that had much in common. Hauerwas included with this letter some copies of his own work that would show McClendon their similarities. McClendon responded by thanking him for his letter and stating that, “I feel that I, myself, do not see how the things I am doing fit together; so, it was a special delight to have you note the unity between the part of my work you had seen and the part you have not.”⁸⁵ A theological friendship was born; one which would enrich both their work and lives. Hauerwas (who was named America’s “best theologian” in 2001 by *Time* magazine) continues to be a vocal advocate of McClendon, listing his trilogy in his top five theology works of the last 25 years.⁸⁶ This friendship seems a

⁸² James William McClendon, *Biography as Theology; How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974). More discussion of the theological issues that went into the formation of this approach to theology will be presented in the following chapter.

⁸³ Published as James W McClendon, “Biography as Theology,” *Cross Currents* 21, no. 4 (September 1, 1971): 415–431.

⁸⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, letter to James McClendon, 18 February, 1972. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary. Hauerwas also briefly recounts their meeting and friendship in, Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 245.

⁸⁵ James McClendon, letter to Stanley Hauerwas, 24 February, 1972. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁸⁶ “Stanley Hauerwas: 5 Picks: Essential Theology Books of the Past 25 Years,” October 4, 2010, accessed February 4, 2013, <http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/stanley-hauerwas-5-picks>.

providential outcome of McClendon's interest in exploring the relationship between biography and theology.

Theology, it seemed to McClendon, had become stagnant. If biography could become theology, and theology biography, McClendon foresaw that many issues that created this stagnation could be overcome.⁸⁷ A recovery of saints within the Christian tradition, specifically for Protestants (for whom saints play a comparably minimal role), would facilitate creativity. Through biography, theology transcends mere cognitive work; it becomes an enterprise which takes seriously the lived experience of believers, but without collapsing into liberal expressivism.⁸⁸

At Church Divinity School, McClendon found that he resonated with the Episcopal claim to be both Protestant and Catholic.⁸⁹ This was similar to the negative claim that Baptists were neither Protestant nor Catholic. He found, however, the theological setting uncomfortable.⁹⁰ After the 'blow up' at Golden Gate, McClendon and his wife, Marie, attended an Episcopal church for a time but did not find it fulfilling.⁹¹ Now charged with training priests for this Church, he contemplated taking Episcopal ordination, but ultimately decided that a

⁸⁷ These issues will be covered in the following chapter.

⁸⁸ Expressivism is a broad category of a theological approach characterized by an understanding that religious language is an expression of experiences. George Lindbeck uses this category (he calls it 'experiential expressivism') as a counter to his own cultural linguistic alternative. See, George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). Nancey Murphy explores the common distinctions within American Christianity, namely Liberalism and Conservatism. She finds that what distinguishes them are two main issues: where authority is located, whether in Scripture or in experience; and how language is thought to function as an expression of inner reality or as a description of an outer reality. See, Nancey C. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism And Fundamentalism : How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). My use of the terms 'liberal' and 'expressionism' are in line with these uses.

⁸⁹ McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," 507.

⁹⁰ The sense is of 'not being at home' in this context, and less so than he had anticipated.

⁹¹ James McClendon. "On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World," 3.

baptist he was, and a Baptist he would remain.⁹² Through refining his convictions amidst those different from his own, he learned how to be a baptist in a non-Baptist world. In seminary, he had been taught that his ‘baptist-ness’ was a type of Reformed Protestantism, but here it became apparent that this was not *his* baptist identity. Exploring these tensions, McClendon sought the connection to the early Anabaptists and their relation to contemporary Baptist expression.

McClendon used a fishing analogy to portray his identity amidst the different traditions within which he found himself. He was a (baptist) catfish in the barrel of (protestant) herring. Apparently, New England fishermen would put their catch in a barrel and discovered that if they placed a small catfish in the barrel, the whole barrel would survive until the market. The herring were so busy avoiding the spikes of the catfish that they did not have the leisure to die of other causes.⁹³ McClendon found this story fitting for his own life, and noted that perhaps that catfish function was a part of his own academic and ecumenical identity.

In pursuit of his renewed understanding of his baptist identity, McClendon read John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*. Having encountered Yoder at a Free Church conference in 1967, McClendon thought him insightful and brilliant, but not someone who would be of much guidance.⁹⁴ Yoder published the book in 1972, but it was not until 1974 that McClendon read it. This book would change the course of McClendon’s theological journey, and he claimed emphatically: “That book changed my life.”⁹⁵ He also calls it “the theological climax of my life, which seemed to have led up to this moment of reorientation from which the

⁹² I should remind the reader that like McClendon, I use the word baptist with a lower case ‘b’ as a broader conviction-set distinctive, and Baptist with a capital to refer to the Baptist denomination.

⁹³ McClendon, “On Being a Baptist in a Non-Baptist World,” 2. McClendon also tells this tale in James McClendon, “Remembering Theological Education at the Graduate Theological Union in the 1960s Oral History,” Interview by Ray Kibler III, December 7, 1994. GTU 98-5-01 Graduate Theological Union Archives. Graduate Theological Union. Berkeley, California.

⁹⁴ McClendon. “On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World,” 4.

⁹⁵ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 507.

rest would flow.”⁹⁶ He had undergone a second conversion, to follow Jesus as understood in this way: “Jesus interpreted by John Yoder’s scornful passion to overcome the standard-account thinking.”⁹⁷ It was this standard-account thinking which McClendon had learned and taught, but which had grown increasingly unsatisfying. Yoder’s compelling presentation of this ‘new’ type of Christianity resonated with what McClendon had known and felt as a child in Shreveport.

When this ‘conversion’ happened, McClendon knew very little of the Anabaptists—only that there were surviving heirs to this movement. He read with an open mind, without much preconception. Yoder rejected the notion that Christian ethics could and should be done without reference to Jesus, his life, and his teachings.⁹⁸ Yoder took seriously the political implications of Christ, and argued that Paul, instead of providing an example of a diversion from Jesus’ teaching, was an embodiment of it in his context. McClendon writes that “in *Politics* Jesus was understood as a political figure; this was certainly good news for me as I tried to teach in mid-seventies Berkeley.”⁹⁹ The radical nature of the Gospel became, for McClendon, deeply important. Jesus had “embodied the kingdom, lived the kingdom, taught followers to live it with him, and when he brought this alternative politics to the seat of government and the seat of religion in his day, he was executed, not as a harmless dreamer or even as a Jewish heretic, but as a revolutionary.”¹⁰⁰ He had made nonviolent revolution in his name a permanent human possibility.¹⁰¹

McClendon recognized the challenge of these implications for both the Protestant high road he had been taught to take, and the Episcopal claim (of being both Protestant-Catholic) of his colleagues. This was a significant shifting of theological priorities in McClendon’s life. He recounts some of these shifts:

⁹⁶ McClendon. “On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World,” 3.

⁹⁷ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 508.

⁹⁸ McClendon, “On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World,” 4.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Rejected was the new hermeneutics with its assumption that the thought-world of the Gospels was remote from our own; rejected, the busy-work of middle axioms; rejected, the preoccupation with 'moral decisions' that so thoroughly trivialized Christian ethics. Rejected also was the evangelical preoccupation with 'theories of atonement' meant to explain how a just God could forgive sinful souls while leaving their owners largely unchanged.

This theology implied recognition and re-elevation of the Anabaptist radical reformers who “across the centuries had each caught some of the light of the Original Revolution (another Yoder title) and had sought in their day and way to live out the baptist vision anew.”¹⁰² McClendon already had pacifist leanings, and these attitudes, the formation of his childhood, and WWII, now combined with Yoder’s logic, produced a convert to the Christian pacifist position. “I was—though I still have no love for the term itself—an “Anabaptist’ Baptist.”¹⁰³

McClendon recognized this as a distinct third option within Christian practice, which had its roots in the early church, and was found springing up throughout Christian history. It was, however, much harder to categorize, and had a less obvious lineage. He began to accept this as his community of reference, sensing that he was summoned to write a systematic theology for this audience. He notes that people who found themselves in this tradition had often focused on “staying faithful and dying well [rather] than they had on writing books.”¹⁰⁴ This left a significant theological cavity which needed to be addressed.

Shortly after his ‘conversion’, McClendon began teaching a very popular seminar on the heritage of the Radical Reformation, and its theology. It was here that he encountered some of his better-known students (Ched Myers, Nancey Murphy), who met their renown in this line of thinking. Hauerwas, who was similarly influenced by Yoder, was influential in bringing Yoder to teach at Notre Dame.¹⁰⁵ That both Hauerwas and Yoder were now at Notre Dame, along with a vibrant theological community that included David Burrell and others, motivated McClendon to take a year sabbatical there as a visiting professor of

¹⁰² Ibid., Brackets McClendon’s own.

¹⁰³ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 508.

¹⁰⁴ McClendon. “On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World,” 5.

¹⁰⁵ Hauerwas tells of his meeting Yoder and of Yoder’s influence on him in Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 116-119.

theology and philosophy in 1976-77. McClendon worked on developing an approach to theological ethics, and published *Three Strands of Christian Ethics* shortly after his time there.¹⁰⁶ This thinking set the tone for the first volume of his proposed three volume trilogy. In 1981, McClendon began to work in earnest on *Ethics* which, in keeping with his previous successful book, included biographical sketches throughout as living embodiments of the type of ethics he was proposing. The ethics of Hauerwas and Yoder were deeply influential for McClendon. He came to acknowledge that, for Christians, “ethics is theology.”¹⁰⁷ To separate these two would be a serious error. The three ‘strands’ he used to form a holistic ethic are: bodily, communal, and anastatic.¹⁰⁸ Each strand represents a distinct but interrelated part of the whole human: each must be engaged to reveal the ethical potential of the whole.¹⁰⁹

As we have seen in the events of McClendon’s life, many circumstances and events set him up for this ultimate conversion. His Baptist roots, his encounters with race and war combined with his conviction about theology being a lived discipline, and his philosophical approach to Christian language, prepared him to be profoundly influenced by Yoder. He easily and fully accepted this radical tradition as his own, yet maintained enough of his uniqueness to bring difference and creativity to it. His non-foundational approach to theology (which had already been developed through his philosophical pursuits and evidenced in his two main books before his Yoderian conversion) gave him a philosophically astute awareness of how these new convictions could function theologically. His embodied past (through his ‘radical’ response to civil unrest,

¹⁰⁶ James McClendon, “Three Strands of Christian Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no. 1 (1978): 54–80. Coincidentally, Glen Stassen has told me in conversation that this article may be among the first, and most important, narrative ethics attempted.

¹⁰⁷ McClendon, “A Decade of Deeds and Dreams,” 1.

¹⁰⁸ These three strands act, for McClendon, as a theological anthropology, which provide an implied understanding of humanity which informs McClendon’s theology. Anastatic is, for McClendon, a term used to portray life in the resurrection, a type of eschatological, yet present, hopeful, existence. He uses the life of Dorothy Day, and the virtue of peacemaking, as exemplars of this ethic.

¹⁰⁹ This becomes the task of the first volume of his systematic theology. These are explored briefly in the opening chapter.

wayward authority, and doctrinal bullying) allowed a natural harmonization with this 'Anabaptist' set of convictions and his own life story.

2.5 Fulfilling his Task

During the late seventies, McClendon was going through some personal struggles. His marriage to Marie had never been quite "what he expected", and he had been undergoing classical psychotherapy to deal with some of its difficulties (1977-80).¹¹⁰ His marital strain concluded with a sad divorce in 1982. He married one of his doctoral students, Nancey Murphy, in 1983. Murphy was a blossoming philosopher who would have a profound influence on McClendon's work. In 1989 they co-wrote a seminal article, *Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies*, which would shape both of their work from that point, and remains a relevant article today.¹¹¹ They would ultimately move to Fuller Theological Seminary, where Nancey was hired to teach, and McClendon was accepted as distinguished scholar in residence, where he taught occasionally and continued to work on his systematics.¹¹²

Ethics was published in 1986, and was met with mixed reviews. To begin a systemic theology with ethics (which tends to be left to the end of a systematic theology, if treated at all) was odd and unnerving for some. The narrative theological method had not been attempted in a systematic way before McClendon, and the theological perspective from which he was writing (Anabaptist) was also an often misunderstood one. All these things made for some mixed response. One in particular caught McClendon's attention, and resulted in him writing a response and receiving a counter-response.

¹¹⁰ While this is an important part of his personal life, it does not play an explicit role in his theological formation, and therefore has not been explored in great detail here. There are some resources in the McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary, which shed more light on this first marriage from McClendon's perspective. In "What Is Your Life", 1974, McClendon alludes that his marriage to Marie had not been as he intended or dreamed it would. He also speaks of his psychoanalysis in a brief unpublished note for a job appraisal in 1986. See, "Five Years (and more) Reviewed by J.W.McC." McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹¹¹ Nancey Murphy and James McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (1989): 191–214.

¹¹² Nancey Murphy is still a professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Max L. Stackhouse wrote his review in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. In it, he explains why “I am not a ‘baptist’, and why I hope the current fascination with narrative theology does not become predominant.”¹¹³

Stackhouse criticizes McClendon’s use of narrative as seeming ad hoc, and questions, among other things, why McClendon did not choose stories of the Gita, or the Koran.¹¹⁴ McClendon responds quite firmly by stating that this review “neither gives a fair account of the volume’s content nor treats responsibly the fragments of my work it does take up.”¹¹⁵ McClendon was disappointed in the claim of primitivism from Stackhouse, and thought Stackhouse misunderstood his logic and rationale, especially with regard to his use of narrative. Stackhouse responds further and reaffirms his own reading of McClendon’s text. The space between their understanding of theology itself is made clear when Stackhouse claims that “a truly systematic Christian theology attempts to speak in universalistic terms, and holds that Christ does.”¹¹⁶ McClendon’s approach to theology is as a particular (contextual) practice. “There is no theology-in-general, only the theology which consciously or otherwise springs from engagement with a particular community.”¹¹⁷ The universalistic approach to theology which Stackhouse advocate), was seen by McClendon as a harmful outcome of the Enlightenment.

Doctrine, volume 2 of the systematic trilogy, was published in 1994 and it remains a groundbreaking doctrinal theology. With this volume, McClendon asks what the church must teach in order to be the authentic church now.¹¹⁸ In it, he covers eschatology, creation, sin and salvation, Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, and the question of authority. His unique narrative approach

¹¹³ Max L. Stackhouse, “[Review of] Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol. I,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987): 615–617.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 616.

¹¹⁵ James McClendon, “On Theological Ethics,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LVI, no. 3 (1988): 553–555.

¹¹⁶ Max L. Stackhouse, “On Theological Ethics,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LVI, no. 3 (1988): 555–556.

¹¹⁷ McClendon, “A Decade of Deeds and Dreams,” 2.

¹¹⁸ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 21.

and theological emphases are displayed throughout. The center of the book is Christology, where he displays a risky treatment, seeking to overcome some traditional theological problems. Unsurprisingly, this has met resistance.¹¹⁹ How this Christology fits within McClendon's wider project will be explored in Chapter Seven. McClendon's approach to Christian doctrine is among his most significant contributions to theology. Barry Harvey explains how McClendon addresses three significant crises that doctrinal theology faces: relevance, pluralism, and truth. Harvey notes that McClendon does not see doctrines as functioning alone, but "in concert with other practices of the church, [which] shapes and defines our identities as believers and as communities."¹²⁰ And, in doing this (Harvey argues), McClendon contends that "doctrine is unintelligible apart from the ongoing drama of the Christian story and the ecclesial practices that form our story-shaped interactions with the world we inhabit."¹²¹ McClendon refused to separate doctrine from the actual practices and teachings of the church.¹²²

Shortly after *Doctrine* was published, Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (another student of McClendon's) set out to present him with the gift of a collection of essays honoring him and his contributions on the occasion of his 70th birthday and 40th year of teaching. Murphy notes that the publishers still required a focal theme for publication and the decided theme,

¹¹⁹ For more on this issue see, Jonathan R. Wilson, "Can Narrative Christology Be Orthodox?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 4 (O 2006): 371–381; Robert Barron, "Considering The Systematic Theology Of James William McClendon, Jr.," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (April 2002): 267–276 esp. 271–272; and Willie James Jennings, "Recovering the Radical Reformation for Baptist Theology : An Assessment of James Wm McClendon Jr's Doctrine," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 181–193.

¹²⁰ Barry Harvey, "Doctrinally Speaking : James McClendon On The Nature Of Doctrine", *Perspectives In Religious Studies* 27, no. 1 (2000): 39–60.

¹²¹ Ibid. This is an effective critical reflection on McClendon approach to doctrine.

¹²² This is why Hauerwas notes that this book could be dangerous for those trained in Academic Theology. This is found in the endorsement on the back cover of *Doctrine*. Hauerwas goes on to say that this has implications because it "forces our imaginations in new paths not envisioned in recent theology." See also, Stanley Hauerwas, "Reading McClendon Takes Practice : Lessons in the Craft of Theology," ed. Kelly S. Johnson, *Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 1997): 235–250.

which stretches the span of his writings, was ‘non-foundationalism’.¹²³ His pursuit was to think in ways that were not based on the foundation metaphor, passed on from Descartes, which pervade the language of knowledge, argument, and rationality.¹²⁴ *Theology Without Foundations : Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* was the result, a festschrift to honor his life and work. It is a valuable collection of essays which recognizes McClendon’s unique perspective and compelling influence. This remains, at the time of this writing, the only collection of essays directly taking McClendon as its subject or inspiration.¹²⁵

Throughout his life, McClendon remained a member of the Southern Baptist church, and attended Baptist churches. In 1994, he and Nancey were attending a small Brethren church in a suburb of Los Angeles when, due to an unfortunate turn of events, and the resignation of the pastor of the church, McClendon was asked to take on the duties of interim pastor. His *Doctrine* was just released, he was 70 years old, and he had his doubts about accepting this task. He writes about this challenging decision: “If I agreed...[and] the ship went hard aground on my watch, leaving the church would not merely be acceding to a Providence that does after all allow some churches to die; it would also require reckoning with a fresh personal failure...fearing much, yet hoping too, I accepted the call.”¹²⁶

The appointment lasted a year (summer to summer) and the sermons preached along with preambles recounting the process were turned into a book. *Making Gospel Sense: To a Troubled Church*, is a true testing of his theology in the weekly rhythms and challenges of a small Christian community in Los Angeles.

¹²³ Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds. *Theology Without Foundations : Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 9.

¹²⁴ See, Hauerwas et al, *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, introduction, for more rational for the volume.

¹²⁵ Ryan Newson and Andrew Wright have just published a collection of unpublished and under-read essays by McClendon See Ryan Newson and Andrew Wright, eds. *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.: Volume 1, Volume 2..*

¹²⁶ James McClendon. *Making Gospel Sense : To a Troubled Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995), xv-xvi.

This was a test within the fire of his theology of church, and specifically of preaching.¹²⁷ At the end of the year, the church had hired a new pastor and much of the work he had done was made redundant.¹²⁸ The year (and the book which explicates it) is, however, an example of how his theology and his life were unified in practice. It was an opportunity for McClendon to display the unity that was at the heart of his theological method.

Over the final few years of his life, McClendon finished the final volume of his systematics, *Witness*. This volume seeks to show how the Church finds its way in the world. It is a theology of culture, showing how culture's science, arts, and philosophy create contexts for the church to relate to. It defends against the claim that those within this radical tradition, heirs to the Anabaptist reformation, are sectarian. It shows "that we have a theology of culture that could make sense of the whole world while inviting that world to find its way back to its own true center."¹²⁹ For him, this volume was a way back to his earliest academic work, his dissertation, written half a century before, on the doctrine of perfection and its perplexing demands.¹³⁰

McClendon maintained his commitment to narrative, and specifically to biography, as an essential aspect of theology. In *Witness*, his subject was philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who became increasingly important to him as his professional career progressed from his first encounter with him in Berkley in the early 1960s.¹³¹ McClendon uses the insight gleaned to further the work he and Nancey had begun in *Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies* to assess the state of philosophy in relation to culture and pluralism. McClendon turns the focus of his theology toward the world and culture, providing insight from the church to the world, and insight from the world to the church. This was

¹²⁷ See *Doctrine*, chapter 9, especially 397-400.

¹²⁸ This included programs that were implemented and theological emphases he saw as essential.

¹²⁹ McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," 509.

¹³⁰ Ibid. McClendon evokes here one trajectory within his work, which is to see how Christians can be fully on the side of the world while rejecting its worldliness.

¹³¹ The tipping point in this development was likely "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies."

a common theme for him and is illustrated by in his aphorism that “the line between the church and the world passes right through each Christian heart.”¹³² This difficult task, which concludes with a chapter on the place of the university within culture, completes his theological offerings and shows his commitment to the convictional formation from his earlier life events. Parush Parushev calls it “a capstone not only of McClendon's Systematic Theology, but also of his entire academic career.”¹³³

The title of this volume was not always intended to be ‘Witness’. At the first publication of *Ethics*, he had intended it to be called ‘Fundamental or Philosophical Questions’ or even ‘Theory.’ Later, it had been appointed ‘Vision’ and was to be more of a postlegomenon rather than a theology of culture.¹³⁴ Ultimately, he decided upon *Witness*, which ties all of these intentions into a single historically Christian concept.

McClendon had been advised of a heart condition years before, and it was his heart that eventually failed him. “He saw the book just before he lost consciousness,”¹³⁵ and his fear of having his life’s work cut short by his ill health was relieved.¹³⁶ It was a project (the trilogy) that had taken him approximately 20 years to complete. It was written slowly and carefully because (he explains) he was,

determined to write every sentence in light of my new-gained radical convictions, but to write in such a way that standard-account people, those who shared my pre-Yoder standpoint, could make sense of it, and if not be convinced, could at least recognize this, too, was a distinct, responsible, Christian heritage that could not be subsumed under the other sorts.¹³⁷

¹³² McClendon, *Ethics*, 17.

¹³³ Parush Parushev, “Systematic Theology. v 3, Witness,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 1, no. 3 (May 2001): 55–56.

¹³⁴ Nancey Murphy, *Theology Without Foundations*, 19.

¹³⁵ Nancey Murphy quoted in, “McClendon, James William, Jr, 1924–2000,” *Christian Century* 117, no. 32 (N 2000): 1180–318.

¹³⁶ Mark Nation, “James Wm McClendon Jr. A Particular Baptist Theologian.” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 1, no. 2 (January 2001): 51–55.

¹³⁷ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 508.

He understood from the outset that this trilogy was to be his opus. As he says, it was “my work, my life, my strong demand for nearly twenty years.”¹³⁸

One final note will conclude McClendon’s life story. Throughout his writing, from *Convictions* to *Witness*, McClendon invokes what he calls the principle of fallibility.¹³⁹ He states it in *Convictions* as the understanding “that even one’s most cherished and tenaciously held convictions might be false and are in principle always subject to rejection, reformulation, improvement, or reformation.”¹⁴⁰ This is not in any way a diminishment of his work, but a humble admission that he is not the ultimate bearer of truth. Or, as he says elsewhere, he does not see his approach to these radical convictions to be “normative for my students and colleagues.”¹⁴¹ He sees, rather, the many taking a “share in a very large task.”¹⁴² His was a perspective that was humble for a number of reasons. Humble origins, and humbling events, formed a man who was sure that his way was not the only way.

Stanley Hauerwas was correct in his prediction that McClendon’s trilogy would “acquire increasing significance and regard.”¹⁴³ The publishing rights to the systematics have recently been picked up by Baylor University Press, with new editions including an introduction by Curtis Freeman. Secondary research on McClendon is gathering pace, and his legacy and appreciation continues to grow. This growth is testament to a man whose convictions, formed through direct participation in some of the most challenging events of the twentieth century, created a theology which is distinct among his peers. Hauerwas calls it the first (systematic) theology to take seriously the work of John Howard Yoder.¹⁴⁴ He also credits McClendon with providing Baptists with an alternative

¹³⁸ Ibid., 509.

¹³⁹ See, *Con.*, 112; *Ethics*, 44; *Doctrine*, 472; *Witness*, 329.

¹⁴⁰ *Con.*, 112.

¹⁴¹ McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” 509.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Stanley Hauerwas, quoted in, “McClendon, James William, Jr, 1924-2000,” *Christian Century* 117, no. 32 (N 2000): 1180.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

to the ‘unfortunate’ choice between fundamentalism and liberalism.¹⁴⁵ There are surely many more praises which could be recounted, highlighting McClendon’s legacy and significance, but which would perhaps be a misleading elevation of McClendon’s humble status within twentieth century theology.

2.6 Reflections and Conclusions

Much of McClendon’s theology has been driven by the conviction that theology is, and must be, related to lived experience; otherwise it has little to contribute. The main difficulty that arises if this suggestion is to be followed, is the collapse from seeking to see the manifestations and implications of theology in experiences into mere reiteration of personal experience. Telling a narrative of a lived life, however, reveals more than subjectivity. It contains images and encounters with others in the public sphere, involving social knowledge and convention. Biography requires fact-checking and contextual understanding that provides more authority than mere reflection on personal experience.¹⁴⁶ Theology is about what makes us live life in the ways that we do. This is why “theology must be at least biography.”¹⁴⁷

From Shreveport to California, from WWII to the dawn of the twenty-first century, McClendon’s convictions were formed throughout his life. Through initial origins to final destinations, a life is formed, and re-formed, through its events. Character is the embodiment of the convictions held by a person. In Mark Nation’s reflection on McClendon (cited above), he highlights McClendon as an Ecumenist, a[n] (Ana)baptist, and a (Southern) Baptist. He remained an ordained Southern Baptist, even after the doctrinal disputes of the sixties and being accepted in different denominations and colleges. He was a Southern Baptist, but in a different way. A passage from *Biography as Theology* is evoked here:

There appear from time to time singular or striking lives, the lives of persons who embody the convictions of the community, but in a new way; who share the vision of the community, but with a new scope or

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See, James McClendon, “Story, Sainthood, and Truth: Biography as Theology Revisited,” 1982. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹⁴⁷ *Bio.*, 22.

power; who exhibit the style of the community, but with significant differences. It is plain that the example of these lives may serve to disclose and perhaps to correct or enlarge the community's moral vision, at the same time arousing impotent wills within the community to a better fulfillment of the vision already acquired.¹⁴⁸

McClendon's life can be construed in this way. He embodied the convictions of his Baptist community in a way that the community could see and respond to, enlarging their vision and evoking more fully what the vision entails. To demonstrate this, I will highlight some of the convictions which make McClendon's vision an expansive version of what he received.

McClendon's understanding of theology, which was transformed in the 1960s during his philosophical conversion via J.L. Austin, Wittgenstein, and which remained his approach from that point onward, is an obvious starting place. In explaining his understanding of theology to an interviewer outside of the field of theology, he explains that there are three main aspects to theology.¹⁴⁹ The first is,

the discovery of the existing, surviving convictions of the community. What do these folk really believe that make them the people that they are? And second, there's the interpretation or understanding of those convictions. What do they really mean? How are we to understand these? And that's sometimes the word hermeneutics, the investigation of meanings apply there.¹⁵⁰

This is the process involved in empathy. The encounter and response of discovery and interpretation is essential to methodological faithfulness. This stage of theological method is other-focused, taking what has come before and allowing it to inform this present context.

McClendon continues, "And then finally there's the creative part. How could these convictions be changed, transformed so as still to serve their old purpose but to serve it better, [including] better relation to whatever exists, [and] better relation to what the other convictions of the community are."¹⁵¹ This is the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ George Csicsery performed this interview concerning McClendon's relationship with Mathematician R.L. Moore.

¹⁵⁰ "On R.L. Moore" Interview by George Csicsery, 5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

imaginative stage, allowing what has been discovered and understood to play a paradigmatic role in producing a set of possibilities for the present and future which could not have existed before. Using empathy, the theologian collects the concepts, images and metaphors, which provide the imagination with its resources to then build upon, contextualize, and embody in a transformed way.¹⁵² The use of biography as theology is the pinnacle of this process.

The empathy required to discover and understand a person's narrative, and tell that story in a way that reveals the convictions for the inspiration and teaching of a community, requires an astute imagination. McClendon's discovery that biography could bridge the gap between lived experience and doctrinal theology, without falling into the trap of mere subjective relativism, formed a lasting conviction that is a capstone of his legacy. One cannot hold this view of biography and theology without the conscious recognition that his own theology must be lived out in life. McClendon's ecumenical 'baptist-ness' was an example of this. His quip about being a catfish in a barrel of herring shows how his commitment to the radical truth of the Gospel in the midst of 'standard account' theology was a constant in his teaching and writing, and indicative of his identity.

The final piece of McClendon's unique perspective on theology came with the second part of his 'conversion'. He notes clearly the impact that Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* had on his life.¹⁵³ The ability to locate himself within a longstanding tradition proved vital to complete the other pieces of his perspective into an holistic approach. The resources he found within the Anabaptist past provided his imagination with content (images, metaphors, stories, etc.) to take the next step and produce a creative systematic theology for this community.

McClendon's uniqueness, while providing fruitful and innovative theology, has likely had a negative effect on his readership. Creativity, while generating new and inventive results, is often misunderstood, or misinterpreted. There are many 'types' in which McClendon has been cast, demonstrating a diminished

¹⁵² This will be expanded upon in the second half of this thesis.

¹⁵³ McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," 507.

understanding of his work. These categories have had a role in limiting McClendon's influence. While his radical convictions in the 1960s cost him academic positions at the time, the more costly ripple effect of this was a limited academic reputation. McClendon did not teach at institutions known for their academic or theological esteem (Oxford, Duke, or Princeton, for example), and therefore was not granted the prestige that comes from this. This made him much easier to ignore by the theological world, despite his output.

In surveys of twentieth century theology, McClendon is often left out, or, if mentioned, relegated to a niche place in one of a few categories. In David F. Ford's *The Modern Theologians*, which claims to be a comprehensive overview of twentieth century theology, McClendon is unmentioned.¹⁵⁴ Even Stanley Grenz, the prominent Baptist theologian, relegates McClendon to a few paragraphs in his exposition of narrative theology.¹⁵⁵ This inclusion, though small, is the exception that proves the rule. Even from within Baptist theological circles McClendon is found on the periphery.

The impulse to categorize is one of the many tendencies left over from the Enlightenment. There are a few prominent categories in which McClendon gets placed, but these placements relegate him because he does not fit wholly into any of them. While most of these categories could be considered apt in a sort of mere correspondence reckoning, each grasps only a small aspect of McClendon's thought. A few of these will be noted here.

The first category McClendon is found within is as a Baptist. To merely label McClendon a Baptist, with the assumptions that come with it, is not a faithful representation of McClendon's thought. He was a baptist, but he was working out new ways of making sense and meaning of what 'being baptist' entailed. As alluded to above, there have been various ways of being Baptist, and these various ways are not innately harmonious. McClendon would share convictions

¹⁵⁴ David Ford and Rachel Muers, *The Modern Theologians : An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005).

¹⁵⁵ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & The World In A Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 279.

with many Baptists, but they may not share his. McClendon's life reveals a way of being baptist that is not often pursued, a way which claims the radical edge of the Gospel here and now. Thus, labeling him merely as a 'Baptist theologian' does not take seriously his life's task. As seen throughout his life, he was not opposed to being a Baptist. He indeed stayed an ordained Southern Baptist his whole career. After his 'conversion', however, he understood theology (the study of convictions) and baptist identity (heirs to the radical reformation) very differently from the Baptist heritage he was trained within.

McClendon is also placed within the post-liberal camp. Post-liberalism emerged out of Yale from the thinking of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei, and under the philosophical influence of Wittgenstein and Alisdair MacIntyre. Certainly McClendon has significant sympathies with post-liberalism, but to label him as 'post-liberal', would misrepresent his use of these thinkers.¹⁵⁶ He has been influenced in similar ways, but his approach is quite distinct from those originating from this 'Yale school'.¹⁵⁷ McClendon understands and utilizes Wittgenstein, Biblical interpretation, and MacIntyre in ways which distinguish McClendon from the post-liberals. Hauerwas is another who often gets labeled here, although he resists its application to himself also.¹⁵⁸ McClendon's project, differs significantly from the post-liberal project, both in scope and depth, while drawing on many of the same sources, including Lindbeck and Frei themselves. A further study comparing and contrasting McClendon and the post-liberals would be a fruitful task.

A final category in which McClendon often appears is as a narrative theologian. This category, while appropriate for McClendon, remains vague, due to it being

¹⁵⁶ To clarify here, I am not opposed to any categorization of McClendon, but merely the type of categorization which justifies a self-fulfilling and limited reading of his work. Thomas Harrington affirms this interpretation of McClendon in relation to post-liberalism, see Thomas W. Harrington, "The Way to God or God's Way to Us: The Theologies of Edward Farley and James McClendon in Critical Dialogue." (PhD diss. Marquette University, 2009), 15.

¹⁵⁷ There has been work showing the similarities between post-liberal and Anabaptist convictions, see, Craig Hovey, "Story and Eucharist: Postliberal Reflections on Anabaptist Nachfolge," *The Mennonite quarterly review*. 75, no. 3 (2001), 315. This construal is not completely misplaced, but the comparison must be done carefully.

¹⁵⁸ Gary Dorrien, "Truth Claims: The Future of Postliberal Theology," *The Christian Century* 118, no. 21 (2001), 24.

a relatively new category of theology. There have yet to be distinct camps of narrative theologians, and the use of narrative in theology varies widely.¹⁵⁹ One theologian may use narrative as a creative way to package propositions, where another may use narrative as a way of removing propositions altogether. McClendon was among the first to take narrative as a methodology seriously for a whole career. In doing so, he shaped a systematic theology around this method, emphasizing the centrality of narrative in ethics and doctrine, and in relationship to culture.

McClendon's use of narrative is part of his unique style. There are many in the field of theology who are still uneasy about it as a theological method. Placing McClendon's work in the category of 'narrative theology' must be done with caution. If this categorization seeks to generalize (or paint all narrative theologians with the same brush), it is in danger of collapse, losing its validity. McClendon's narrative Christology will be explored in the final chapter. It becomes clear that the way he uses narrative is distinct from many other 'narrative' theologians.

McClendon's modest success may partly be due to his work's innate resistance to a neat placement within any single category. McClendon's conviction set combines a philosophical awareness (from the analytical tradition, specifically Austinian and Wittgensteinian) with a radical Anabaptist theological force (including Christian pacifism and emphasis on communal living), yet with a first-hand knowledge of 'standard account' theology. He brings these things together with ease. Each stage of his life shaped his convictions in particular

¹⁵⁹ The categorization of narrative theologians has been attempted by Gary Comstock, who discards the categorization from the originating cities (Chicago and Yale) in favor of more descriptive categories: Pure Narrative Theologians, and Impure Narrative Theologians. Even within these categories McClendon does not fit well. Comstock notes that McClendon (along with two of his students, Terrance Tilley and Michael Goldberg) belongs to an "uncommitted contingent from Berkeley." See, Gary Comstock, "Two Types Of Narrative Theology," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* LV, no. 4 (1987): 687–717. Comstock places Lindbeck, Frei, Hauerwas, and David Kelsey in the 'Pure' category, seeing the influence of Wittgenstein in their work, and a rejection of unnecessary abstract reason which distracts from the significance of the narrative itself. Within the 'Impure' category he places Ricoeur, Hartt, Tracy, and McFague. This group affirms the importance of narrative, but does not grant it unique status within theology like the other group does, and they affirm explanation as a useful genre, as opposed to description which the purists acknowledge as the only option.

ways, leading him to his unique perspective, a fact which may seem odd to traditional theologians, but provides compelling insights. The result is a theology that defies any simple label. His work does, however, provide a new view that is apt for the current cultural and theological environment.

McClendon's character, from source to consummation, was formed through his personal narrative and the convictions cultivated therein. His was a unique life producing distinct convictions, and therefore an uncommon theology. With each season of his life bringing a new environment (both social and physical), McClendon's practice of theology was built upon and revised. The result was a baptist perspective that was different from anything he had received. He formed and embodied perspective that is valuable for the field of theology, both from within the B(b)aptist tradition, and from outside of it. This biographical sketch describes and contextualizes the theology that will be explored throughout the thesis.

Chapter Three. Images and the Formation of a Biographical Method of Theology

In McClendon's groundbreaking work, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Remake Today's Theology* (1974), his biographical method turns to focus upon the use of 'images'. He uses images in a particular way that becomes key not only for understanding his subjects, but also understanding how his subjects relate to the Christian faith. Images act as the connecting point between the lives his subjects lived and the greater story of "God and man in meeting", revealed in Scripture.¹ McClendon proposes that images are "not the only constituent of religion, [they] are of central importance in it."² McClendon most clearly explicates his meaning when he says, "by images, I mean metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such they bear the content of faith itself."³ This chapter will illuminate McClendon's biographical method by exploring how he uses images in his early work, that is, before *Systematic Theology*. The exploration in this chapter will proceed as follows: 1. the context and cause of McClendon's biographical method; 2. the influence of Austin Farrer on McClendon's use of images; 3. McClendon's developments of these notions in *Biography as Theology*; 4. challenges and questions that arise from McClendon's method.

3.1 The Context and Cause of McClendon's Biographical Approach.

Having introduced McClendon's *Biography as Theology* briefly in the opening chapter, a more thorough look at this work, its biographical method, and its context is required to appreciate its significance and task. McClendon explains in the introduction to the first edition how this was a book that grew out of his own teaching in the years 1960-1970.⁴ This was a time of significant change and

¹ *Bio.*, 70.

² *Ibid.*, 72.

³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

public debate, in which McClendon found himself very much involved.⁵ He notes elsewhere (at a much later date) that one of the major influences upon the direction of his life was his “personal involvement in the turbulence of American unrest in the sixties, an involvement which doubtless colors all the rest.”⁶ These events, along with his theological and philosophical developments during that time, are major strands that form his unique perspective. He observed that these strands “together bear upon the contribution I am now in the position to make.”⁷

McClendon was the father to a son who resisted the draft and a teacher to a graduate who was student jailed for a more “lively” resistance.⁸ Furthermore, McClendon had lost his job as a professor for being outspoken in his opposition to the war in Vietnam.⁹ McClendon notes that teaching in these classrooms “where students were finding they could not swallow the received pieties of religion or of nation”¹⁰ caused him to become dissatisfied with much of how contemporary theology was being done, and it became obvious that “it was clearly time for a change.”¹¹

Two essays written in the 1970s articulate some of this dissatisfaction, and McClendon’s hope of a way forward. The first, written in 1971 and simply titled *Theology*, articulates some of the issues present within the very notion of theology itself.¹² The essay pursues three main goals. First, to “indicate the sort of intellectual enterprise theology is.” Second, “to state the characteristic

⁵ This involvement is outlined in the previous chapter in the section on the 1960’s.

⁶ James McClendon, “A Brief Narrative Account of my Professional Life...”. Unpublished essay, 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Bio.*, v.

⁹ For a further exploration of these events see Chapter Two.

¹⁰ *Bio.*, v-vi.

¹¹ Ibid., vi.

¹² James McClendon, “Theology”, 1971. Unpublished essay, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

challenges which theology must face in the present world.”¹³ And third, to “look at the recent history of Western Christian theology.”¹⁴ It concludes by taking note of some recent theological tendencies.

McClendon shows the uniqueness of theology as a discipline among other disciplines, and how, as it has been commonly approached, it has missed some of its potential. He notes the seeming absurdity in common phrases theologians use such as “The church is the body of Christ”, or “The church is a permanent revolutionary community”; absurd due to the facts “that the church is demonstrably and frequently not even very Christlike, much less Christ’s body; [and] the fact that so far from being revolutionary the church is sociologically an agency of conformity and stability more often than change.”¹⁵ He urges that these and other oddities are not to be explained through citing carelessness or poor work, but due to the “special nature of the theological task itself.”¹⁶

McClendon moves from here to highlight what he sees as theology’s unique attributes that must be embraced if it is to be practiced honestly. He claims that theology must be acknowledged as “normative” and “apologetic”. Its range is “as wide as reality itself—or wider”,¹⁷ and it is “theoretical”, concerned with expressing thought and belief in a cogent way.¹⁸ He notes that although it is a normative practice, the norms of theology are not given prior to its practice, that is, theologians differ on what norms are requisite, yet they are all still labeled ‘theologians’.¹⁹ Lastly, McClendon notes that theology is an historical inquiry. Christian theology must deal with Jesus Christ, and his historical existence.²⁰

¹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

²⁰ Note that here, according to McClendon’s understanding of theology, we must distinguish between theology and Christian theology. The study of convictions makes it Theology, while the Christian content of certain convictions makes it Christian Theology.

The strength of theological traditions, such as those of Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches, lies in the fact that they explicitly claim direct connections to this past. Theology will always be evaluated, in relation to how theology has been formerly practiced.

Struggling with theology as an historical discipline highlights two pressing problems for McClendon: the critical problem, and the hermeneutical problem. The critical problem can be summed up as the difficulty of “securing reliable knowledge about the past.”²¹ This has been a problem for many years, and has resulted in the dominance of the historical critical method in theological enterprise (especially in biblical studies). The hermeneutic problem is how texts written in one context can be understood in another.²² These problems are continual; no lasting solution can overcome them. The past is ever further away, and the present is always presenting new challenges, and theology must attend to both.

The second essay from this period which reveals the background to McClendon’s development of his biographical method is, *Theology, Language, and Life – A Christian Perspective*, from 1974. It builds on the former essay and declares McClendon’s desire to theologize in a particular way.²³ This essay articulates the idea of ‘convictions’ as the subject of theology as well as the relation between convictions and “whatever else there is.”²⁴ He argues that

a desirable way of focusing theological attention upon this final concern –what there is– is to attend to the lives of actual men and women in our time: If these lives embody the convictions of the community under investigation and if they are engaged in the real world of today, their biographies should provide the sort of experiential data which will provide a field for examination of the community’s shared conviction set.²⁵

²¹ McClendon, “Theology”, 8.

²² Ibid., 9.

²³ James McClendon, “Theology, Language, and Life – A Christian Perspective”, 1971. Unpublished essay, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

²⁴ Ibid., 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

McClendon proceeds in two ‘moments’: first, the discussion of what it is to ‘discover’ and ‘examine’ a given conviction which is basic or foundational, followed by a report on the progress of his work on the contribution of biography to theology, which he sees as part of the ‘superstructure’ of theology.²⁶ He evokes his preceding article in a preparatory way, leading to his first ‘moment’: “Since convictions are approachable via language in which they are expressed, and since biography is one form of story, the two moments depend on two of the tendencies of contemporary Christian theology listed at the end of the previous paper – the first (linguistic) and the last (narrative)”.²⁷ These two emphases become touchstones for McClendon’s work, and he has made unique theological contributions with each emphasis.

McClendon acknowledges that explaining the technicalities of how convictions operate, and how one may discover, examine, and creatively transform them, might seem to many to be a ‘dry hole’ if there are not creatively transformed convictions to show for it.²⁸ The discovery of one’s own convictions is a rewarding enterprise, and McClendon insists that the concern of theology today is to see these convictions “taking shape which will turn the problems of pluralism into opportunities, and make our modern pluralism the occasion of better Christian theology than we have inherited.”²⁹ How is this opportunity to be seized? McClendon’s conclusion is that it can be seized through studying the lives of those who have embodied the convictions of their community with a difference, causing the status quo to be brought into question. He explains:

By examining present-day lives, we can bring the theological task into the present; by examining lives rather than propositions first, we can increase the likelihood that our propositions, when we do formulate them, will correspond to lived convictions and thus be lively ones; by attending to the challenging lives of a few modern saints (as opposed to the uninteresting lives of theologian-autobiographers) we will bring theology to the cutting edge of religion where it belongs.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid., 2. The focus of his previous work (that would become *Understanding Religious Convictions*) is apparent here.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 8. Here McClendon proposes that unless the convictions are transformed, theology has not been successfully done.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

By studying such compelling lives, theology will reclaim its place as being not only relevant, but perhaps as contributing to the vital questions facing human communities in novel ways. Soon after this article appeared, McClendon brought a few of his articles together and expanded his theory to form a significant portion of his book *Biography as Theology*.

Within *Biography as Theology*, McClendon pursued the connection between theology and ethics, and his exploration of biography as a method for theology takes place within this context. He named this type of ethical thinking as an ‘ethics of character’.³¹ Character has multiple uses in our common language, often in connection with a typified persona. McClendon wanted to track the more noble understanding of a person *having* character rather than merely *being* a character: He suggests that “to have character, then, is to enter at a new level the realm of morality, the level at which one’s person, with its continuities, its interconnections, its integrity, is intimately involved in one’s deeds.”³² It is “just that connection of purpose and policy and individual actions that makes possible motivation of any sort.”³³ Character is, by its nature, a self-fulfilling cycle: “A woman of (some) generosity will act generously, as a general rule; but also as a general rule, the woman who acts generously on this occasion is shaping herself along generous lines. Thus, character is paradoxically both the cause and the consequence of what we do.”³⁴ Character is, by this understanding, deep-seated, but not necessarily fixed or unalterable. McClendon states that a man’s “character is formed by the way he sees things, by his vision, we say. It is shaped by the way he does things, by his style. It is coincident with his deepest and most dearly held beliefs, his convictions.”³⁵

McClendon makes the connections between ethics and theology quite clear. He insists that convictions (the very subject of theology) are the underlying determination of what creates character. Character brings together both actions,

³¹ *Bio.*, 1-23.

³² *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

and the style of actions, that reveal both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of living. As such, the cognitive, affective, and operative elements are present in the assessment of character.

What McClendon proposed in his work is not the study of lives in isolation, set apart from their communities and universalized. On the contrary, McClendon insisted that these lives be seen in their contexts, that is, in their communities. ideally, he would want to label this brand of ethics as the ethics of “character-in-community”.³⁶ McClendon noted that, “Individuals, while they may dissent from this or that common conviction, nevertheless are shaped by the need to agree or to dissent, and so their own convictions are formed in interaction with the community’s.”³⁷ Convictions are discovered, refined, and challenged in communities who are united through their common convictions. Theologians are concerned with these convictions, McClendon argued, “not merely in themselves, but in relation to the persons and communities that embrace these convictions, and they are interested in what those convictions are about.”³⁸ The Christian theologian, then, is not only concerned that God exists, but also that God’s being makes a difference to the lives of those who believe or do not believe. Or, as McClendon claimed, “if it [theology] does not enter into the actual shape of the lives of the people in its community of concern, [it] is after all irrelevant to these lives.”³⁹

It is those lives which, through their unique and compelling living, highlight and enable the community to reflect more truly “upon the tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all.”⁴⁰ Thus, McClendon turns to those who have lived their lives embodying the convictions of their community, but in a way which shapes and propels that community to renew and revise their convictions to be relevant within their context. Lives which do so can be looked upon as exemplars, as saints, and their character revealed. McClendon also

³⁶ Ibid., 15. He resists this for rhetorical reasons.

³⁷ Ibid., 18.

³⁸ Ibid., 21.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

placed a negative criterion for the lives he chooses (within this particular work); none of them are professors of theology.

“Images” provide the nexus of past and possibility to shape a character’s vision. In the study of lives, “the vindication of vision depends in part upon the quality of life that vision evokes.”⁴¹ McClendon used images as the primary tool in the exegesis of these lives. Images reflect and cause lives to be lived in their particular and compelling fashions. The impetus for this mode of exploration was the work of the British Anglican theologian Austin Farrer. Farrer’s work on images, especially in *The Glass of Vision*, enabled McClendon to make the explicit connections between the lives of his subjects, the Scriptures, and, ultimately, Jesus Christ.

3.2 Austin Farrer’s Notion of Images

McClendon’s main influence in his decision to use images was Austin Farrer (1904-1968). Farrer, who was born into a Baptist family in Hapstead, England, was acknowledged from a young age to be an intelligent child, and spent most of his mature life learning, teaching, and serving at Oxford.⁴² He was in equal parts a philosopher and theologian, and his place among the philosophers of his day led his biographer to note that “he wrote for the philosophers around him, but he paid more attention to them than they to him. Few could understand what he was trying to do, most did not care.”⁴³ So Farrer, while being talented across a broad spectrum of academic interests, has remained relatively under-appreciated in academia.⁴⁴

McClendon’s interest in Farrer fits with his philosophical and theological interests. Farrer’s thoughts on language progressed in a similar, albeit less specialized, pattern to his contemporaries, the “ordinary language philosophers”

⁴¹ Ibid., 87. Vision here is a broad term that refers to the whole perspective of a character which involves convictions, social relations, narrative place, and so on.

⁴² All biographical information on Farrer is from Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows : A Biography Of Austin Farrer* (London: SPCK, 1985).

⁴³ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁴ Farrer’s publications include works of philosophy, theology, and biblical studies, as well as sermons.

J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Farrer observes in the foreword of the second edition to *Finite and Infinite*, that language is more “related to our acts, than it is to anything else. Speech is the very form of our linguistic activity, and linguistic activity is a specialized type of intentional action in general.”⁴⁵ This distinction reveals a similar understanding of language between Farrer and McClendon. McClendon lists Farrer as an influential thinker from early on in his academic life, and he is featured in McClendon’s first book, *Pacemakers in Christian Thought*. McClendon notes that images are central to Farrer’s interpretation of the Bible, and to understanding God’s revelation. McClendon takes from Farrer that it is “these God-given images ... rather than the words of fundamentalism or the inspired ideas of modernism, which are the stuff of inspiration.”⁴⁶ It is likely, then, that Farrer played a part in preparing McClendon for the impact that J.L. Austin and Wittgenstein were to make on him later on. Like them, Farrer endeavors to clarify the connections between language and its relation to the experience (and existence) of the world.

Farrer’s work *The Glass of Vision*, a collection of his Bampton Lectures at Oxford in 1948, centers around the idea of images and their role in metaphysics and revelation, and how they function for the theologian. Farrer begins by stating that the subject of his lectures is the “form of divine truth in the human mind.”⁴⁷ It is within this context that Farrer develops his theory of images. Farrer sets out “not to make truth as narrow as the Church which professes it, but as high as the God who proclaims it.”⁴⁸ He seeks here to develop a way of understanding that does not limit God to our experiences, but attempts to show how it is possible for our experiences to contact the marvels and awe that are available in God. Farrer develops the notion of images to achieve this paradoxical purpose.

⁴⁵ Austin Farrer, *Finite And Infinite : A Philosophical Essay*. (New York: Seabury Press), 1979, ix.

⁴⁶James William McClendon, *Pacemakers of Christian thought*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 63.

⁴⁷ Austin M. Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948), 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Farrer seems to purposefully avoid defining image as such. Instead he opts for describing an image's function in various instances. Images, for Farrer, encompass the encounter and relationships between past and present, event and thought, divine and human. They make up the transferable, interpretive substance that provides the form of the divine and of revelation within the human mind. While, this may seem lofty and vague (indeed, at times it is) Farrer also uses "metaphor" as a synonym for image.⁴⁹ Farrer describes what this may look like in function: "each image will have its own conceptual conventions, proper to the figure it embodies: and a single over-all conceptual analysis will be about as useful for the interpretation... as a bulldozer for the cultivation of a miniature landscape garden."⁵⁰ He continues by stating that images must be understood, then, "according to their own imagery laws, and not according to the principles of conceptual system." Farrer is affirming the contextual necessity of both the application and interpretation of images, which are unable to fit into a firm rule-based or systematic analysis.

In *A Rebirth of Images*, Farrer begins his treatment of the book of Revelation by stating, "The human imagination has always been controlled by certain basic images, in which man's own nature, his relation to his fellows, and his dependence upon the divine power find expression."⁵¹ He turns this into an ontological observation: "Our ignorance of what we are does not make us cease to be, and our unawareness of the profound levels of our imagination neither abolishes them nor prevents them from acting upon our wills, nor, even, on the wills and minds of others."⁵² There are images, Farrer infers, that operate on both the conscious and pre-conscious levels to determine how we operate as humans, shaping the very structures of our mental sphere and actions. This occurs not only in the intra-personal realm, but also the social realm, determining the images or content that our imaginations have to work with.

⁴⁹ I have also used 'image' and 'metaphor' synonymously at various places throughout this work.

⁵⁰ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 45. Farrer evokes the conceptual nature of image and metaphor in a way that must be responded to in itself, that is (borrowing from the opening chapter) with empathy.

⁵¹ Austin Marsden Farrer, *A Rebirth Of Images: The Making Of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949).

⁵² Ibid.

Images, then, are pictures of the way things are that shape how people respond to the world.⁵³

Images are not the revelation themselves, but the medium in which revelation is encountered. Farrer claims that “the inspired man may not reflect on the instrumental function of the images, but whether he reflects on it or not, he makes an instrumental use of them.”⁵⁴ He highlights an essential truth of the nature of metaphors, noting that when metaphoric language is used, it is not the metaphor itself which is communicated, but rather the meaning of the metaphor.⁵⁵ Metaphors have the power to “mislead us or send us right, without our observing it.”⁵⁶ The search for assurance and appropriateness of the metaphors of Scripture, however, brings in another challenge to these issues. Robert Boak Slocum points out that, for Farrer, “humanity cannot conceive of the ineffable ‘except through images’ and these images must be ‘divinely given’ for humanity.”⁵⁷

Daily metaphors can be judged, Farrer claims, against what we experience as reality. However, for *revelatory* images, “nothing but the image is given [to] us to act as an indication of the reality.”⁵⁸ It is only through the images that the divine reality is revealed. This unearths a sizable question for the rational thinker: how is one to judge the validity of the truth if there is nothing outside of the image to judge it by? The philosopher in Farrer comes out here, and he quickly raises questions regarding images and metaphysics noting that this is like running straight into “a thicket of thorns.”⁵⁹

⁵³ There are obvious connections here to Wittgenstein’s notion of “forms of life” and “picture thinking” which will be explored in section 4.3.

⁵⁴ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 57. There are obvious links here to the work of Green, as explored in the opening chapter. For Green, it is the imagination that is the medium of revelation, whereas Farrer sees it as being the images themselves.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Robert Boak Slocum, *Light In A Burning-Glass : A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer’s Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 51. cf Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 108.

⁵⁸ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 58.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 63.

To struggle within this thicket, however, is essential for this type of theology. The connection between the realms of language (imagery) and what is (metaphysics), is vital for this type of work, fusing revelation to daily life.⁶⁰ This questioning reveals Farrer's imaginative thinking. He begins by stating that metaphysics is primarily concerned with mysteries, and not problems, which is how it is often framed. Mysteries are not solved so much as described.⁶¹ The traditional issues in metaphysics, claims Farrer, are mainly difficulties in description. Metaphysics is advanced by improving and refining the descriptions so the mysteries at hand may be apprehended more fully. He defines problems (the subject of science) as those questions which have a definitive right answer, while mysteries (the subject of metaphysics) are those questions which have no 'right answers'.⁶² Problems entail specific tools being deployed to measure and achieve the 'right answer'. These tools would be incapable of achieving an answer to a mystery. One cannot apply a purely scientific method to the study of theology. Farrer observes the same type of tendencies within metaphysics, and seeks to deal honestly and sufficiently with the many mysteries that are present in theology, attending to language and specifically images as a way forward in the metaphysical task.

For Farrer, the task of the metaphysician is to understand the manifold mystery at hand in as much depth as possible. "Since the human mind understands in the act of discourse, and not by simple intuition, to understand will be to describe."⁶³ The metaphysician cannot pre-determine the tools (such as specific images, metaphors, and other linguistic devices) that he will use to describe the mystery. Instead, the tools are selected out of encountering the mystery.⁶⁴ The description of a mystery is, therefore, an empathic response.⁶⁵ The nature of

⁶⁰ This fusion is what McClendon was attempting also with his biographical theology.

⁶¹ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 64.

⁶² Ibid., 66-67.

⁶³ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁵ Farrer displays a line of thinking in his work which enables much of my interpretation of McClendon to have historical relevance. In Farrer the

metaphysics is the work of metaphor. Through taking images from a domain which is familiar, and applying those images to a domain which is mysterious, an understanding is achieved. Metaphysics develops through the mapping of convictions from various domains to create deeply held descriptions of what is. Theology is necessarily metaphysical. Farrer denies the possibility of doing theology without dealing with the mysteries that metaphysics seeks to describe.

Farrer returns to his initial quandary that, for revelation, there can be no outside justification of truth apart from the images being used. Or stated differently, he asks, “Can the metaphysician point away from the analogical statements he uses to a non-analogical truth which they state?”⁶⁶ Farrer claims that this question, which would surely be asked by many, is a misconstrued one. He states that the metaphysician does not have “any such non-analogical thoughts: analogy is the proper form of metaphysical thought, in the realm of *thought* there is no getting behind it.”⁶⁷ He continues, “thinking is mental discourse, and no discourse can be performed without at least two terms.”⁶⁸ It is the relationship between ideas or words (images) in a particular context and use that make meaning. One can conclude, then, that whether thinking (and speaking) metaphorically about the phenomena we encounter in our everyday lives, or the phenomena we encounter through the revelation of Scripture, the relation of mystery to the metaphoric structure of its description is inevitable. The scriptural theologian is at a loss because they only have the images within the text to compare and analyze in pursuit of divine truths, while the metaphysician has the whole of existence to draw upon and compare his images to. The Christian canon is fixed, which limits the texts and images that are available to the hermeneutic of the Scriptures.⁶⁹ An implication of Farrer’s project is that these limits can be overcome through a deeper understanding of

connection between language, metaphor, metaphysics, and the essential requirements of these for theology is made. As such, my empathic response (displayed through the second half of this work) to McClendon is in many ways enabled by Farrer’s influence upon McClendon.

⁶⁶ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 74.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Emphasis is Farrer’s own

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ McClendon, recall, expands the available material beyond the canon of Scripture.

images and their role in all speech and thought, including their relation to ‘what is’. What we see in McClendon’s use of Farrer is that this is not necessarily a limitation of either hermeneutics or metaphysics, but a tradition of making meaning. New descriptions of reality arise from the given set of images (which come from Scripture, experience, and history) to describe the ever-changing social and physical realities at hand. Furthermore, the metaphysical mysteries of the world are not merely described but created through the embodiment of such images.

This approach to metaphysics has recently become more accepted. In their book *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that this (the connections between metaphor and metaphysics) is the conclusion they have come to from their work with metaphor and cognitive linguistics. They claim that “the hidden hand of the unconscious mind uses metaphor to define our unconscious metaphysics—the metaphysics used not just by ordinary people, but also by philosophers to make sense of these concepts.”⁷⁰ They go further and say that, “Throughout history it has been virtually impossible for philosophers to do metaphysics without such metaphors.”⁷¹ It is from this starting point that they seek to take a fresh approach to philosophy. From the account of Farrer, however, we can see that this is not a new perspective on metaphysics, although perhaps an overlooked and underdeveloped one.

The Christian conviction that humans bear the image of God creates (for this type of thinking) some unique challenges. This belief requires a type of connection between humanity (finite) and God (infinite). Farrer spends significant time addressing this specific concern, suggesting that this connection takes place within linguistic images:

The event that we are speaking of is a double event: two things are happening. First, there is an ordinary pedestrian act of the mind, appreciating some aspect of finite existence. Second, there is a sublimer act, by which the finite object is itself appreciated as a symbol of the infinite. Of these two acts, the former and more pedestrian is unambiguously directed towards a finite object: the second and

⁷⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: The Embodied Mind And Its Challenge To Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 14.

⁷¹ Ibid.

sublimar act is ambiguous in its direction; it bears both on a finite and on an infinite object, for it treats the one as a symbol of the other, and so seems to hang between earth and heaven. This being so, we shall naturally expect the first act to exercise an attraction upon the second and pull it in the earthwards direction.⁷²

Farrer seeks to be honest with the human experience of knowing God. He states, “It is only in being aware of something finite as an analogy of God that we begin to be aware of God at all.”⁷³ Farrer makes an important distinction at this point: the difference between a rational analogy, used in everyday life, and a revelatory image, used to reveal divine truth. The temptation would be to say that they function in the same way, but Farrer insists that they do not. “Rational analogies are *natural* images; the revealed figures are not, in the sense intended, *natural*.”⁷⁴ The result of these two types of image are very different; revealed images are conduits for something much greater than natural images.

In the Christian tradition the images pivot upon the person of Jesus Christ. The images of the Hebrew Bible are embodied in Christ, and the apostles interpret and develop the images to achieve their task. It is the images that enable revelation. Farrer proposes that the images “are not the whole of Christ’s teaching, but they set forth the supernatural mystery which is the heart of his teaching. Without them, the teaching would not be supernatural revelation, but instruction in piety and morals.”⁷⁵ He continues to explain this phenomenon, saying: “The great images interpreted the events of Christ’s ministry, death and resurrection, and the events interpreted the images; the interplay of the two is revelation.”⁷⁶ As stated, this process continues with the apostles: “The images given by Christ continue to unfold within the apostolic mind, in such fashion as to reveal the nature of the supernatural existence of the apostolic church.”⁷⁷ Today these images function in a similar way. They are formed supernaturally,

⁷² Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 90.

⁷³ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 94. Emphasis is Farrer’s own.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 43. In many ways Farrer’s approach outlined here foreshadows the cyclical understanding argued for in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight of this thesis.

⁷⁷ Farrer, *The Glass Of Vision*, 43.

and by faith they are made intelligible. Farrer claims that faith enables discernment not just of the image itself but of “what the images signify.”⁷⁸ He reaffirms, however, that this does not mean that the images are somehow bypassed, but it is indeed *through* the images that this revelation is possible. “We cannot by-pass the images to seize an imageless truth.”⁷⁹ Images, and by implication their metaphoric or analogical linguistic acts, are the very form in which divine revelation and truth are accessible to humanity. It is through these special images that it is possible for humans to cooperate or participate in the divine reality.

McClendon draws directly from Farrer that “the device by which we men and women appropriate the Christian stories and are appropriated by the great story is the sacred or holy image.”⁸⁰ As McClendon was developing his biographical approach, Farrer, and specifically this concept of images, played a vital role in shaping his use of biography as a method for theology. He does not use this concept in the same way that Farrer does, but repeats it with a revised focus.

3.3 McClendon’s Development of ‘Image’ within his Biographical Method

McClendon does not understand images exactly as Farrer does. He instead develops a use of images that is more flexible. Regarding the use of images by New Testament authors, McClendon asks, “If central to the writers, then surely [the use of images is] central to the correct reading?”⁸¹ “Our doctrine,” he claims, “must be that those of biblical faith are they who find in Scripture what is centrally there – great dominant images, such as the Kingdom of God, and Israel, and sacrifice, and Son of Man, *and who apply them as the makers of Scripture applied them – to themselves.*”⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ James McClendon, “Story, Sainthood, and Truth: Biography as Theology Revisited”, 1982, 9. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁸¹ *Bio.*, 74.

⁸² Ibid. Here we see McClendon seeking an empathic method for interpretation of the Scriptures. Emphasis is McClendon’s own.

Whereas Farrer mainly sees these images as applicable to Christ, and believes they are used for developing understandings and theologies in the life of the Church, McClendon allows for images to be faithfully applied to the lives of persons here and now. He sees images as embodied by Christ so that they may be applied to his followers. McClendon suggests that,

In the New Testament writings there is a continual blurring of the line of application between the teacher and the disciples: he is the presence of the Kingdom, yet those who know their need of God learn that the Kingdom is *theirs*;⁸³ he takes up his cross so that they may take theirs up and follow him;⁸⁴ the Son of Man is sometimes Jesus alone, sometimes his community collective;⁸⁵ his is Israel, but they are the twelve tribes who constitute Israel.⁸⁶

According to McClendon, Christ invites and enables his followers to participate in the images he embodies. McClendon points to the Christian rite of the eucharist as an example of enacted imagery. Whether one takes the practice of the wine and bread as *representing*, or *becoming* the body and blood of Christ, the locution remains ‘this is my body, this is my blood.’ Understanding this phenomenon will lead to a deeper appreciation of how the “Christian faith comprises images applied to life”, and recognizing “why the understanding of that faith must involve the examination of the role of images in actual lives, the role of images in the experience of life.”⁸⁷ What McClendon is proposing, then, is that there are images in the lives of people and communities that shape their understanding and experience of life.⁸⁸ The understanding of these images and the way they enable a particular life is central to an understanding of religion. In this light, religion is seen as a particular way of making sense (or meaning-making), through the images available from that particular tradition.⁸⁹ In this

⁸³ *Bio.*, 74, cf. Luke 11:20; Matt. 12:28; Luke 7:22; Matt. 11:4-5, etc.; with Matt. 5:10, 20; Mark 9: 47; etc.

⁸⁴ *Bio.*, 74, cf. Mark 8:34 with 9:1 and parallels Matthew 16:24, and Luke 9:23.

⁸⁵ *Bio.*, 74 cf. Mark 8:38 and parallels with Mark 2:27-28.

⁸⁶ *Bio.*, 74 cf. Matt. 15:31, 27:42; Luke 1:54; Matt. 19:28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁸ This concept will be picked up and nuanced in the section on picture thinking in the next chapter.

⁸⁹ This is another concept which will be expanded upon in the second half of the thesis.

way, it is the “dominant images that seem to shape the life of the subject and that relate that life to the tradition in which the subject stands and to ourselves to the extent that these images speak to us.”⁹⁰ Images provide a connection between lives throughout history, and encounter or challenge present observers to reexamine their own vision.

Discovering the images that are fundamental to the shaping of a tradition is part of the theological task. Historical assessment, then, is indeed vital for the theologian, but as McClendon reminds us, it is “not merely a historical enterprise.”⁹¹ Once the discovery of these images, and the doctrines that they are related to, are made, it is part of the theological task to ask, “Can we who live in the age in which we live, having discovered what we have discovered about ourselves in the modern world, believe this?”⁹² According to what McClendon argued, one must not limit one’s realm of speculation to the academic or theoretical, but must look to the lives of those living with these images and doctrines today. The point of images, claims McClendon, is the point of doctrine: images “*are* the theological doctrine in the only form in which it can give substance to the religion of those who live by that doctrine.”⁹³ They bind a person to his or her convictions. Images become vital in the connection between the historical doctrines and convictions of a given tradition, and the current lives of those within that tradition. Through observation and analysis, these lives tell us if the images and their corresponding doctrines are relevant to the current age.

The most important implication of this practice of interpreting lives, and the images within them, is that it speaks to a reality. Biography as theology is not merely a theoretical approach, but it is seen and justified through the lives of the saints among us. McClendon recognizes that the theoretical defense of this approach to theology can only have a limited potential to persuade. The true

⁹⁰ *Bio.*, 161.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹² *Ibid.* This question remains a vital underlying question for McClendon throughout his systematic theology.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, emphasis is McClendon’s own.

defense of this approach comes from its practice. In *Biography as Theology*, McClendon uses four example lives to show how biography may be theology, with images as the connection between the theology and living.

The specific doctrine that is being tested in *Biography as Theology* is atonement, or as McClendon often puts it, 'at-one-ment': the reconciliation of God and creation accomplished in the event of Jesus Christ. Theological traditions have understood this in a variety of ways, which is in part due to the multiple images used in Scripture to describe this phenomenon. McClendon uses the images around the atonement in the lives of his subjects to see how the doctrine has formed their character. The first of his subjects is Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961), the Swedish former Secretary General of the United Nations.⁹⁴ Upon his death in 1961, Hammarskjöld's personal journal was discovered, revealing that he was a hidden Christian who viewed his life in light of Christ's. His journal was eventually published as *Markings*, and it reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings towards his very difficult and vital vocation.⁹⁵

McClendon cites a passage from Hammarskjöld's *Marking* from 1955 when, Hammarskjöld was just hitting his stride inside of the UN:

A jealous dream which refuses to share you with anybody or anything else: the greatest creation of mankind – the dream of mankind.

The greatest creation of mankind, in which the noblest dream of the individual to lose himself.

Therefore: gladly death or humiliation if that is what the dream demands.

Therefore: how easy to forgive.⁹⁶

McClendon brings this poetic description of possibilities within the UN into dialogue with another of Hammarskjöld's 'marking' in which he (Hammarskjöld) makes the connection between his own life and the life of Christ. Hammarskjöld writes, "As I continued along the Way, I learned, step by step, word by word, that behind every saying in the Gospels, stands

⁹⁴ Hammarskjöld held this position from 1953 - 1961.

⁹⁵ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H Auden (New York: Knopf, 1965).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 115.

one man and one man's experience."⁹⁷ While some claim that Hammarskjöld had a Messiah complex, McClendon sees Hammarskjöld as interpreting his life as a disciple of the cross.⁹⁸

Atonement, for McClendon, is mission – its goal is 'at-one-ment' or unity, and its descriptor, peace. With this in mind, it is easy to see the connections between the task and burden of the Secretary General, and the work of Christ.

McClendon argues that this is how Hammarskjöld saw his own life.

Hammarskjöld wrote: "No peace which is not peace for all, no rest until all has been fulfilled."⁹⁹ McClendon saw that "the language of the Gospels brings [the] imagery of mission and fulfillment of goal into interplay with the peaceful unity of humankind."¹⁰⁰ For Hammarskjöld, this language crystalizes in the images of 'servant', 'brother', the 'One', and, as McClendon says, through these images, Hammarskjöld "understood himself, faced critical situations in life, and chiseled out his own destiny."¹⁰¹

McClendon elaborates here, by explaining that "Hammarskjöld understands himself as Christ's brother, as brother to the Brother; he sees the point of his life as a sacrifice to be offered."¹⁰² These images formed a governing vision for Hammarskjöld's life. It is the enactment of such a vision that allows McClendon to use lives such as Hammarskjöld's as data for theological practice. McClendon clarifies his own use of images near the conclusion of *Biography As Theology* by claiming,

Images come into a life from the tradition in which that life participates, but different Christians are formed by different sets of images within the larger manifold. As the images converge in a particular life they both shape that life and, making themselves known, reflect its shape to others. Thus, to know its images is so far to know a life, particularly to know it in connection with its creative sources (its 'scripture' and 'tradition') and its creative possibilities (the influence that life may have on others' lives). The saints both belong to

⁹⁷ Ibid., 205.

⁹⁸ *Bio.*, 43.

⁹⁹ Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ *Bio.*, 81.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰² Ibid., 72.

communities of the past and shape communities of the future, and the images are a central means of this communication.¹⁰³

Images also have within them an ability to change or enable new ways of seeing things. McClendon says, “images are vital for they help us discover in the vision of our subjects that which may have escaped our own vision; like other metaphors they work to shift the way we see things.”¹⁰⁴

This final observation will be crucial when we see that McClendon’s use of images changes over time. It is worth noting the (possibly obvious) connection between images and optics. There is an innate ability for images and metaphors to change the content of thoughts and pictures based on what they are being applied to. Or to put it differently, the relationships between various (internal) pictures are undergoing change, and because of this they will manifest in various ways, depending on the context and the persons and communities involved. Our vision (and its resulting experience of the world) will change based on the images being used.

The connection between images and optics will again come into focus when the relationship between McClendon’s use of images and his *baptist vision* is explored in the following chapter. McClendon’s compelling use of images was influential in Stanley Hauerwas’s initial decision to pursue dialogue. Hauerwas writes that he found McClendon’s use of images to be quite “congenial”. He says that

Metaphor gives you the means of making clear that the “metaphor” is not mere metaphor, but the true way of seeing reality because that is the way the world is— i.e., it seems to me that you are not trying to end run the falsification issue, but broaden the scope of the question. This allows for the development of what I think is absolutely crucial for the Christian theologian — namely that there are certain “compulsive metaphors” of the Christian faith (he rose from the dead) that cannot be translated into any other language.¹⁰⁵

Here, Hauerwas displays a deep understanding of the potential of McClendon’s work in this area. That McClendon’s use of images broadens the scope of the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, letter to James McClendon, 18 February, 1972.

questions of theology is key to understanding the meaning of this theological approach.

McClendon acknowledges his dependence on Farrer for his development and use of 'images' but sees potential for more work to be carried out in this area. McClendon cites Paul Tillich's notion of 'symbol' and Carl Jung's understanding of images in the human life as two specific examples of where this thinking about 'images' may be reinforced and nuanced.¹⁰⁶ In this thesis it is argued that recent development of metaphor theory is a fruitful area in which this path of thought may be expanded.¹⁰⁷ McClendon's own interests lay in the connection of images to the character as a whole, and in developing a type of character ethics through this work. His work shows how images reveal convictions, which, as we have seen, are the subject of theology.

3.4 The Challenges and Questions Arising from McClendon's Method

McClendon's biographical method has been praised for its innovations and creativity in allowing theology to be brought into more direct contact with lived lives. George Stroup notes exactly this when he says that *Biography As Theology* "attempts to respond to the lamentation one hears often these days that contemporary theology is too abstract, that it has become the exclusive possession of a small, professional guild, and that it is unrelated to the everyday concrete lives of individuals in the Christian community."¹⁰⁸ McClendon's work can be seen as fulfilling an attempt to do theology in a way that addresses some of the problems that he saw within the contemporary theology which surrounded him (a topic explored in the opening section of this chapter). His method, however, brings with it questions which need to be addressed.

¹⁰⁶ Tillich's notion of symbol has some strong similarities here. In the introduction to *The Protestant Era*, Tillich says, "Protestants often confuse essential symbols with accidental signs. They often are unaware of the numinous power inherent in genuine symbols, words, acts, persons, things. They have replaced the great wealth of symbols appearing in the Christian tradition by rational concepts, moral laws, and subjective emotions." See, Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), xix. McClendon is correct that an exploration of this in light of his use of images within *Biography as Theology* would be a fruitful study.

¹⁰⁷ This will be the task of Chapters Six and Seven.

¹⁰⁸ George W. Stroup, "Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology," *Homiletic* 1 (1976), 30.

The first issue that should be addressed has to do with the selection and interpretation of the images found within the lives of his subjects. In many ways, this process seems like an arbitrary guide to the interpretation of such lives. As Michael Goldberg notes, its strength lies in its ability “to let diverse lives—through their own diverse images—‘tell their own stories.’”¹⁰⁹ The weakness of this method comes from the seeming ambiguity with which it is applied. Stephen Crites, a leader in the field of narrative theology, sketches this critique. He claims that with the image-based methodology, McClendon “does not explain how one knows which images are the appropriate ones to apply to another person’s life or to one’s own. What if the image of ‘atonement’ is not the appropriate one to apply to Martin Luther King Jr.? What are the consequences of that misapplication?”¹¹⁰ This same critique has been made by David Nelson Duke, who questions, “How do you know you are choosing the best or even correct dominant images for the person? It sounds so subjective.”¹¹¹

Duke goes on to answer this question by stating that “it is subjective because it is imaginative, but it must be imagination in tension with the raw data and historical process of the biographical subject’s life story.”¹¹² He is correct that McClendon’s methodology displays imagination and innovation that proceeds from the material displayed in the life of the subject. What these critiques highlight is a lack of clarity in McClendon’s explanation of the process of choosing and interpreting these images. The presence of imagination does not erase the obscurity which many have found in the application.

The second question that must be raised is that of the selection of lives studied. McClendon cites the importance of the compelling nature that these lives must have. ‘Compelling-ness’ of a life was the main factor that McClendon required in

¹⁰⁹ Michael Goldberg, *Theology And Narrative : A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 91.

¹¹⁰ George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 78.

¹¹¹ David Nelson Duke, “Theology and Biography : Simple Suggestions for a Promising Field,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13, no. 2 (Sum 1986): 144.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 145.

order for that life to qualify for biographical study. The compelling nature of lives is surely not unique to Christian lives, but McClendon argued that the primary task of biography as theology is to “understand this compelling quality theologically.”¹¹³ McClendon himself seemed to acknowledge the soft ground he stood on at this point, saying that “it is just the limits of this understanding on my own part that have caused me to be very slow to answer the question: how are biographical subjects to be chosen?”¹¹⁴ He notes that he purposefully avoided giving an answer beyond a vague notion that the lives that are chosen should be ‘liked’.¹¹⁵ This suggestion is completely open to the charge of subjectivism, for what people like varies as much as people themselves.

McClendon addresses this briefly, saying that “‘liking’ may be misleading: perhaps we should say we are struck by them; there is sometimes an element of strong repulsion which signals the claim these lives make upon us.”¹¹⁶ He evokes the work of Rudolf Otto and his ‘numinous’ concept which combines elements which simultaneously attract and repel both the awful and the fascinating.¹¹⁷ Karl Rahner is also cited by McClendon for his understanding of the saints and their creative living (from within the Catholic tradition). Rahner writes:

Canonized saints are the creative models of sanctity who have set a concrete example, each for his own particular age, of a new way to be Christian and so have shown others how to accept Christianity creatively and with new understanding. The image of these models may fade with the passage of time or emerge with new clarity, as is shown by the fact that certain saints cease to be venerated or even disappear from the catalogue of saints.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *Bio.*, 160.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ McClendon, “Theology, Language, and Life – A Christian Perspective”, 8.

¹¹⁶ *Bio.*, 160.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 161. See also Rudolf Otto, *The Idea Of The Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1943). Otto includes within this concept: awe-fulness, overpowering-ness, energy or urgency, the wholly other, and fascination. Not all apply to what McClendon proposed, but each framed the phenomenon he sought to address.

¹¹⁸ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, ed. Cornelius Ernst, O.P., trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 479.

McClendon's approach to the saints has significant resonance with Rahner at this point. McClendon resists the inclination toward viewing the saints' lives as merely useful, however. He notes that if this is the case, then the usefulness should be identified, and "we would have discovered features or aims of Christian faith and life which were *logically* prior to the lives that so usefully exhibit these features or expedite these aims."¹¹⁹ This, in his eyes, would limit biographical theology to the realm of illustration for teaching, which assumes that theology is more of a static, rather than a dynamic, enterprise. For McClendon, theology is not static, and this compelling nature is "often more powerful than the propositional religious goals we are in the position to make."¹²⁰ These lives are compelling, as are the doctrines related to them, "because it [the doctrine] had prior embodiment in them and may be embodied again."¹²¹ Theology has been lived in these lives, and through this method people can see how it may be lived by them.

McClendon obviously anticipated critique, but even within his answer there remain questions. McClendon wanted to resist placing the theological program ahead of the witness of the compelling lives of his subjects, but how do we know that this has been the case in his practice? The lives he has chosen (in *Biography as Theology*) all neatly fit into an appreciation and revision of the doctrine of atonement and, while recognizing that correlation is not causation, this is quite convenient for his task. I am not claiming here that there is any insincerity on McClendon's part, but there could have been more transparency with how these particular lives all came to bear upon the doctrine of atonement.

A third critique that should be noted in brief is the relation of biography as theology to the prevalent use of autobiography as a theological method. The main distinction for McClendon is the extent of self-deception in autobiography, compared to biography. While McClendon used any autobiographical material in the formation of his biographical studies, he did not attribute to it any higher or special authority compared to other material. He acknowledged the tradition

¹¹⁹ *Bio.*, 161. Emphasis is McClendon's own.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

of having significant theological works within the autobiographical genre (especially Augustine's *Confessions*, and the multi-layered reflections of Kierkegaard), but posits that this "confessional writing appears in the Christian movement whenever a believer finds it necessary to take a stand against the dominant thought-patterns of the day: Augustine against pagan philosophy; Kierkegaard against nineteenth century culture-Christianity."¹²² McClendon proposed that self-deception is best conceived not as the purposeful deception of others, but instead as a "narrowing or rather a non-enlarging of our consciousness or conscious awareness."¹²³ It is as though the autobiographer, often without seeking to do so, recalls and interprets their narrative in a way that is congruent with the purpose and task of their work.

McClendon drew upon the work of his peers, Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, who wrote on the topic of autobiography and self-deception at the same time as McClendon was working on *Biography as Theology*. Under their approach to self deception, the virtues that are lacking are not integrity or sincerity, but rather the courage required to come to terms with the reality at hand.¹²⁴ Hauerwas and Burrell write, "To the extent that we cannot make anything of what we are doing, we fail to make our lives into anything."¹²⁵ The autobiography, then, they claim "is the literary form that mirrors the moral necessity to free ourselves from the hold of our illusions by exercising the skills which more demanding stories provide."¹²⁶ Within Christianity, one such skill Christians possess is the confession of sin, found through the story of Jesus Christ. The saints "formed by this story testify to its efficiency in purging themselves of all self-deception as it forces the acceptance of a new self mirrored in the cross."¹²⁷ In this way, McClendon acknowledged the useful and unique

¹²² Ibid., 165.

¹²³ Ibid. McClendon's own interest and experience with classical psychoanalysis is evoked here.

¹²⁴ *Bio.*, 166.

¹²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness And Tragedy : Further Investigations In Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 96.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 98.

contribution that autobiography provides for the task of biography as theology. It is a vital perspective to gain in any understanding of a life, but as McClendon saw it, “If Christian theology is to be concerned always with shared faith, with community, we must hear from other experience as well as our own, and must examine self-told stories by external as well as internal light.”¹²⁸

Self-deception is a sin, McClendon claimed, “like sloth and pride, which operate some of the time in each of us. It is, as other biblical passages make evident, a recurrent human fault, one that only cynics can generally escape.”¹²⁹ McClendon saw self-deception as a sin that may indeed be overcome, and proposed three biblical ‘words’ or practices as being key in progressing: repentance, discipling, and doctrinal reformation. Following these three practices, McClendon claims, will allow the Christian community to develop the skills and virtues necessary to recognize the deception that is taking place, and to honestly re-tell our stories to one another.¹³⁰

The question arises, that if self-deception is such a prevalent epidemic, how does one know it is not at play in the understanding and interpretation of any writing? Or, to put it bluntly, to what extent is self-deception at play in the formation of the biographical accounts McClendon writes? While this may be a cynical line of questioning, it presents itself at this point. The question is not easily answered, and one must, at some point, trust their perspective.

McClendon addresses this in the preface to the second edition of *Biography As Theology*, saying “the ordinary biographer can of course be mistaken, but only the autobiographer is virtually sure to produce a self-deceived account.”¹³¹

Another reason for choosing biography over autobiography, beyond self-deception, is the ability to see the influence a life has on other lives. Self-deception is likely to be present, and the ability to see in context a life among other lives would surely be beneficial.

¹²⁸ *Bio.*, 166.

¹²⁹ James McClendon, “‘Biography as Theology’ for Southern Baptists”, 1986. Unpublished essay, McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary, 12.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* McClendon goes into much more detail explaining his perspective on these practices, and applying them to the Southern Baptist context.

¹³¹ *Bio.*, vi.

All of these critiques and questions regarding McClendon's biographical method are interior critiques, meaning they are not sufficient in themselves to discredit the method. They primarily point out certain places where expansion or clarification within McClendon's method is needed. On the whole, *Biography as Theology* was well received and respected. McClendon notes that the "ultimate accolade [of the book's success] came from Robert McAfee Brown, then at Stanford, who simply adopted the book as a text for his own 'life stories and theology' course there."¹³² However, in order to assess whether or not the book was/is a success, it must be judged by its initial aim, which was simply to begin anew (after the shaky 1960s had blown the old structures of theology to the ground). As an attempt to find within the lives of current Christians a way of doing theology while overcoming much of what was plaguing theology, it has ultimately succeeded.¹³³ As George Stroup notes, and as we have seen, "the argument is not without its faults, as is true of most ground breaking efforts."¹³⁴

3.5 Conclusion

Within this chapter, McClendon's rationale for undertaking the project of using biography as a theological method was explored. The significance of the thought of Austin Farrer upon McClendon, with special focus on his concept of images was then displayed. Keeping this background in mind, I was then able to show how McClendon used this notion of images to form his method of exploring lives in a distinctly theological way. A brief look at some of the questions and concerns that arise from McClendon's method concludes this chapter.

The question may arise at this point from readers familiar with McClendon as to why images and biography has been chosen as focal points in this study compared to practices and narrative, which take on a more prominent role in his Systematic Theology. The purposeful focus upon image and biography is in part due to the early focus of these tools in McClendon's early work, but seemingly underdeveloped in his later work. Furthermore, this focus reveals the

¹³² Ibid., vii.

¹³³ cf Ibid.

¹³⁴ George W. Stroup, "Biography as Theology", 31.

potential for revision through recent work on metaphor, which may lead to a renewed practice of biography as theology. McClendon's later work clearly develops the role of narrative and practices as features of his distinct theology, and leaves little room to revise his use of those tools. My focus will add renewed depth to images and biography to be re-appreciated within McClendon's contribution.

This initial exploration into McClendon's method will allow us to seek out the implicit methodological moves McClendon makes, as well as exploring the significance of some of these convictions upon McClendon's work more broadly.

Chapter Four. McClendon's Implicit Metaphoric Thought

So far, I have explored the background and initial steps in McClendon's biographical method focusing on the concept of images and the development of his method through the influence of Austin Farrer, its employment in *Biography as Theology*, and concluding with a look at some of the questions and concerns raised by the book. Casting an eye over thus has given an initial sense of McClendon's theological practice. If *Biography As Theology* was the only book of McClendon's that one had ever read, one would be left with the impression that 'images' play a vital part in his theology. It would come as a surprise, then, that explicit talk of images is literally non-existent in the three volumes of his systematic theology. The concept is, however, still present and important to his method, albeit in a more implicit way. Three main developments grew from the soil of images and remain vital to understanding McClendon's work. The first is his 'baptist vision', the second is the use of 'picture thinking', influenced by Wittgenstein, and the third is his understanding of 'catachresis'.

These three conceptual tools are used by McClendon in varying degrees throughout *Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness*, the three of which make up his Systematic Theology trilogy. Up to this point my treatment of McClendon has been limited to the development of his method in his early work. However, McClendon's legacy will be judged finally on the contribution of *Systematic Theology*. As presented in Chapter Two, McClendon took great time and care in working out how to write this theology from the new baptist perspective he was forming. Although *Biography as Theology* was written before his conversion was complete. There is, however, a great deal of unity between his early work and *Systematic Theology*. This chapter explores a few of these uniting methodological concepts.

The baptist vision, picture thinking, and catachresis, each intersect with language and logic in a way that McClendon saw as significant to thinking and living Christian convictions. I will be relating these three developments to the previously detailed notion of images. Taking this step relates to the

corresponding step I am taking with metaphor theory. Showing this move explicitly, at this point, will clarify the trajectory of my thinking, creating a context for the content of this chapter.

4.1 Metaphor Theories

Terrence Tilley, a former doctoral student of McClendon, acknowledged the potential in McClendon's use of metaphor within *Biography as Theology*, and used it as a launching pad in the first chapter of his book *Story Theology*. In it, Tilley argues that metaphor is central to theology, and must be addressed as such. He points out that detailed analysis and parsing of metaphors into similes and dissimiles, decent propositional claims can be made. There is, Tilley argues, another way that the meaning of metaphor can be approached, through its location within a narrative. Echoing McClendon, Tilley claims that "the metaphor a story carries can be used to express the meaning of life."¹ Christian narrative theology, must highlight the central Christian metaphors through the proclamation, interpretation, and revision of the stories which contain these metaphors. Biography reveals how these metaphors are being enacted in various contexts in compelling ways. The function of metaphor, and *how* it means, then, is a prominent concern for those studying biographical theology.

How metaphor operates has been a mystery that has exercised many great minds over thousands of years. The dominant theory of metaphor that evolved considers ordinary speech to be literal and metaphoric expressions to be either "a deviant form of expression or a nonessential literary figure of speech."² This notion of metaphor has become so entrenched that it is often no longer taken as a theory, but is assumed as truth, and even treated as definitional.³ Due to this status, theories of metaphor are typically limited to the words used, and do not often influence accounts of cognition.

¹ Terrence W. Tilley, *Story Theology* (Liturgical Press, 1985), 5.

² Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind : The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 66.

³ See, George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor" in *Metaphor and Thought* ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 202.

Johnson explains that this denial of the cognitive dimension of metaphor finds its roots in objectivist assumptions about meaning which directly influence the understanding of metaphor. Johnson sees the argument for this (objectivist) account of metaphor consisting of the following main points:⁴

1. The most basic descriptions of reality are literal terms and propositions. The world's basic categories are fixed, definite, and tied to nature and essence. 'Literal' terms and ideas are those entities which fulfill truth conditions for objects and events that exist objectively.
2. Metaphorical statements cannot be basic descriptions of objective reality because metaphor crosses categorical and experiential boundaries and domains. Metaphor does not correspond to the types of definite categorical boundaries found in the world and can only describe reality to the extent that it can be reduced to some set of literal propositions which then fit, or fail to fit, the world. Literal language and metaphorical language are mutually exclusive forms of language.
3. Since metaphors are not fundamental structures for describing the world, they can have no role in constituting it. They may help shape understandings of the world but do not contribute to structuring our experience.

While these are some of the assumptions that have led to metaphor being thought of in the way that it has, there are differences concerning how metaphor is thought to function. There are a number of theories within the objectivist assumptions of metaphor, and some have changed over time to the point where many of the initial deeply held understandings have been let go. A brief look at a few of these options will enable the alternative to be seen in perspective.⁵

The first category has been called the "literal-core" theories.⁶ These theories see the metaphor as a poetic or elaborative sheath containing a meaning which can be stated as a literal proposition. This category considers the metaphoric aspect

⁴ Johnson's account can be found in *The Body In The Mind*, 66-67.

⁵ My reliance upon Johnson here is apparent. I am indebted to his work for its concise and clear descriptions of these past developments of metaphor theory.

⁶ For consistency I will be using Johnson's names for these categories. See, Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 67-72, for his exposition of these theories.

to be a literary device which is a deviation (in a variety of possible ways) from the literal meaning. Within this category there are variations, including the popular ‘similarity’ and ‘comparison’ perspectives.

The similarity theory says that metaphor is based on the similarities that can be drawn between two domains. They usually employ the simple structure A is B, or in simile form, A is like B. The literal propositions can be found when the similarities are explicitly stated as such. For example, “time is money” can be reduced to literal statements such as “time is like money in that they can both be quantified”. What this theory does, however, is limit the meaningfulness of a metaphor, and reduces it to the highlighting of similarities between domains. To quote Johnson, “there is, then, on this view, no such thing as an irreducible metaphorical concept or proposition. There are only metaphorical utterances, and thought processes whose meaning reduces to sets of literal propositions.”⁷

Another subcategory of the literal-core theory is the comparison view of metaphor. In this view, the meaning of a given metaphor is created through the comparison of separate fields or domains. It insists, though, that what are compared are not the words or even ideas, but the literal objective realities in the world to which the words correspond. They cannot, then, structure experience, but only indirectly inform an objective reality.

The ‘metaphorical proposition theories’ make up another significant approach to how metaphor is thought to function. The origins of this approach developed in the Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century, in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and others were exploring imaginative uses of language and granting it (language) a constitutive role for experience.⁸ There were minor implementations of this type of theory throughout the years that followed, but

⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁸ Coleridge placed metaphor within the realm of imagination, which has many sympathies with the account of imagination given in the opening chapter. Coleridge argues that metaphor plays a part in the genuine creative activity which humans have an innate ability to use. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1907), Chapter 13; and Kieran Egan, *A Very Short History of Imagination* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Imaginative Education Research Group, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, 1992).

philosophy did not pick up metaphor as a major issue until much later. Max Black took up this theory in his seminal article *Metaphor* in 1955 in which he brought metaphor theories back to prominence in linguistic philosophy.⁹ After an effective summary of some of the theories which came before, Black offers his own which he calls the ‘interaction view’ of metaphor. Black sees this view as being “free from the main defects of substitution and comparison views” and as able to offer some “important insight into the uses and limitations of metaphor.”¹⁰

A main feature of Black’s view is that with any metaphor there are two subjects and that within a metaphor these subjects interact. These interactions involve what Black calls a “system of associated commonplaces”.¹¹ The example Black gives is the metaphor MAN IS WOLF.¹² To call a man a ‘wolf’ is to “evoke the wolf-system of related commonplaces.”¹³ Within these interactions, then, the subsidiary subject (wolf) not only informs the primary subject (man) but “organizes our view of man.”¹⁴ In this way Black affirms that metaphor has the potential not only to notice similarities that metaphor evokes, but also to “create the similarity.”¹⁵

Black’s article received a considerable amount of feedback, both positive and negative, and led him to revise and elaborate on his ideas in a 1977 article *More About Metaphor*.¹⁶ In it, Black expands and elaborates on his ‘interaction’ view, giving further explanation of how metaphors work. After finishing some technical work explaining how different theories account for the inner workings

⁹ Max Black, “Metaphor,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954): 273–294.

¹⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹¹ Ibid., 287.

¹² Small caps is the standard for denoting conceptual metaphors as seen in Johnson and others.

¹³ Max Black, “Metaphor,” 288.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 285.

¹⁶ Max Black, “More about Metaphor,” *Dialectica* 31, no. 3–4 (1977): 431–457.

of metaphor, Black contends that “some metaphors enable us to see aspects of reality that the metaphor’s production helps to constitute.”¹⁷ While Black moves the discussion in a positive direction by affirming the creative aspect of metaphor, he “has not yet provided a sufficiently detailed account of *how* it is that metaphors can be creative.”¹⁸ Johnson (along with his colleague George Lakoff) takes up this task himself, and attempts to articulate the power of metaphor in shaping and creating our everyday experiences of life.¹⁹

The final type of metaphor theory that accepts the objectivist account outlined above is the non-propositional theory of metaphor. This theory was advanced by Donald Davidson in his 1978 article *What Metaphors Mean*.²⁰ Davidson’s thesis is that “metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.”²¹ Davidson argues that there is no special meaning that is created through using metaphors; what is distinct is how the words are used in novel ways. Davidson concludes that how metaphor functions is to make us “see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight.”²² But, Davidson claims, “what we notice or see is not, in general, propositional in character.”²³ Due to the fact that the metaphors are not propositional and only encourage insights in the user or hearer, the problem of searching for the propositional truth is dismissed. He claims that, “what the metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, recognition of some truth or fact, [so] the attempt to give literal expression to the content of the metaphor is simply misguided.”²⁴ How the words are used - and the subsequent

¹⁷ Ibid., 454.

¹⁸ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 70. Emphasis is my own.

¹⁹ Their first work which has gained wide acclaim and introduces their ideas is *Metaphors We Live By*. See, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²⁰ Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 31–47.

²¹ Ibid., 32.

²² Ibid., 47.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

meaning they suggest to the interpreter - make up the phenomenon of metaphor, and this cannot be put into formulaic propositions of meaning.

Johnson points out that in Davidson's view "metaphor has no meaning beyond that of the literal sentence used in the utterance, what most people would call the 'metaphor's meaning' is no meaning at all."²⁵ What Davidson's theory lacks is that it has "no account whatsoever of how it is that the literal sentence used is in any way connected up with what the hearer comes to notice."²⁶ It is as if the insight gleaned through an encounter with a metaphor is completely by chance. The prevalence and consistency of metaphors, and the successful use of them, make this very unlikely.

A further thinker who has influenced the progression of metaphor theory is Paul Ricoeur. While Ricoeur is primarily interested with metaphor theory as it applies to hermeneutics and rhetoric, he contributes to the present discussion. Ricoeur points out that if metaphoric meaning or "sense" is more than one of the many "potential meanings of a polysemic word" (which all words in common discourse are, he claims), then it is "necessary that this metaphorical use is only contextual; by that I mean a sense which emerges as a result of a certain contextual action."²⁷ Ricoeur is influenced by J.L. Austin and his notion of "speech acts." Speech acts locate a given locution (the act of saying) and illocution (that which is done in the saying) into the context in which they take place, dictating the meaning of that utterance.²⁸ This consideration led Ricoeur to claim that metaphor is a "contextual change in meaning."²⁹ Accordingly, genuine metaphors are both simultaneously "event" and "meaning" bringing a creative force to linguistic and, by implication, mental communities.³⁰

²⁵ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 72.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 99.

²⁸ Ricoeur cites Austin in "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," 97.

²⁹ Ibid., 99.

³⁰ Ibid., 100. Ricoeur implies the mental function of metaphor throughout this essay, but does not advocate explicitly for this as a central feature of metaphor.

Ricoeur argues that it is the particular contexts in which the event of metaphor brings together various “semantic lines” (which he says are similar to Blacks “system of associated commonplaces”) which allow new meaning to emerge.³¹ This is how metaphor can be both event and meaning. Through bringing various domains together, metaphor not only highlights similarities but creates them, giving birth to new ways of seeing things. In another essay Ricoeur explains metaphor as having a predictive capacity which overcomes the collapse of the literal meaning or “lexical value” of words.³² Here, as well, Ricoeur credits metaphor with having a broader influence than previously recognized in metaphor theory, saying “the figure of speech that we call metaphor allows us to glance at the general procedure by which we produce concepts.”³³ Ricoeur then moves to overcome some of the objectivist assumptions with regards to metaphor theory by returning to imagination.

One key function of the imagination with respect to metaphor, Ricoeur argues, is the suspension or “epoché” of the “ordinary descriptive reference in connection with the ontological claims of poetic discourse.”³⁴ The epoché functions to eliminate the need for “reference proper” to be held in order for a concept to have meaning. This is held alongside the (Kantian) schematizing function of the imagination which synchronises concepts to fit our mental capacity. Ricoeur is promoting a struggle with the integral tension of what is and what is not, or what is yet to come.³⁵ Ricoeur wants to emphasize that there is a struggle between the epoché and the subsequent creation of new possibilities through metaphor. So, in a sense, a metaphoric utterance is a rejection of the literal use of the word, but it also creates possibilities to view and experience the world in a whole new way. This is a key contribution that

³¹ Max Black, “Metaphor,” 288.

³² Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 146.

³³ Ibid., 149. Here, Ricoeur credits Gadamer with influencing this claim.

³⁴ Ibid., 153.

³⁵ Ricoeur cites Sarte who says that to imagine is to address oneself to what is not, and says it more radically as “to imagine is to make oneself absent to the whole of things.” Ibid., 154.

Ricoeur brings to this discussion and naturally leads to the contribution of Mark Johnson, who was Ricoeur's student.

This overview gives a brief look at what has been the basis of metaphor theory over the last half century. The project of Lakoff and Johnson has been to further develop a metaphor theory that rejects the objectivist assumptions outlined above which many of the above theories assume. One of the main concepts that is used to achieve this is what they call "image schema."³⁶ An image schema is "a dynamic pattern that functions somewhat like the abstract structure of an image, and thereby connects up a vast range of different experiences that manifest this same recurring structure."³⁷ Johnson and a group of theorists from this new perspective argue that metaphors evoke and create these types of schemas. They are not fabricated or purely subjective, but are embedded in our bodily experiences of the world.

Johnson explains that image schemas are not propositional in that "they are not abstract subject-predicate structures that specify truth conditions or other conditions of satisfaction."³⁸ Instead they "exist at a level of generality and abstraction that allows them to serve repeatedly as identifying patterns in an indefinitely large number of experiences, perceptions and image formations for objects or events that are similarly structured in the relevant ways."³⁹

A pervasive example of this is the containment schema. The containment schema is prevalent in our everyday language. Most uses of the word 'in' are related to the image schema of containment. If something is *in* something else it is considered to be bound by a region of space. This often takes a considerable

³⁶ Lakoff affirms that image schemas are central to the new theory, saying, "The contemporary theory has an image-schematic basis." See, Andrew Ortony and George Lakoff, eds., "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, Second Edition (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 249.

³⁷ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 2. In many ways it is another way of explicating what happens with metaphor, similar to Black's "system of associated commonplaces".

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

amount of (pre-conscious) structuring of our perception of a given circumstance. For example,

to see a butterfly as *in* the garden, we have to project a nontrivial amount of imagistic structure onto a scene. We have to conceptualize the boundaries of the garden as a three dimensional container with an interior that extends into the air. We also have to locate the butterfly as a figure (or trajector) relative to that conceptual container, which serves as a ground (or landmark).⁴⁰

This also extends to a logic that we experience with physical containers. If A is in B, and X is in A, then X is in B.

This logic is mapped on to other domains which are more abstract than these physical experiences. The containment schema is mapped onto non-physical things (such as the mind and the ideas developed within it). We say that “I just can’t get that concept into my mind”, or “I know that knowledge is in there somewhere, I just can’t seem to get it out.” This is part of the related metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER which shapes much of how we think, and subsequently of how we speak of the body. This is metaphorical because the body and the mind are significantly different from containers. This metaphor highlights some of the ways that the body and mind function and hides the ways that they are not like containers. The source domain (the physical experience of containment) is mapped onto the mind or the body to enable an inter-personal relationship of ideas and experiences. Johnson highlights that these schemas for our understandings of “spatial and temporal orientation are so pervasive and constitutive of our ordinary experience that they are taken for granted (and thus overlooked) in standard accounts of meaning and understanding.”⁴¹ These schemas, however, can be known and studied and it is this that Johnson is undertaking. Johnson states that what shapes most of our meaning is overlooked and missed, and that “we need to look more closely, therefore, at the way such schemata operate in our understanding.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 31. Johnson also explains the containment schema in *The Body in the Mind*, 30-36.

⁴¹ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 31.

⁴² Ibid.

This contemporary metaphor theory, or the ‘conceptual metaphor theory’ as it has been called, is at odds in many ways with the objectivist assumptions that have been handed down and practiced in philosophy and theology for centuries. The move to the more pervasive and embodied understanding of metaphor is resisted because it questions deeply held assumptions, such as those about the body and the mind, and how meaning and truth are known.

A further exploration of the implications of this shift and significance of conceptual metaphor theory, especially the work of Johnson, will be treated in the next chapter. This quick overview should, however, make the development in McClendon’s work - from specific images to more hidden cognitive imagery - more visible.

McClendon’s use of images (as described in the previous chapter) is departed from in his later work. What I will show in the remainder of this chapter is that through his use of the baptist vision, catachresis, and picture thinking, McClendon does not neglect or dismiss images, but views their potential more clearly. Johnson suggests that looking at image schemata in more detail reveals how much of human meaning is made. Similarly, McClendon intuitively how these deep image structures (picture thinking) and logics within (baptist vision), shape theological meaning and speech (catachresis), allowing an embodied theology to emerge.

4.2 Baptist Vision

In the first volume of his systematic theology, *Ethics*, McClendon gives three biographical studies, displaying living exemplars of the three strands of Christian ethics: embodied, communal, and anastatic. These lives are seen to “not just illustrate, but test and verify (or by their absence or failure will falsify) the set of religious convictions they embody.”⁴³ While he does not explicate the images found in the lives he explores, McClendon displays how each of these lives demonstrate the particular moral theology he is proposing. To see how the use of images has been adapted in *Ethics*, one must zoom out for a broader look at how the biographies fit in to his larger project. The first observation that must

⁴³ McClendon, *Ethics*.

be made to see how McClendon has developed image-based thinking and biography into his systematics involves his 'baptist vision'. Through seeing what this is, and how it is related to his use of images and metaphoric rationality, the continuity in his method will become apparent.

The 'baptist vision' is the unifying theological centre around which McClendon constructs his distinct type of theology. He holds that this vision describes the centre of the life and belief of baptist practitioners.⁴⁴ He clarifies that by such a vision,

I do not mean some end result of theological reflection, remote from the daily life of a rather plain people. Nor do I mean a detachable baptist Ideal--what baptists ought to be (but of course are not). Instead, by a vision I mean the guiding pattern by which a people (or as here, a combination of peoples) shape their thought and practice as that people or that combination; I mean by it the continually emerging theme and tonic structure of their common life.⁴⁵

McClendon seeks this vision to be necessarily connected to the daily lives of its adherents, and that once "acknowledged for what it is, the vision should serve as the touchstone by which authentic baptist convictions are discovered, described, and transformed, and thus as the organizing principle around which an authentic baptist theology can take shape."⁴⁶ This vision creates a uniquely 'baptist' perspective, representing a unique strand in the wider Christian tradition.

The baptist vision takes on two functions: as a hermeneutic principle, and as a temporal pattern. As I briefly introduced in the opening chapter, the hermeneutical function of the vision is the way Scripture reads itself, and is expressed as a "shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community."⁴⁷ McClendon draws upon Peter's use of the prophet Joel in Acts 2, and sees this familiar pattern of

⁴⁴ I remind the reader that baptist with a small b, according to McClendon's use, does not refer to the Baptist denomination, but rather the attitude or set of convictions which correspond to a third way of being Christian, specifically in line with the Radical reformation, distinct from either Catholic or Protestant types. See *Ethics*, 19

⁴⁵ *Ethics*, 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

how Scripture is used in the Bible. It is paraphrased by McClendon as ‘*this is that*’, a direct quote from Acts 2:16. Peter uses a passage from a former time (Joel 2:28-32) to understand and describe what is currently taking place in the present. McClendon comments that “we are here in the presence of a regular motif in biblical literature in which language about one set of events and circumstances is applied under guidance to another set of events and circumstances.”⁴⁸ This is how the Bible should be read, he argues, and the way in which those in the ‘baptist’ tradition have commonly read Scripture. He summarizes the baptist vision in *Doctrine* as:

the way the Bible is read by those who (1) accept the plain sense of scripture as dominant sense and recognize their community with the story it tells, and who (2) acknowledge that finding the point of that story leads them to its application, and who also (3) see past and present and future linked by a “this is that” and “then is now” vision, a trope of mystical identity binding the story now to the story then and the story then and now to God’s future yet to come.⁴⁹

In a similar way to “this is that”, the temporal aspect of the vision is labeled “then is now”. Similar in many ways to the hermeneutic principle, the temporal implications are applied to our perception of time. An understanding of our current time is formed based on an understanding of its significance from an earlier era. One implication of the ‘then is now’ aspect is the foreshortening of time. This vision not only applies to the past, but also to the prophetic future.⁵⁰ Time as we have experienced is a relative phenomenon which is influenced by many variables, and there are resources within the Christian tradition which theology must deal with. McClendon’s emphasis on narrative becomes vital at this point. He contends that what holds the various points in history together is “the linking of its parts into one narrative.”⁵¹ McClendon insists that the baptist vision entails a “shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community.”⁵² Or, in motto form, “the church now is the primitive church and the church on judgement day.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹ *Doctrine*, 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁵¹ *Con.*, 176.

⁵² *Ethics*, 30.

⁵³ Ibid.

Parush Parushev engaged with McClendon's baptist vision in his address at the 2009 Baptist Symposium. Of this temporal aspect of McClendon's vision Parushev writes that a given community's task in uniting its narrative must look to the past as well as to the future. "While looking backwards, it is not intended that the community should become retrograde, dissenting or sectarian. It is rather looking 'forward to the roots.'" ⁵⁴ The baptist vision sees that "the story of Israel, of Jesus, of the church, is intimately related to the narrative we ourselves live." ⁵⁵ Parushev continues, "Similarly, looking forward is not a speculative futuristic exercise. It is an acute alertness that the story of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and lived out by the prophets, by Jesus and by his disciples, is still the story that shapes our lives today. Yet we choose to take different paths to lead us to the Kingdom." ⁵⁶ Therefore, one vital function of this vision is as a way of "constructing our experience by way of Scripture." ⁵⁷

McClendon's desire is to use this vision consistently and fully. He says, "by this vision disciples live by the faithfulness of Christ who *was* and *is* and *is to come*, the first and the last." ⁵⁸ It is, for McClendon, the faithful way of understanding time in relation to the story of Christ.

Curtis Freeman explains the difference that McClendon's vision achieves:

From the perspective of standard-account Christians, the baptist vision seems to get everything backwards: Christian life before Christian faith, ethics before doctrine, convictions before reasons. This backwardness, however, is not merely a difference for the sake of difference. It reflects the reversal of perspective in "the view from below" where baptists first learned to see things. McClendon reminds us that our radical foremothers and forefathers rarely acquired a majority consciousness that presumed to speak for everyone, due in no small measure to the

⁵⁴ Parush Parushev, "Doing Theology In A Baptist Way" (paper presented at the Jubileum Symposium ajar Baptisme, 1609-2009, Vrije Universiteit, 16 April 2009), 7.

⁵⁵ *Ethics*, 36.

⁵⁶ Parushev, "Doing Theology In A Baptist Way", 7.

⁵⁷ *Ethics*, 36.

⁵⁸ *Doctrine*, 92, emphasis is McClendon's own.

fact that their heritage was rooted in soil watered by the blood of those who dared to differ.⁵⁹

McClendon's vision enables his theology to be distinctively Baptist in posture and method.

McClendon says of images in *Biography as Theology*, "images are vital for they help us discover in the vision of our subjects that which may have escaped our own vision; like other metaphors they work to shift the way we see things."⁶⁰

McClendon regards the subjects he uses in *Ethics* as seeing with a baptist vision. Following McClendon then, we must see the metaphoric nature of this vision if we are to understand how it functions to allow a particular (faithful) perspective in his subjects.

McClendon's use of metaphor enables much of this vision. As stated, the 'this is that' and 'then is now' aspect of the vision is an expression of a method of metaphoric projection. The logic and rationale from a given situation in the text ('that', 'then') is projected onto a situation here and now ('this', 'now'). In the more technical language of Mark Johnson, the source domain ('scripture', 'that', 'then') is mapped onto the target domain ('here', 'this', 'now'). Johnson and Lakoff affirm this approach, saying that all humans operate in this way: "We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor."⁶¹ McClendon's vision does not promote specific metaphors but instead sets up a method to view the "great story"⁶² as taking on this role in forming the rationality of the Church and its disciples.

⁵⁹ Curtis W. Freeman, "A Theology for Brethren, Radical Believers, and Other Baptists," *Brethren Life and Thought* 51, no. 1-2 (Wint-Spr 2006): 107. This is a fitting description of not only McClendon's baptist vision but of his work in general.

⁶⁰ *Bio.*, 163.

⁶¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 158.

⁶² The "Great Story" is a term that McClendon used to indicate the whole story told in the Scriptures, through the history of the Church, and which continues today.

The above exploration of the developments in metaphor theory show how my use of metaphor here applies in a broader sense than the traditional ‘figure of speech’ understanding. McClendon uses the baptist vision as a way of approaching the underlying images that shape the lives of those he studies, as well as the community he is addressing. McClendon’s method can be seen, then, as an image-based method for seeing and thinking about the world in light of the Christian narrative. By locating the images and structures that shape how a person or group of people relate to the world within the baptist vision, McClendon sets up a distinctive method of seeing which determines convictions. It is an emphasis on images but at a deeper level.

The baptist vision necessarily takes on different shades depending on the context. The ‘this’ will differ, as will the ‘now’, which makes the vision difficult to identify at times. Each case of its application has to be taken separately and analyzed to see if it reflects this vision. McClendon is more concerned with the method of living, or the connections one makes between Scripture and their lives, than in any particular set of beliefs or criteria. In the application of biography I recall here two of the four requirements for theology that McClendon proposes, which were presented in Chapter One: contextuality and self-involvement. Each of the lives must be tested in their context and the subjects’ involvement in interpretation must be accounted for prior to the vision being seen in their lives.

Dorothy Day

One life that McClendon highlights as an embodiment of a particular type of Christian ethics is Dorothy Day, the radical Catholic peace activist and editor of the *Catholic Worker*. McClendon used her as a living exemplar of resurrection (anastatic) ethics. She lived a life that was made possible through the “new”, available through the resurrection of Christ. Day embodied this ethic, with a focus on peacemaking, Christian pacifism, and a radical appreciation of the Gospel. Many of McClendon’s convictions around these issues have been deeply shaped by John Howard Yoder, who, as noted earlier, was fundamental in McClendon’s conversion to the type of Christianity he practiced and believed. Day is, however, an interesting choice to display the baptist vision. Her life is compelling (fulfilling the requisite attribute to be studied, discussed in the

previous chapter), and as such it has been the subject of significant study. McClendon used her life as an embodied exemplar of a distinctive form of Christian living. I will recount briefly here how McClendon used her narrative as illustrative of the baptist vision, while also revealing many of the convictions McClendon saw as necessary in Christian living.

Day was born in November 1897 and had a tumultuous journey to her ultimate roll as author-activist. McClendon traces her childhood, from Brooklyn to San Francisco to Chicago. Eventually she went back to New York, where the socialist leanings and journalistic ways she had been developing landed her a job at the *Call*, a 'leftist' newspaper. McClendon recounts the many personal trials and formative relationships which formed her life and convictions, including a pregnancy and subsequent abortion, and a suicide attempt. She eventually found success as a writer, having a novel published and its rights purchased by Hollywood. Over this period she had continued an intermittent relationship with the Christian faith and it had grown progressively to the point where, as McClendon notes, "this provided a symbolic focus for her self-understanding."⁶³

Becoming a mother in March 1927 led Day to a conversion experience. Day was determined to raise her daughter (Teresa Tamar) in the Church, an upbringing which she did not receive herself. This compulsion proved to be a turning point that would necessitate both Day's own baptism and the loss of her long-term partner Batterham (who was against any kind of religion). While this was a turning point, it was not until five years later that the conversion would be complete. That is when Day met Peter Maurin (a French Catholic Brother interested in European social thought) who announced himself as her teacher. Day accepted him as "the prophet who would show her what her own vocation was to be."⁶⁴ Day found that Maurin's teachings were "the bridge between the faith she had professed and life around her."⁶⁵ Maurin and Day together founded the Catholic Worker movement. Maurin taught that an active love

⁶³ *Ethics*, 291.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁶⁵ William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), 64.

would change things, a love using the tools that one possessed from one's vocation. Day's vocation was journalism, and there seemed to be a need for a paper to spread ideas and clarify this (Day and Maurin's) distinctive point of view.⁶⁶ So, they began a paper; the first *Catholic Worker*, a tabloid sized, four page magazine, was published on May 1, 1933.⁶⁷

The other side of this movement related to social justice. Day's apartment became the first "House of Hospitality" which served soup to those who needed it and formed discussion groups addressing the important issues at stake in this time of radical importance in American history and in Christianity.⁶⁸ The movement eventually grew to have communities across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom and the publication grew to have international distribution.

Day has gained wide recognition as an advocate for the poor and for peace activism. The FBI even rated her as dangerous, noting in their files that she was a "very erratic and irresponsible person."⁶⁹ McClendon proposes that this shows her life was lived by a logic that was wholly unintelligible by the standard account (both in terms of convictions and rationality) of the state. It is important to recall here part of the original intent of McClendon's biographical method, which was to show, in lives, how theology is still relevant. It recounts the convictions of people who live in ways which create new possibilities for theology. Day provided such a life. She also fulfilled McClendon's baptist vision in the context of providing an embodiment of how peace, in the tradition of Christ, is a possible, relevant, and "live" option for today. She lived in a way which read and understood the teaching and life of Christ as not merely historically relevant, but as informative on how to live life in response to the state and the poor around her.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 64-66.

⁶⁷ This was an historic day for socialist and communist activists as thousands demonstrated in Union Square in New York, a fitting and ambitious day on which to launch their first issue.

⁶⁸ *Ethics*, 294.

⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ethics*, 279.

McClendon argued that Day was so misunderstood by the authorities of her day because they had no category by which to describe her position, probably because of a lack of known examples.⁷⁰ The category he suggests as appropriate would be “Radical Christianity: a Christianity that in obedience to Jesus Christ would be consistently nonviolent, refusing violence on the side of revolution, but also refusing it on the side of establishment and oppression.”⁷¹ This is distinguished from ‘just war pacifism’ which was common at the time, justifying violence if it was necessary to achieve an end.

Day embodied a theological perspective on peace that became vital for McClendon after his Yoderian conversion. She did this, not by means of her theological training, but through what McClendon labeled ‘the baptist vision’. Her way of reading the gospel of Christ involves the ‘this is that’ hermeneutic which applies the teachings of Christ to the current time. The calls for peace in the Gospels, specifically in the Sermon on the Mount, were obvious to Day and she took them seriously. During the fervor of war, living in this way was particularly difficult. Despite its difficulties, Day and the Catholic Worker movement stood firm in their Christian pacifist stand. McClendon cites a passage of Day’s writing on this issue: “I have been and still am a Christian pacifist, opposing class war, race war, civil war and international war. [I]f conscription comes for women, I will not register, and if this breaking of the law means [I must], I shall consider myself privileged to go to jail, where one can be quite sure of not doing one’s own will.”⁷² Day’s convictions stood in spite of their resistance to the status quo of her culture.

It was this radical shaping of her own life, based on the newness of what she saw available in Christ, that made Day a fine example of the anastatic strand for McClendon. She made available in her life the method of radical peacemaking which Christ himself embodied and taught: the way of the cross. John Howard Yoder, explains how this Christian pacifism is quite different from other forms of pacifism:

⁷⁰ *Ethics*, 296.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Day cited in *Ethics*, 298.

Certainly any renunciation of violence is preferable to its acceptance; but what Jesus renounced is not first of all violence, but rather the compulsiveness of purpose that leads the strong to violate the dignity of others. The point is not that one can attain all of one's legitimate ends without using violent means. It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb.⁷³

McClendon does not focus on particular images that stand out from Day's life (as he does with his subjects in *Biography As Theology*, explored in the life of Dag Hammarskjöld in Chapter Three), and he does not use her life as an argument for the principles which should be followed in holding a radically Christian pacifist stance. He instead put forward Day's life as a kind of display of how this can and has been lived out in the not-so-distant past. Through Day's embodiment of the baptist vision, the Catholic Church - perhaps the religious institution with the strongest sense of tradition in the world - was called back to a more active and peaceful version of its own convictions. McClendon then elaborates upon these ideas which Day embodied, developing a theology of peace. He does not explicitly connect the life and images of Day with the theology he develops. Instead he allows the life of Day to speak for itself in providing lived evidence for peace and social justice. His restraint conveys a confidence in biography to convey theological truths, without buttressing it with propositions.⁷⁴ He allows the picture of her life to be viewed and he describes, rather than explains, how theology is evoked.

What we see, then, in the development of McClendon's use of a biographical method for theology, is an expansion from specific images and metaphors (drawn mainly from Farrer) to a broader application of metaphoric rationality included within the principle of the baptist vision. In many ways this application of biography is a more developed and difficult application than the more explicit seeking of particular images and application of them to a corresponding doctrine, as we see in *Biography as Theology*. This broadening of McClendon's use of image-based thinking can be seen elsewhere in his work. In particular,

⁷³ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, Second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1994), 237.

⁷⁴ This affirms McClendon's acknowledgement that theology is not about a number of propositions to be judged but about the convictions that form the lives of people and communities that hold them. See, *Bio.*, 22.

the notion of ‘picture thinking’ is one that takes on a role within his treatment of eschatology.⁷⁵

4.3 Picture Thinking

As I have begun to show in the opening section, the use of images does not completely disappear from McClendon’s work. Instead of being a creative way to interpret the lives of his subjects while employing his biographical method, images become central to what McClendon calls ‘picture thinking’, a way of using language that highlights the interpretive and imaginative dimension. As stated previously, McClendon sees the pictorial and imaginative method of the Scriptures to be vital to its apprehension and understanding. These pictures and images are put into words, but the words must, he argues, “evoke as much as they represent; the pictures must come to life, must take shape, but can do so only as believers receive and retain and are themselves remade by these pictures.”⁷⁶ McClendon explicitly draws upon Wittgenstein’s “word pictures” to enable a deeper understanding of the function of linguistic images.

Wittgenstein’s influence on McClendon is evident throughout his work, though often implicitly. However, this is one instance in which Wittgenstein is used overtly to make a point.⁷⁷

McClendon notes how Wittgenstein thought that the obsession with literal correspondence of words to reality was a misplaced pursuit (a pursuit which Wittgenstein had ironically undertaken in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and sought to overcome in his *Philosophical Investigations*).⁷⁸ By highlighting pictures and images, Wittgenstein sought to move beyond this misappropriated

⁷⁵ McClendon’s treatment of eschatology includes a rich treatment of “what comes last”, and also “that which lasts” and picture thinking is used in achieving this. See, *Doctrine*, 69-103.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁷ McClendon chooses Wittgenstein as a subject for a biographical chapter in *Witness*, highlighting the faithful life that is seldom seen in regard to Wittgenstein.

⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London; New York: Routledge, 2001). I note here as well that my generalization and oversimplification of Wittgenstein’s work is only in service to my overall goals, acknowledging that Wittgenstein does spend significant time on “pictures” in *Tractates*. I have avoided drifting too much into distracting, albeit useful, explorations pertaining to Wittgenstein’s influence on McClendon.

objective. McClendon treats these ideas in the context of eschatology, and recognizes how the different images of the end times shape and control the minds of those who use them. These mental images provide logic for experience. So, as Wittgenstein says, when a picture is grasped, it “is enough to make me change my whole life.”⁷⁹ This pictorial thinking is a linguistic and mental phenomenon, and can have either positive or negative effects. Wittgenstein writes, “A Picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”⁸⁰ These pictures and images which form and are formed in and through our language, cannot be overcome. They must be embraced, then, if we are to use them as an advantage rather than being held by them against our will.

McClendon acknowledges the pervasiveness of this type of thinking for Wittgenstein, and surveys some of the results of its influence. He cites six implications of this thinking, four that are direct and two that follow from the first four. McClendon summarizes:

- 1) ‘Seeing-as’ (seeing a line drawing as a rabbit, for example) is not identical with ordinary seeing (for example, seeing a drawing on an artist’s pad), but it has some features in common with the other as well. In certain circumstances, every seeing is a ‘seeing-as’.⁸¹
- 2) The futuristic pictures that characterize religious belief, such as life after death and the last judgement, are not objects of belief on the basis of ordinary sorts of evidence; and they are not the result of better or worse reasoning based on such ordinary evidence, either.
- 3) On the other hand, they are not unreasonable beliefs. What distinguishes those who believe in the last judgement from those who do not is not different chains of reasoning, but radically different pictures of how in general the world goes.
- 4) For a believer in the last judgement “whenever he does anything [that picture] is before his mind”; Wittgenstein said that such a picture once it is grasped, is “enough to make me change my whole life.”⁸²

And the two further points:

⁷⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 57, quoted in *Doctrine*, 77.

⁸⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), §115, 48.

⁸¹ Here, *Doctrine*, 76, McClendon references Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), Part II §xi. McClendon wants to draw out that while seeing-as highlights explicit interpretive sight, all seeing is implicitly interpretive in nature.

⁸² cf. *Ibid.*, §53, 57. These four points are from McClendon, *Doctrine*, 76-77.

5) What distinguishes one person's 'seeing-as' from another's is, to speak broadly, the connections that each makes between the picture itself and something more: in the duck-rabbit case, one connects it with one's knowledge of what ducks (rabbits) look like; in the case of the last judgement, one may relate it to other pictures of the end, and also the present. *It is making these connections* (or failing to make them) that distinguishes biblical faith in the last judgement from mere fantasies that have no recognizable life consequences.

6) The required connections need not be temporal or spatial or causal ones. In order to believe in the last judgement, we need not be able to fit it into a chronology of other last (or penultimate) beliefs; in order to believe in a real heaven or hell we need not be prepared to supply its spatial coordinates with respect to earth, sun or stars.⁸³

McClendon accepts the image-based cognition that Wittgenstein advocates.

David Egan, a philosopher at Oxford, explores this easily overlooked aspect of Wittgenstein's work. His article, *Pictures in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*, explores the use of the concept of pictures in Wittgenstein.⁸⁴ He distinguishes three main uses of 'pictures': 1) Literal Pictures: the sort that can be drawn and seen on paper or the like; 2) Mental Pictures: these are mental images which form much of our ideas, but often do not do the work that Wittgenstein's interlocutor hopes they will;⁸⁵ 3) Conceptual Pictures: this is the main use that Egan is interested in exploring. These are pictures which cannot literally be drawn. Wittgenstein uses this as a kind of picture which comes before the mind, as a kind of conceptual impression. Egan expands this use by providing three subcategories within it. A) Pseudo-theses: these are uses of a small sentence or thought which make a definite philosophical claim, e.g. 'The Augustinian Picture' is a common example of this.⁸⁶ B) Illustrated turns of speech: These are uses which are not explicitly philosophical claims, but which incline us to consider a given matter in a particular way. C) Conceptions: Not usually explicit thoughts or verbal expressions, but ways of conceiving a particular matter. These can either be particular or quite broad.

⁸³ *Doctrine*, 77.

⁸⁴ See, David Egan, "Pictures in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," *Philosophical Investigations* 34, no. 1 (January 2011): 56–57.

⁸⁵ Wittgenstein uses a rhetorical technique in which he has (at least) two voices, his own voice and the voice of a questioning 'student' or interlocutor of sorts. This interlocutor often through misunderstandings brings Wittgenstein to further clarify what he means.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 57. 'The Augustinian Picture' is what Wittgenstein opens his *Philosophical Investigations* with. See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), §1.

For Egan, the final use of the word ‘picture’, and its variations, naturally raises the question, “why call these things ‘pictures’ at all?”⁸⁷ Egan answers that Wittgenstein wants to draw our attention to certain connections between the various types of pictures. The other reason, Egan proposes, is that the common usage of other options such as ‘conceptions’ or ‘positions’ fail to capture some of the logical roles they play for Wittgenstein.

One of the main features that Egan notes is that, consonant with his ‘meaning as use’ thesis, Wittgenstein engages with how these pictures are being used. Egan claims that often “we might expect pictures to be able to do more work for us than they do.”⁸⁸ How a picture is to be put to use is not essentially implied by ‘looking’ at a picture. Instead, pictures tend to shape how we conceive a matter in the first place, dictating to us the kind of questions that should be asked. As Egan notes, for Wittgenstein, “the interesting philosophical work lies in exploring our way of conceiving of the matter in the first place.”⁸⁹

Again, the paradigmatic example of the duck-rabbit comes to focus here. This is an exercise where we see Wittgenstein’s understanding and use of picture quite clearly. The picture, whether seen as a duck or as a rabbit, has not physically changed. Nothing has changed, yet everything has changed. Egan notes that what changes has nothing to do with the picture itself, but our “overall way of relating to the picture”, our way of “making sense of it.”⁹⁰ It is as if Wittgenstein’s pictures do not merely represent, but also “express character and emotion.”⁹¹ The various ways of relating to a given picture (here, either as the lines on the page viewed as a rabbit or as a duck) are not mutually exclusive; one can relate to it in either way, but never both at once. One can switch from seeing it as a rabbit to seeing it as a duck (even with the knowledge that it can be seen as both) but it cannot simultaneously function as both at once. McClendon

⁸⁷ David Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 57.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

notes this as well, stating that while the lines of the picture do not change, “each line has a new function.”⁹²

Egan uses this example to highlight the view that pictures, like words, “have roles far beyond those that such talk of representation might most immediately bring to mind.”⁹³ That is, pictures are put to use to do a variety of things in our lives, and not merely to represent specific words in the mind.

Wittgenstein’s use of pictures, (as Egan describes in 3 A,B and C, above) as a category which determines how other things are comprehended, is one of Wittgenstein’s philosophical contributions. Egan notes that with this usage, “pictures are something that lie deep within us and seem to come before deliberate reflection.”⁹⁴ These pictures “tend to be the basis for reflection rather than the result of reflection . . . they lie so deep and do not simply shape the answers we give to philosophical questions, but are the source of the confusions that give rise to the questions in the first place.”⁹⁵ There are certain ‘pictures,’ then, which determine to how we see other things, form the questions we ask, and organize and prioritize other thoughts.

Returning to the quotation above, “A Picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”⁹⁶ Egan observes that these pictures “take hold of us at a level deeper than reasoned acceptance or rejection, and in this way the experience is

⁹² *Doctrine*, 76.

⁹³ Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 61.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63-4. Egan here points to *Philosophical Investigations*, §308, where Wittgenstein is seeking to bring into question our ‘knowledge’ of mental processes. He is noticing how we tend to have a confidence in our progress of knowledge based in an idea (picture) of how this process works, without ever thinking critically because to do so causes “the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts fall to pieces.” Wittgenstein rightly points to the knowledge we do not have as causing a great fear among us, yet he sees it as a potentially vital unexplored medium. See, Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §308.

⁹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), §115, 48.

less one of persuasion and more one of conversion.”⁹⁷ In both how they function internally and how they are manifest in our lives, pictures shape us in profound ways. It is not a surprise then, that this type of thinking led Wittgenstein to explore religious pictures.

One such picture that interests Wittgenstein is that of the Last Judgement. He discusses this in his *Lectures on Religious Belief*.⁹⁸ The interest in this as a belief is not merely how rationally this belief is justified, but how it shapes the life of its bearer. He says that this belief “will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, rather by regulating for [sic] in all his life.”⁹⁹ He notes that this type of belief is not in any way decided upon to lead to any form of pleasure but, rather, in always appealing to the picture (e.g. of a last judgement), the believer “risks things on account of it which he would not do on things which are far better established for him.”¹⁰⁰ Even “indubitability wouldn’t be enough to make me change my whole life.”¹⁰¹ This implies that a picture, though not always based on its rational merit, has life-changing force. Egan makes two observations based on this thinking. First, that “a picture is not justified in the way that ordinary beliefs might be, by appealing to justifications or grounds for belief.”¹⁰² And second, “a picture applies pervasively.”¹⁰³ This means that such pictures pervade beyond the realm of the cognitive or the rational into the behavioral. As Wittgenstein says elsewhere, “he does not

⁹⁷ Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy”, 67.

⁹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972), 53-59. In particular, Wittgenstein brings up the idea of a Judgement Day and Resurrection.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰² Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 67.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

believe it; he lives it.”¹⁰⁴ There is, then, the capacity for human behavior to be “wrapped up with such a picture.”¹⁰⁵

This bears remarkable similarities to McClendon’s own conception of convictions, from which much of his theological method takes its cue. Convictions (explored in the opening chapter), as McClendon used the concept, are necessarily lived beliefs. They are the ‘guttural’ beliefs that we live out whether they are known or not.¹⁰⁶ They also must fit the requirements of being significant and persistent.¹⁰⁷ In many ways, the way that Wittgenstein uses pictures overlaps with how McClendon uses convictions.¹⁰⁸ It is interesting that for both McClendon and Wittgenstein there is a realization that no neutral ground is possible on which to come to a pure belief or objective point of view. Instead, what is sought is to understand the context and how the language (including pictorial language) is being used, so the life (“form of life” for Wittgenstein) is intelligible. In both these cases it is the underlying and formational pictures or convictions which are of primary concern.

McClendon acknowledged that pictorial language may not be easily accepted by many believers. He proposes that with this type of language, “we may complain that they [images] do not answer our legitimate doctrinal questions.”¹⁰⁹ We have been taught to prefer clear answers instead of captivating images. He explains that in theology we “like to be offered a cool, clear, aseptic account, even a ‘scientific’ account, that will shelve these powerful biblical pictures as an adult shelves the toys of childhood.”¹¹⁰ Or, yet another tempting option (which has been pursued by Bultmann and his followers), is to strip the images of all of

¹⁰⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), §278, cited in Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 68.

¹⁰⁵ Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 68.

¹⁰⁶ cf. *Con.*, 4-9; *Ethics*, 22-23; and *Bio.*, 17-22.

¹⁰⁷ McClendon discusses this in *Con.*, 87-90.

¹⁰⁸ McClendon himself draws this connection in “Picture Eschatology”, an unpublished paper delivered at the AAR in 1985.

¹⁰⁹ James McClendon, “Picture Eschatology”, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

their mythical elements leaving only the “authentic self-awareness.”¹¹¹ All of these temptations stem from our desire to attain a certainty, which is impossible.

What we have are these images (imaginative pictures) which McClendon saw as needing to be understood ‘literally’ to grasp their truth; literal in this case means “that they must be received *as* the true pictures that they are, and as the *sort of* picture that they are.”¹¹² He continues explaining that they be seen “not as a code to be deciphered, not as fragments of a puzzle to be assembled by clever modern fingers, and not as grotesque caricatures of themselves, but as the pictures, the true, glinting, dancing, awesome, God-given visions that, collected, constitute promise and warning to God’s people.”¹¹³

Here, one can see that how one understands what a picture is, or rather, how it should be applied, would have a profound impact on what that picture comes to mean. To see an eschatological picture as a confusing message of a future state will result in a very different application of that image than for one who sees it as a God-given vision which evokes awe and hope through its mystery. This resembles Farrer’s distinction between mystery and problem, discussed in the previous chapter.

The proper application or use of a picture is of great concern to Wittgenstein. Egan points out that this is one of his main concerns and contributions to Western philosophy. He explains: “As long as we hold to the picture that leads us to expect smooth contours, we will turn away from examining the details that show otherwise.”¹¹⁴ This means that a picture misapplied not only is untrue to its purpose, but perpetuates its untruth “because it makes us resist making the examinations we ought to make.”¹¹⁵ Wittgenstein sought to free people from untrue pictures which held them captive from a fuller experience of life.

¹¹¹ McClendon, “Picture Eschatology,” 4.

¹¹² Ibid. Emphasis McClendon’s own.

¹¹³ McClendon, “Picture Eschatology,” 4.

¹¹⁴ Egan, “Pictures in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” 70.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Egan affirms this phenomenon, noting that “pictures influence the way we think and live in profound and subtle ways, and they can do so in ways that are pernicious and ways that are helpful.”¹¹⁶ As such, part of Wittgenstein’s later project was “not exposing an error so much as exploring the nature of this picture, what motivates it, what lines of thought it encourages.”¹¹⁷ Just as with McClendon’s convictions, changing pictures does not come easily, nor should it. The nature of them requires a form of change that is more like a conversion than a refutation.¹¹⁸ Egan notes though, that “the emptier a picture seems, the easier it is to let go of.”¹¹⁹ This can be illustrated through a brief return to McClendon’s life.

The conversion McClendon underwent as a result of his encounter with John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*, was made possible by the emptiness of the alternative picture of Christ, and the Gospel, that McClendon had held prior. He recalls that this encounter was with a Jesus that was “unlike the standard-account sort I had worked so hard to learn and to teach.”¹²⁰ This was a picture which had been emptied through the division and conflict it created in his Baptist denomination and seminary during the sixties, and again with the challenges he experienced when attempting to relate it to the lives of his students who struggled to connect with it amidst domestic and international strife. It is against this backdrop that McClendon was set up to accept this new picture.

It is the underlying pictures which primarily shape the way we go about asking questions and which form the behaviors we enact. Within Christianity there are many such pictures which shape doctrines, ethics, and relations. McClendon used this type of thinking throughout his work, and appreciated how images

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ James McClendon, “The Radical Road One Baptist Took,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 4 (2000): 509.

shape our lives. This connection between lived convictions and conceptual images comes together in biography where we see how pictures become embodied in lives and contexts in our own time. Wittgenstein's use of pictures still has significant potential for influence in how images are understood today. Having this brief reflection in mind brings greater clarity to how McClendon internalized and revised his concept of images prior to their application in his systematic theology

4.4 Catachresis

A further application of McClendon's understanding and use of metaphor is his development of 'catachresis'. McClendon explored this term as a way of describing what happened in the linguistic struggle that the Disciples of Christ encountered in the years following his resurrection. McClendon explains that, "The difficulty lay in giving adequate expression to the new that was theirs in Christ. He was Lord—but of no bounded realm: he was risen—but in no ordinary waking from a sleep. . . The problem that lay unresolved was one of definition, communication, expression."¹²¹ In this pursuit the Disciples wrestled with what was required to be a follower of Christ. It was certainly deeply connected with their Jewish-ness, but it was also something different. McClendon continues, "The common life in Christ was by nature adventure, daily discovered, daily risked. Yet the outward adventure could not be fulfilled apart from its inner reality: Disciples must find words, a vocabulary and syntax, in which to proclaim the revolution."¹²² How they did this was by finding terms and ideas (word pictures) within the Hebrew Scriptures, and these were "adopted, adapted, and pressed into service to declare the dynamic of those who shared the new reality created by the Risen One."¹²³ It is for this process that McClendon uses the word 'catachresis'. He explained it as "the deliberate use of language drawn from one sphere in order to indicate something in another sphere that eludes existing speech."¹²⁴ For the most part this occurs when there is a linguistic gap which needs to be filled.

¹²¹ *Doctrine*, 106.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

Here, one can see the similarity in this language with how I have been speaking of metaphor. McClendon used catachresis as a broad category of mapping one type of linguistic picture (source domain) onto another (target domain). McClendon acknowledged the similarity of terms that relate to catachresis, such as coinage, metonymy, displacement, among others. He resisted using metaphor in the broad conceptual sense as I do. This is, however, one of the places where he deals with metaphor explicitly, raising some legitimate concerns for its use.

His main concern is the “indiscriminate use of this deeply disputed concept.”¹²⁵ This arises earlier (in *Doctrine*), in discussing reading strategies of Scripture, where he highlights the challenges and controversies that plague metaphor theories.¹²⁶ McClendon wanted to avoid these intrinsic difficulties involved in metaphor, noting that even “what metaphor is, and what counts as a metaphorical utterance, is far too uncertain”, and is therefore unable to form a ‘center’ for understanding apostolic discourse.¹²⁷ Given the brief look at the metaphor theories above, which McClendon would have been familiar with, it is not a surprise that he avoids getting involved in this discussion. His second concern arises out of an issue with theory in general. He did not want to be seen as “claiming too much”, believing (quite wisely) that “not every fresh application of a term is metaphorical, even if some are.”¹²⁸ McClendon preferred to proceed on a case by case basis rather than adopting one of the many theories of metaphor, basing his success on actual cases rather than debatable theories.

It is quite understandable for McClendon not to want to wade into the murky waters of metaphor. It is wise to avoid unnecessary confusion for a point which is not central to one’s main objective. I contend, nonetheless, that his work would have been enriched, and further connections made between theology and biography, if he had expanded his discussion and pushed further into metaphor

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See Ibid., 37.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

theory. I will show in the final two chapters why this is the case, and how Johnson's contribution to metaphor theory helps to give his theology more force in achieving his aims. For now, however, we will take a look at what McClendon *does* say about metaphor.

McClendon mentions a few sources used in forming his ideas on metaphor: William Alston, Colin Gunton, and Janet Soskice. Gunton recognizes the innate potential in metaphor and its role for theology saying, "If... we are to be true to the way things are in our world we must see metaphor as the most, not the least, significant part of our language."¹²⁹ Instead of viewing metaphor as a kind of deviant form of linguistic activity, he recognizes that it comes naturally and is essential for faithful use of Christian language. Gunton contends that metaphor is "a primary vehicle of human rationality and superior to the pure concept (if such exists, as must be doubtful)."¹³⁰ Here, we find this influence of Gunton on McClendon in the affirmation of the necessity of broadly metaphoric language within theology. McClendon uses this language throughout his work (much of which I have already pointed out), while rarely dealing directly with its theory.

For his (brief) discussion on metaphor theory, McClendon turns to Janet Soskice who has written one of the most comprehensive books on metaphor and religious language (though it may be in need of a revised edition due to the progress that has been made in this field). *Metaphor and Religious Language* takes the task of bringing clarity to this field where there are many variations. She investigates metaphor historically before surveying some of the problems in defining it. From there she moves on to investigate some of the theories of how metaphor works, before exploring it in its context with other linguistic devices. She concludes with a look at religious language in general, focusing on its relation to science and realism.

Soskice provides a rich resource that deals with metaphor (conceived in a traditional way) and its implications for theology and religious language. However, she does not investigate metaphoric phenomenon as such. She limits

¹²⁹ Colin Gunton, *The Actuality Of Atonement: A Study Of Metaphor, Rationality And The Christian Tradition* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 38.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 39 Brackets Gunton's own.

metaphor to the realm of speech, excluding the cognitive function of metaphor. Or, as she says, “All sorts of confusion can arise from neglect of the simple point that metaphor is a form of language use.”¹³¹ She does not deny that there may be elements of successful metaphors which are non-linguistic, but she does not want these aspects to be central. She claims that “it should not be thought that metaphor is primarily a process or mental act, and only secondarily its manifestation in language.”¹³² Metaphor is by definition a figure of speech and not an ‘act’, ‘fusion’ or ‘perception’.¹³³ Her priority of definition, while being helpful for beginning one’s exploration of metaphor theory, limits her exploration and explanation.¹³⁴ She is aware of this however, and aims not to let these other concerns obscure her and her readers from “the more fundamental point that metaphor is a mode of language use, and that the study of metaphor should begin in a linguistic setting.”¹³⁵

Her working definition of metaphor proposed early in her book is “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.” This sets the field of play for her work, yet neglects much of the potential influences of metaphor (such as the non-conscious, conceptual and formative aspects explored in Mark Johnson’s work). Allowing a given definition to set the agenda of exploration of a theme seems a faulty method of genuine exploration. To neglect parts of a concept because of a prior ruling on what that concept is, is not a compelling method. I would contend that this is, in fact, the opposite of the empathic aspect of my own method. The rigidity of setting a definition and dictating the study around it does not allow for true encounter and response which would be a much more contextual and honest approach, in my view. I am not claiming, however, that Soskice’s work is

¹³¹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 16.

¹³² This is likely aimed at Johnson and Lakoff and their school of metaphor theory.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ This limitation has both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side it makes her task much more achievable in one volume. Negatively, the potential of metaphor beyond the realm of the linguistic is a more unexplored and potentially fruitful area. This will be further explored in the second half of this thesis.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

misguided; she presents clear reasons for approaching metaphor the way she has. She does acknowledge that there are parts of metaphor which are beyond her definition, but at times the defense of her project comes across as dismissive of aspects which are beyond her project's scope.

Another theologian who uses metaphor in a deliberate way is Sallie McFague. She is often presented as opposing Soskice's view on how theology uses metaphor.¹³⁶ McFague acknowledges the conceptual nature of some metaphors, but limits the scope of metaphor to imaginative expressions of "contemporary experience which will express Christian faith for our day in powerful, illuminating ways."¹³⁷ She claims that the most important element of a metaphor is "its insistence on two active thoughts which remain in permanent tension or interaction with each other."¹³⁸ She repeatedly refers to the 'is' and 'is not' quality of metaphor, so in a way "a metaphor is a word or a phrase used inappropriately."¹³⁹ In this she rightly acknowledges that the source domain and the target domain are not the same thing. It is, as Lakoff and Johnson point out, inevitable that no metaphor will align perfectly. There will be highlighted, diminished, and hidden features in every metaphor.¹⁴⁰

McFague's use of metaphor may not go as far as Lakoff and Johnson would like it to, and her understanding of theology may stray too far from tradition for many, but her work is compelling and useful in furthering the discussion. She challenges and expresses a creative interpretation of the Gospel that many in today's context find helpful. She presents metaphors that challenge the dominant metaphors evoking thought and revision of our (previously taken for granted) metaphoric understandings. McFague's project is a helpful resource on

¹³⁶ McClendon does not cite McFague but is aware of her work. I bring her up here in relation to Soskice and the other theologians using metaphor to provide a brief overview of the key scholars writing in this area.

¹³⁷ Sallie McFague, *Models Of God: Theology For An Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 32.

¹³⁸ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models Of God In Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 37.

¹³⁹ McFague, *Models Of God*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Johnson and Lakoff explore this in *Metaphors We Live By*. See, Chapter 3, "Metaphorical Systematically: Highlighting and Hiding" 10-13.

using metaphor as a methodological guide to further a theological agenda. She has engaged with theological method, feminist theology, and environmental theology in a way that faithfully explores the implications of her metaphorical theology.¹⁴¹

Soskice spends some time discussing catachresis, where her interests overlap with McClendon's. She defines this as an activity which fills linguistic gaps which is similar to McClendon's use of the term. She alludes that catachresis, through its ingenuity in creating new ways to say things, can lead to new ways of thinking about ideas while using pre-existing language. This is the phenomenon that McClendon described as taking place in the formation of Christianity. He noted that this began originally in the parables of Jesus and continued afterwards in the apostles' teaching. The distinction McClendon made is that it is not always the vocabulary which changes, but the grammar.¹⁴² The parables, he notes, are narratives, which present a shift in logic. They present stories of people usually following the law, but in ways which are inadequate, shifting the narrative to reveal the 'new' that Christ brought. This is similar to how a picture (via Wittgenstein) can remain exactly the same, yet the function of each part of it can change, revealing a whole new way of understanding.

McClendon proposes three categories which were catachretically developed, mainly as ways to describe this new world: the first, to more appropriately describe right relations between believers and Christ; the second, to describe what the presence of Christ was like in his followers; and the third, a way of describing the new way of life which was now possible.¹⁴³ McClendon highlights the importance for those involved in this activity of connecting what has come

¹⁴¹ See, Sallie McFague, *Speaking In Parables : A Study In Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); *Metaphorical Theology: Models Of God In Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); *Models Of God: Theology For An Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); and *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008).

¹⁴² *Doctrine*, 108.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109.

before them to the broader narrative of the Hebrew people. While what is new is clearly the emphasis, this newness cannot be understood apart from its origins. Indeed, the Jewish Scriptures formed the source for most of their catachresis. McClendon presents some examples: “‘Entering’ the Promised Land was denied to Moses—he was permitted to ‘see’ that country but not ‘cross over’ into it (Deuteronomy 34). Now both ‘seeing’ the rule of God arrive (Mark 9:1) and ‘entering’ that rule (or its ‘life,’ see Mark 9:43,45,47) stood for the new reality to which Jesus called his followers.”¹⁴⁴ This is just one of many examples where this type of linguistic development shows how the “New Testament employed existing language, but reshaped it to make intelligible the new that had come in Jesus Messiah, whose own heritage and hope were funded from that same treasury.”¹⁴⁵

In each of these cases the person of Christ, and his life and teaching, created gaps in the language and the logic available. These gaps were filled through the projection of familiar language pictures which were apt to be stretched in a way that was still fitting with how language was originally used, whilst allowing the ‘newness’ to be described. This stretching of meaning is an imaginative activity. Continuing in the same vein of understanding imagination (as I have described in the opening chapter), this shifting of understanding through metaphoric projection changes the paradigm which drives the imagination. This, in turn, directs the possible ways in which the language and its grammar can be used. Imaginative rationality pervades the whole process of language. McClendon recognizes this. His whole implicit method and approach to theology, including his emphasis on biography, is related to this form of rationality.

Catachresis continues to be practiced today. The process of contextualizing Christian convictions to the ever changing cultural environment which believers find themselves in, is constantly revealing linguistic (and cognitive) gaps which need to be filled. While the early Church were doing this with fresh doctrinal convictions (especially in regard to the person of Christ and how this transforms life), today we are forced to think and speak in new ways because of the ever

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

shifting ground of our social forces, changing technologies, and emerging problems not present in the past. The ability for Christian teachers and followers to speak to these developing issues involves the practice of catachresis. The uniting force between believers now and believers of the past is the continued narrative (picture) which, for McClendon, is an identifying conviction.

4.5 Summary

As I have argued, for McClendon, these three important concepts all have at their core an image-based, or metaphoric, thinking. Catachresis uses metaphoric projections to create novel ways of thinking and speaking about the new world that Christ initiated. Picture thinking holds that images are central to how the world is perceived. Through the insights of Egan, I looked at how this important Wittgenstinian notion has deep implications for image-based thinking in theology. It is easy to see how McClendon gravitated towards this idea as a natural progression of the thinking in *Biography as Theology*. The baptist vision becomes the unifying theme of his approach to theology. It locates him within a tradition and its main feature is a kind of metaphoric projection of time and place to come to a faithful understanding. Each of these is rooted in the story that is found in Scripture.

Each of these three concepts employs a type of metaphoric rationality which involves mapping across domains, where one draws on knowledge from a familiar domain and uses it to inform ways of thinking about another domain. This shows a maturing of McClendon's initial use of images, influenced by Farrer, as explored in Chapter Three. Image-based thinking remains a vital aspect of McClendon's thinking, but in a more fundamental way. This development was facilitated, in part, by the significant influence of Wittgenstein upon McClendon.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ It seems to me that McClendon gave philosophical priority to Wittgenstein through the process of writing "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies". Nancey Murphy confirmed this tendency toward Wittgenstein in conversation. See, Nancey Murphy and James McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (1989): 191–214.

These three aspects of McClendon's theology mirror the progression in metaphor theory displayed in the opening section. Theories of metaphor began by being quite firm and specific in terms of what a metaphor was and how it functioned. As more energy was used on these mysteries, more options emerged, and the more creative dimensions of metaphor (both in terms of metaphor creating meaning, and the potential cognitive aspect of it) were realized. Eventually (as will be seen more clearly in the next few chapters), Johnson moves to a more metaphoric method for describing how meaning is made. This progression is similar to how McClendon moves from images and their specific corresponding doctrinal implications in his early work, to a more metaphoric use of understanding language (catachresis) and thought (picture thinking). Ultimately this particular perspective brought McClendon his method for how theology and faithful living is approached (baptist vision) which pervaded his systematic theology.

Being the type of narrative theologian that McClendon was, his language use, including images, is located within the context of the narrative he saw as governing and guiding his life and theology. The 'great story', a term McClendon used to identify the macro-narrative of the Christian faith, centers on the story of Jesus Christ. This was naturally the center of McClendon's theology, both in a methodological and convictional sense. In other words, McClendon's theology cannot be rightly understood unless it is seen in relation to the person, life, and work of Christ. I argue this in the final chapter, particularly in relation to the developments highlighted in this chapter, and in light of Mark Johnson. In Christ, each of these methodological tools (baptist vision, picture thinking, and catachresis) find their source and truest fulfillment.

A final thought on McClendon's use of image-based thinking will prepare the turn to Johnson in the subsequent two chapters. As I have argued in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, McClendon's use of images and image-based thinking is carried out with care, but he did not pursue the topic to its full extent. He explains in an introductory way each of these methodological moves, but does not pursue comprehensively. What we are left with, then, is a display of these methods being used for his theological agenda. As mentioned, it is likely that McClendon did not find it necessary for his task to wade into the very disputed

arena of metaphor theories. While McClendon is successful in his use of these methods in bringing about his aims, it is my hypothesis that there is more to be gained through examining how and why metaphoric ways of thinking and speaking are such integral parts of his work, and of theology in a more general way.

My response to McClendon involves revising a reading of him through looking more intently at how and why his image-based thinking functions. This revision (via Johnson) will not only bring an added depth and clarity to McClendon's methods, but will also contribute to an adapted application of these methods in the future. The first half of this thesis highlighted an integral pattern or theme within McClendon's theological method, that is, the image-based thinking that drives his biographical method, and how that produced other tools for his practice of theology. I now turn to my response to McClendon's work, discussing how McClendon may be read and applied in the future.

Chapter Five. Mark Johnson's Philosophical Insights

Mark Johnson's voice has already been heard in the first half of this thesis.¹ I included him there to introduce aspects of his thought and to set up the empathic response that will be spelled out in the following chapters. In Johnson's project there is a continual pursuit of re-thinking philosophy in light of the current advances in the science of the mind.

Johnson's work develops a revised understanding of human meaning-making, embodied rationality, and imaginative metaphoric thinking. In the present context it points to potential ways that a biographical method for theology could be revised and re-applied. It also allows for a deeper interpretation of what McClendon has done in using image-based thinking with a focus on embodiment in his theological method.

This chapter presents a detailed reading of Johnson's work which will focus my empathic response to McClendon's method.² Most importantly, Johnson treats many issues which relate to McClendon's theological agenda. Indeed, many of Johnson's insights bring further dimension to what McClendon has done.

I begin this chapter by introducing Mark Johnson, taking a brief look at his life and context, before exploring his work in a more thorough way. First, I will present his critique of Western thought which provides, for him, a starting place to resist and to show an alternative voice. Secondly, I will describe his project in a broad way, demonstrating how his work has progressed and shifted from a specific kind of analysis (metaphor) to a broader, more fundamental, human focus (concerning how we make meaning). Johnson's understanding of aesthetics and how it determines how we experience things as meaningful will also be described, adding further insight to a reading of McClendon.

¹ In his insights in imagination in the opening chapter, and through the explanation of various theories of metaphors in chapter four

² This means it is not a comprehensive presentation of Johnson's work, nor is it a critique of his work in general.

5.1 Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson was born in 1949 and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. At university he was immediately taken with philosophy.³ Encouraged to pursue further study upon graduating from the University of Kansas in 1971 he went to the University of Chicago for post-graduate studies. He would receive his MA in 1975 and Ph.D. in 1977. While there, he was significantly influenced by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur who taught him that “no philosophical or scientific orientation had a complete hold on truth.”⁴ This lesson can be found throughout Johnson’s work. His other main influence was his dissertation advisor Ted Cohen, an Austinian who was always concerned with bringing philosophical perspectives to bear on lived experience. From these influences, Johnson came to the conviction that “philosophy should make a difference for how you live.”⁵ He received his first teaching job at the University of Southern Illinois soon after graduation (1977), and he remained there until 1994 when he moved to the University of Oregon, where he is still employed as the Knight Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Chair of the Philosophy department.

While at Southern Illinois, Johnson set out to work on an anthology of perspectives on metaphor. There was, it seemed to him, more to the issues than the current dialogue allowed.⁶ It was through this project that he encountered George Lakoff. They met in January 1979, Johnson having been given Lakoff’s name as someone who could bring a linguistic perspective on metaphor for his work.⁷ They quickly became allies and both had the sense that “we were not given any tools, in our respective intellectual training, that were adequate to

³ “Biography of Mark Johnson,” last modified January 6, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/markj/biography.html>.

⁴ Mark Johnson, Interview with Mark L. Johnson, interview by Laureano Ralon, November 15, 2011, <http://figureground.ca/interviews/mark-l-johnson/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This current dialogue would have included much of the account given in 4.1.

⁷ This work would be published as Mark Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives On Metaphor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

give the sense of importance to metaphor that we felt.”⁸ They agreed to write a chapter for Johnson’s collection together but, realizing that a larger treatment was needed, began working on the book which became *Metaphors We Live By*.

In this work, first published in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson offer a new understanding of metaphor. They argue that metaphors are not merely figures of speech but play a much more fundamental role in how we as humans think. “Conceptual metaphor theory” was the resulting name they gave to this work. They argue that instead of being primarily expressed in words, metaphors are first a matter of thought and action, and only then are they put into words. These metaphors shape much of how we conceptualize and approach everyday thinking. In *Metaphors We Live By*, they cite numerous examples of how everyday language is soaked in metaphor. The clear implication was that we are dependent upon metaphor, not only how we communicate, but for how we experience and understand our worlds. Much of this thinking was new, beginning a path on which they would each continue for many years.

Johnson explored more about the relation of embodiment to metaphor and imagination in his 1987 work *The Body In The Mind*, and applied this approach to the world of ethics in his 1993 book, *The Moral Imagination*.⁹ He reunited with Lakoff to write the anticipated sequel to *Metaphors We Live By*, entitled *Philosophy In The Flesh*.¹⁰ In each of these works Johnson questions the traditional modes of inquiry for philosophy and seeks to move to a more holistic and embodied understanding of humans and, therefore, a more embodied rationality. Johnson’s latest work has been on the recovery of aesthetics which builds on his previous work. He claims that the qualitative and aesthetic dimensions of life allow for the possibility of meaning. *The Meaning Of The Body* (2007) is where Johnson works out these claims, and it has garnered

⁸ Roger Pérez i Brufau, “Philosophy and Cognitive Science: Interview with Mark Johnson,” *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 9, no. 1 (2011): 329–339.

⁹ Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: The Embodied Mind And Its Challenge To Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

significant recognition. Within these books we see a large project unveiling in stages, and its progression is part of its importance.

5.2 Johnson's Account of Western Thought

The resourceful approach Johnson shows in his practice of philosophy is provoked by (what he sees as) significant problems within the Western philosophical tradition. He takes significant time and effort to provide a context for his thought. This usually takes the form of presenting how thinking has been approached in the past and how these ways are insufficient for today. The earliest form of this presentation is in Johnson and Lakoff's *Metaphors We Live By*, in a chapter entitled "The Myths of Objectivism and Subjectivism." Here, they highlight a dichotomy which is deeply rooted in Western culture, namely, that between the subjective and the objective. This is a mind-set which is prevalent and creates an outlook which holds that "the only alternative to objectivism is radical subjectivity."¹¹ Simply stated, "either you believe in absolute truth or you can make the world in your own image... there is no third choice."¹²

Each side of this debate is dependent on the other for they are primarily identified as being in direct opposition. They form a duality which becomes stronger as each side gains support.¹³ "Objectivism," Lakoff and Johnson say, "takes as its allies scientific truth, rationality, precision, fairness, and impartiality. Subjectivism takes as its allies emotions, intuitive insight, imagination, humaneness, art, and a 'higher' truth."¹⁴ Each side sees its own domain as being completely separate from the domain of the other, and they do not join. The rise to power of Western science and medicine (and its connection to the myth of objectivism) has allowed the objectivist position to take hold in the West. The subjectivist perspective makes up a much smaller, yet just as firmly held, minority position.

¹¹George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003),185.

¹² Ibid., 185. This attitude is found in theological outlooks as well. The turn to conservatism and its foundational approach is based on similar assumptions.

¹³ See, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 186-188 for their account of objectivism and subjectivism.

¹⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 189.

For Johnson and Lakoff, this creates an issue for the study of metaphor. Metaphor has often been understood as being a trope or literary tool more suited to the realm of subjectivism, or as a creative casing for objective and literal truths. As presented earlier (in the section 4.1), much of the understanding of metaphor has been worked out within these (or similar) assumptions which have formed deep-seated beliefs in our societies and determine how people understand. Johnson wants to move beyond these traditional categories to work out new ways of thinking about understanding in light of the scientific advances of today.

Philosophy, like many other disciplines, has boundaries of inquiry shaped by the traditions it has received from the past. Traditionally, the mind has been seen as ‘disembodied’. The realm of ideas and concepts has little or nothing to do with our physical existence. Much of this thinking has been the legacy of Rene Descartes. Considered by many as the ‘father of modern philosophy’, he famously asserted that thinking is what primarily identifies humanity. His search for an undoubtable foundation for knowledge (which was found in his *cogito ergo sum*) led to a philosophy based on this ‘thinking self’.

Lakoff and Johnson affirm that what emerged from the Cartesian legacy was a new metaphoric view of the mind which represents “in some ‘inner’ realm, the objects existing in the ‘external’ world.”¹⁵ But, since the inner world is not anything like the external world, the problem of knowledge became “the problem of how we could know that the internal ideas (representations) in our minds correspond to the ‘things in themselves’.”¹⁶ In many debates Descartes tends to take a significant amount of blame for many of the problems that have come from foundational epistemology and the Enlightenment, rather than taking significant credit for the ways in which he propelled philosophy forward. Habits like reducing things down to their smallest parts for greater clarity (atomism) and setting up firm boundaries for thought, along with the primacy of the concept, have made philosophy what it has become.

¹⁵ Ibid., 391.

¹⁶ Ibid., 391-392. Scare quotes are Lakoff and Johnson’s own.

His legacy is still present in philosophy (and theology) in many methods and underlying assumptions, but the appropriateness of these methods and assumptions must be called into question for today's context. Lakoff and Johnson highlight many of these assumptions. Among them are:

- The mind can know its own ideas with absolute certainty.
- All thought is conscious.
- The structure of the mind is directly accessible to itself.
- The mind is disembodied. It consists of mental substance, while the body consists of physical substance.
- The essence, and only essence of human beings is the ability to reason.
- Imagination and emotion are not part of the essence of human nature.
- Thought is formal, just as mathematics is.¹⁷

From these assertions we can see that much of this thinking is present still today.

Johnson's departure from modern philosophy finds its fullest expression in his engagement with Immanuel Kant who appears in all of his major works.¹⁸ Johnson understands Kant to view judgement as the fundamental act of human cognition.¹⁹ Each of Kant's *Critiques* pursued a detailed analysis of three forms of judgements: scientific, moral, and aesthetic. In each case Kant argues for the universal validity of each type of judgement. Johnson critiques this by saying that "this strategy already skews our entire understanding of mind, for it breaks thought into discrete types of judgements, each with its own conditions and fields of application."²⁰ Kant's view affirms the Enlightenment's account of faculty psychology which holds that we have different and distinct faculties (reason, will, passions, etc.), each with their own way of reacting to various

¹⁷ Ibid., 392. Lakoff and Johnson continue to show that this thinking is based on the underlying metaphors Descartes was using to shape his logic.

¹⁸ See Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, passim; *Moral Imagination*, 65-76; *Philosophy In The Flesh*, (415-439; and *The Meaning of the Body*, passim, for Johnson's engagement with and analysis of Kant.

¹⁹ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 214.

²⁰ Ibid.

experiences which contest with each other, ultimately leading to a behavior.²¹ With this approach, Kant confines the aesthetic dimension to the subjective and non-conceptual sphere which, as we will see, is the opposite of what Johnson proposes, namely, that the aesthetic dimension facilitates and gives form to the more cognitive and “logical” areas of thought.

Johnson pursues a holistic account of the mind. As such, this necessitates a critique of the fragmented account of the mind that much of the philosophical tradition has held in the past. The Modern tradition is easily represented by Descartes and most fully worked out in Kant, and they provide Johnson with prominent accounts from which to depart.

This has been a simplified look at some of the underlying assumptions in the Western philosophical tradition. It shows, however, from where Johnson takes his cue in forming his own philosophical approach. He moves from the analysis of metaphor to a new understanding of how understanding happens, and of meaning making itself.

5.3 Tracing Johnson’s Trajectory

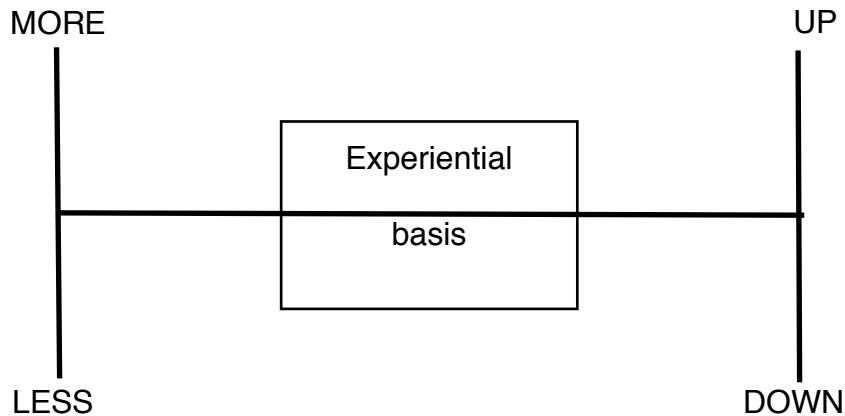
Johnson’s work has followed a steady trajectory since *Metaphors We Live By*. Through following various implications of this initial work (namely that metaphor is a conceptual reality that is formed through the body), Johnson has explored the role of the body in how we think, the ethical implications of embodiment, and how these things change the practice of philosophy. The focus on metaphor *is* has shifted onto a concentration on what metaphor *enables*. This section will highlight this progression.

At the beginning of his project Johnson (with Lakoff) was primarily dealing with metaphor as a way of connecting the phenomenon of pre-conscious thought to the actual lived phenomenon of speech and everyday life. In his later work he worked out the implications of metaphor as a conduit of a much larger sphere of exploration, namely the phenomenon of meaning itself. An example of this progression can be seen in a diagram in *Metaphors We Live By*, which shows

²¹ Johnson covers faculty psychology in *Moral Imagination*, 15; *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 16-17 and 36-37; and *The Meaning of the Body*, 210.

the connection between metaphors and lived experience. In the diagram Johnson and Lakoff elaborate on the conceptual metaphor “more is up, less is down”.

Fig.1.0²²



Johnson comments on this diagram in a 2011 interview saying,

This ridiculous diagram that has vertical arrows connecting more and less, up and down, and some arrows connected to a box that says ‘experiential basis’. That was just fascinating, but a bit embarrassing, because the diagram explained almost nothing. My whole life since that time has been the exploration of that experiential basis box!²³

This quotation shows us a glimpse of Johnson's attitude to his overall project. For Johnson, metaphor is where it all began and it opened up a whole new world of possibilities for how philosophy could be practiced. If what Lakoff and Johnson had argued in *Metaphors We Live By* was correct and can be supported through science, then the stage is set for a whole new way of thinking about thinking and the practice of philosophy...and, for the present task, how that influences theology.

Metaphor continues to play a vital role in Johnson’s thought. It is central in initiating the whole project, fusing body and mind, but it is no longer explicitly

²² See, Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 20.

²³ Brufau, “Philosophy and Cognitive Science: Interview with Mark Johnson,” 333.

the focus. How it works and what its implications are for reasoning (and how we live) are where the natural future of this line of thinking leads.

At this point it is worth noting that Johnson's move from metaphor to meaning-making and aesthetics mirrors the move from explicit images to image-based thinking and rationality displayed in McClendon's work. Johnson's insights provide a body of work that sets McClendon in a wider intellectual context, and reveals a familiar pattern of those involved in metaphoric thought.

Johnson's thought is marked by a departure from the *a priori* philosophical tradition that has been standard in his tradition. Johnson overcomes many of the assumptions of modern philosophy to achieve a practice of philosophy that he argues is better suited to the twenty-first century.

Departing the Standard

There are a few key ways in which Johnson's perspective constructively shifts the assumptions that guided that philosophy of the past. He seeks to develop a philosophy which is helpful for people, even those who do not engage in philosophical analysis as such. "We are social, moral, political, economic, and religious animals, and our philosophy ought to help us in these areas and more", Johnson claims.²⁴ His new approach to philosophy can achieve this in two ways. First, Johnson's approach can show us how and why we think and believe in the ways we do. This provides a significant amount of self knowledge and understanding.²⁵ It also points out where there are mis-questions and falsely-held assumptions which need to be rejected.²⁶ Secondly, this constructive understanding provides "a positive guidance for living".²⁷ By this, Lakoff and Johnson do not mean guidance which provides an absolute rule or principle which can be applied across the realm of possibilities in life (this was the

²⁴ Ibid., 342.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lakoff and Johnson point out here that this role is a continuation of the type of thinking displayed by John Dewey and Ludwig Wittgenstein in the age prior to cognitive science.

²⁷ Brufau, "Philosophy and Cognitive Science: Interview with Mark Johnson," 342.

attempt of much moral philosophy in the last 100 years), but instead a guidance which provides intimate details about “the kinds of creatures we are, how we experience our world, and what the limits are on our cognitive capacities.”²⁸ To know more about how our bodies and brains work will allow a much more accurate picture of the mind to be developed and the philosophical task to be formed through that picture.

One of the most significant ways that Johnson and Lakoff depart from the philosophical tradition is in their understanding of the mind. In *Philosophy In The Flesh*, Johnson and Lakoff begin by making three claims which locate their philosophical convictions, setting the reader up for the book to follow. They claim: “The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.”²⁹ They make the bold assertion that “these are three major findings of cognitive science. More than two millennia of a priori philosophical speculation about these aspects of reason are over. Because of these discoveries, philosophy can never be the same again.”³⁰ No doubt some of the dramatic rhetoric is designed to act as a hook, but the clarity and force of these statements cannot be ignored. Since 1980 both Johnson and Lakoff worked closely with cognitive scientists to ensure their theory was not simply ‘a priori philosophical speculation’. Lakoff and Johnson go on to defend these claims and bring up many traditional philosophical issues, showing how the lessons learned from cognitive science, and its corresponding analysis, allow these to be dealt with in a new way.

Underlying cultural assumptions have led to what Lakoff and Johnson call ‘folk theories’, shared cultural knowledge which makes up a culture’s common sense.³¹ Some folk theories are consciously held as matters of public knowledge (e.g. that the world rotates around the sun). Other folk theories, they claim, “are implicit, that is, unconscious and automatic, taken as background assumptions

²⁸ Ibid., 342-343.

²⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: The Embodied Mind And Its Challenge To Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 352.

and used in drawing conclusions.”³² Cognitive science can help in getting behind these folk theories, testing their assumptions based on conceptual analysis and constructive theorizing. What Lakoff and Johnson propose is a sort of building-block apparatus applied to theories. ‘Cross domain mappings’³³ from bodily activity in the world make up much of our metaphoric categorizations and concepts we use. These form cultural folk theories, which are in turn elaborated upon by philosophers creating philosophical theories. As Lakoff and Johnson say,

Philosophy is built up with the conceptual and inferential resources of a culture, even though it may transform and creatively extend those resources.³⁴ These cognitive resources are not arbitrary or merely culturally constructed. They depend on the nature of our embodied experience, which includes both the constraints set by our bodily makeup and those imposed by the environments we inhabit.³⁵

We inhabit environments that are made up of long traditions of folk theories and ideas that produce the convictions of a culture, forming ways of thinking that are handed down through generations.

What Johnson and Lakoff are seeking, then, is an empirically responsible philosophy which can be supported and strengthened by the findings of the scientific community. To continue to do philosophy in the same way that it has been practiced for hundreds of years while there are these new findings of science is, to Johnson, negligent. As he states, “I sometimes wonder how some people can look themselves in the face when they continue to ignore empirical work on language, thought and cognitive processing, and still claim to be doing philosophy of language and mind.”³⁶

³² Ibid.

³³ ‘Cross domain mapping’ is a term used by cognitive metaphor theorists to explain the processes of using one set of ideas and terms in the understanding and application of another set of ideas or thing.

³⁴ Note the similarity here with McClendon’s understanding that theology must creatively transform what has come before.

³⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, 341.

³⁶ Mark Johnson, Interview with Mark L. Johnson, interview by Laureano Ralon, November 15, 2011, <http://figureground.ca/interviews/mark-l-johnson/>.

5.4 Scientifically Responsible Philosophy

As a significant part of the shift from the former methods of philosophical inquiry, Johnson draws upon the findings of cognitive science to give his theories validity. Johnson's writing partner George Lakoff also co-wrote a book with a cognitive scientist, Mark Turner. Their book, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide To Poetic Metaphor*, is a guide to interpreting metaphors as they are found in poetry, and as such, must first treat metaphor in the more conventional sense.³⁷ They state that "to study metaphor is to be confronted with the hidden aspects of one's own mind and one's own culture."³⁸ They find that instead of being ornamental, as has been traditionally thought, metaphor within poetry enables imaginative rationality to drive the meaning and logic of poems. Much of their work and arguments was based upon a significant body of data from the world of cognitive science.

Mark Turner continued to research metaphor within cognitive science, and together with Gilles Fauconnier wrote *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending And The Mind's Hidden Complexities*. Fauconnier and Turner undertook the majority of their research between 1992-1993 and were looking at the mind as it blends concepts together. They analyzed data from various places and developed the idea of "conceptual blending". They argue that conceptual blending is an evolutionary trait which made possible a wide variety of human accomplishments such as the origins of "language, art, religion, science, and other singular human feats."³⁹

For Turner and Falconer, conceptual blending is understood as "a general, basic mental operation with highly elaborate dynamic principles and governing constraints."⁴⁰ It functions quickly and invisibly to produce awareness of identity, sameness, and difference, using "framing, analogy, metaphor,

³⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide To Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

³⁸ Ibid., 214.

³⁹ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), vi.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

grammar, and commonsense reasoning”.⁴¹ Conceptual blending concerns how our brains work, bringing together past experiences and current knowledge to make sense of the world. Conceptual blending allows us to project situations and thoughts into the future, and to anticipate the consequences of the present, and what the implications of our actions may be.

Blending also allows knowledge of past events and people to be brought to bear on other contexts. In many ways blending allows metaphor and metaphoric knowledge to form. Fauconnier and Turner develop a more specific theory of how the mind actually accomplishes what Johnson, Lakoff and others are working out. They seek to answer many of the ‘how’ questions that Johnson’s theory has implied. By spending significant time on establishing how this phenomenon works in our everyday lives, Fauconnier and Turner make a compelling case for the pervasiveness and formative abilities of conceptual blending and conceptual integration. They explore language (chapter 9), things and objects (chapter 10), the phenomenon of the created unreal (chapter 11), and identity and character (chapter 12).

The insights and conclusions that Fauconnier and Turner make are based on what Johnson and Lakoff call “second generation cognitive science”. First generation cognitive science was developed, they explain, in the 1950s and 1960s and was based on the assumption that reason was disembodied and literal. Cognitive functions were seen to be in the mind alone, and environment or body was quite separate from them.⁴² Second generation cognitive science discovered evidence that reason and conceptualization were dependent upon the body, and that they were largely based on imaginative processes involving metaphor, imagery, prototypes, frames, mental spaces, and other image-based mental phenomena.⁴³ Cognitive science offers philosophy an insight into how

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 75. Chapter 6 is pertinent to this discussion. See “Embodied Realism: Cognitive Science Versus A Priori Philosophy” in *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 74-93.

⁴³ Ibid., 76. Lakoff and Johnson elaborate on how this new evidence overturned much of how Anglo-American philosophy had been practiced. A new view of mind had to be developed. They explore some of the main tenets of this new perspective in *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 77-78.

the mind operates leading to responsible theories which can move beyond conjecture. It offers tools for understanding conceptual analysis looking at many underlying assumptions that are present. For example, Johnson and Lakoff claim that philosophical theories attempt to “refine, extend, clarify, and make consistent common metaphors and folk theories shared within a culture. Philosophical theories, therefore, incorporate some collection of the folk theories, models, and metaphors that define the culture from which they emerge.”⁴⁴ Cognitive science gives resources which can explain how this process works and how the cultural influence and the more universal embodied experience contribute to our thinking.

A second way that cognitive science helps philosophy is by aiding in critical assessment. There is a growing body of empirical evidence which highlights the numerous ways the body and the mind are indivisibly one.⁴⁵ This type of data provides precise information which can be used either to enforce or re-frame how difficult problems are viewed. It also reveals the ways that an out-dated theory of mind can lead to a limited perspective on current issues arising within culture and science.

Finally, cognitive science offers a way of forming constructive philosophical theorizing which should help make theorizing less abstract from how people actually live. This is, indeed, one of the main goals of Johnson’s departure from the standard account – to help people live rich and more meaningful lives.

5.5 Johnson’s Proposals for an Embodied Rationality

For Lakoff and Johnson, reason is embodied, mainly unconsciously, and hidden from direct contact. They claim, “the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment.”⁴⁶ They affirm an evolutionary progression in rationality: “Reason, even in its most abstract form, makes use of, rather than transcends, our animal nature.”⁴⁷ They stand against objectivism as stated and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 341.

⁴⁵ The Journal *Metaphor and Symbol* is dedicated to the empirical study of metaphor in the fields of psychology and philosophy.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

do not see reason as being universal in any transcendent way. Instead, Johnson and Lakoff see it as being universal “in that it is a capacity shared universally by all human beings.”⁴⁸ Their understanding of reason is directly engaged with the emotions, and is largely metaphorical and imaginative. This understanding of rationality allows for purely abstract *a priori* philosophy to be overcome and new philosophy to be practiced.

In his 1987 book *The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis Of Meaning Imagination and Reason*, Johnson argues that the connection between our bodies and our minds needs to be understood as leading to a new perspective on meaning and reason.⁴⁹ He seeks to move away from reductionist tendencies that claim to have isolated the aspect or faculty which creates meaning in a specific way. His theory proposes that experience is re-understood in “a very rich, broad sense as including basic perceptual, motor-program, emotional, historical, social and linguistic dimensions.”⁵⁰ Experience, then, “involves everything that makes us human—our bodily, social, linguistic, and intellectual being combined in complex interactions that make up our understanding of our world.”⁵¹ Johnson seeks a more holistic philosophy of life which takes seriously our lived bodily experience in our socially active, emotional context. In some ways, his project is similar to McClendon’s in that they are seeking a way to become less abstract and much more grounded in the lived experiences of life.⁵²

From the end of *Metaphors We Live By*, Johnson and Lakoff see the need to have a new understanding of understanding. They see the myths of objectivism and subjectivism as sharing a concern for understanding.⁵³ There is latent potential here for a unity between these two opposite forces. While they are looking in opposite places for understandings (objectivism in the external, and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁵⁰ Ibid., xvi.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The similarities between Johnson and McClendon will be highlighted in Chapter Six.

⁵³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 229.

subjectivism in the internal), they share a common perspective, namely, that humans are separated from their environment.⁵⁴ They propose a third option between these two poles which they call the 'experientialist myth'. This perspective claims that humans are a part of their environment and are not separate from it. It focuses on "constant interaction with the physical environment and with other people."⁵⁵ This interaction, like all relationships, is reciprocal; it involves mutual change. They state plainly, "You cannot function within the environment without changing or being changed by it."⁵⁶ The process of living is a matter of changing and being changed through life and understanding and re-understanding things as a by-product of living.

Metaphor, image schemas, and other structural patterns are revised as a part of this process, giving rise to, and shaping, the inner concepts and categories that help provide understanding and meaning. With this reciprocal understanding of understanding in place, and the subsequent rejection of objectivism, Johnson argues that a new approach towards reason and meaning is required. As a result of this shift, propositions lose their high stature. Johnson explains that his project seeks to explore "nonpropositional" structures of meaning.⁵⁷ Instead, he sees image schema as replacing propositions as the main vehicle of meaning.⁵⁸ Johnson says quite plainly, "I want to suggest that there are nonpropositional structures in the background that play a far more central role in the elaboration of meaning than objectivism allows."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 229-230.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 2.

⁵⁸ Johnson explores briefly whether image schema can be propositional. He looks at six ways that the word 'proposition' is used, and finds one ("A proposition exists as a continuous, analog, pattern of experience or understanding, with sufficient internal structure to permit inferences," 4), which fits with how he will use image schemas. This is not a common use of propositions, and Johnson chooses to distance the terms rather than make this connection stronger due to the strongly held nature of the more common uses of the word. Much later, Johnson acknowledges that propositions are not entirely negative tools. When they are acknowledged as more abstract versions of schemas propositions can be used effectively with positive effects. See, Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 2-5.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *The Body In The Mind*, 10.

The major flaw in the objectivist account of rationality is that it operates in an ideal fictitious world in which purity and clarity are not only possible but prevalent. Johnson says that much of how real people think is based on metaphoric connections which the objectivist account would reject as making unsound inferences. However, he points out, quite rightly, that “people do, however reason in the above manner all the time. And it is not possible to understand the logic...without reference to such an inference pattern, a pattern generalized to include metaphor in the reasoning process.”⁶⁰ To clarify, Johnson’s project is not concerned with the idealistic world of objectivity, but with “how real human beings reason and not with some ideal standard of rationality. We are concerned with what real human beings grasp as meaningful.”⁶¹

Central to this understanding of rationality and meaning is this new theory of metaphor. Johnson asserts that in this context a metaphor is seen as “a process of human understanding by which we achieve meaningful experience that we can make sense of. A metaphor, in this ‘experiential’ sense, is a process by which we understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind.”⁶² Metaphor continues to be central to Johnson’s theory and becomes a connection point between some strongly held dichotomies. Understood in this way, metaphors have the ability to shape perceptions.

Metaphor, then, breaks down the firm distinctions between subject and object, as well as between perception and conception. In the traditional philosophical account, there are separate and distinct faculties, i.e. the faculty of reason is distinct and separate from the faculty of perception and bodily movement.⁶³ Within this account, “perception may inform reason, and movement may be a consequence of reason, but in the tradition no aspect of perception or

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11. Here, Johnson is discussing an example of this thinking in which the inference is displayed as such: F(A), A=B, Therefore, F(B).

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

⁶³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 36-37. They introduce this idea of faculty psychology on pp.16-17 and pp.36-37.

movement is *part* of reason.”⁶⁴ A conception, in this understanding, is completely in the realm of reason, and wholly separate from perception. Lakoff and Johnson argue instead, that our bodily existence directly determines how we apprehend our concepts.

Perception and conception are not separate but strongly linked. An example of this is the concepts of front and back which are formed through our physical experiences. Johnson and Lakoff explain that we make projections based on our bodies. Because we have fronts and backs, we project (metaphorically) fronts and backs onto other objects. They claim that “concepts like *front* and *back*... arise from the body, depend on the body, and would not exist if we did not have the kinds of bodies we have.”⁶⁵ There is a host of other concepts which are completely dependent upon an experiential bodily basis such as pushing, pulling, propelling, supporting, and balance. We comprehend these phenomena physically with our bodies, especially the limbs, and then subsequently apply them metaphorically to more abstract domains.⁶⁶ The dichotomy between perception and conception, then, is shown to be false, and the body is seen as “not merely involved in conceptualization but is shaping its very nature.”⁶⁷

Another dichotomy which is presented as false in the thinking of Johnson and Lakoff is subject-object. This is obviously related to the rejection of both the myths of subjectivism and objectivism. This is worked out in their presentation of what they call embodied realism. Embodied realism is an alternative to disembodied realism, which holds to a strict subject-object separation, creating an ontological chasm between the two. Once this separation is made, there are two mistakes that take place. “Objectivity is either given by the ‘things themselves’ (the objects) or by the intersubjective structures of consciousness shared by all people (the subjects).”⁶⁸ Lakoff and Johnson reject both of these, stating, “There are no objects-with-descriptions-and-categorizations existing in

⁶⁴ Ibid., 37. Emphasis is Lakoff and Johnson’s own.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 93.

themselves.” And, “mere intersubjectivity, if it is nothing more than social or communal agreement, leaves out our contact with the world.”⁶⁹

The alternative they propose is an embodied realism which takes the process of mutual interaction between a subject and object as part of the interrelationship between human bodies and the environments we live in. Or, as they say it, “Our directly embodied concepts can reliably fit those embodied interactions and the understandings that arise from them.”⁷⁰ What disembodied realism gets wrong is that “as embodied, imaginative creatures, *we never were separated or divorced from reality in the first place.*”⁷¹ Our bodily existence within our social and physical environments creates the understandings and conceptions we operate with. The reciprocal (relational) change that happens between subject and object, knower and known, is a part of what makes up the differences and similarities of our personal and communal narratives. Both subjects and objects are a part of this same process and, as such, not ontologically distinct.

With the dissolution of these dichotomies, knowledge, truth and reality are understood in a new light. Philosophy can and must rediscover itself, and the traditional ways in which problems were conceived and solved must be re-thought. This is what Lakoff and Johnson sought to accomplish in *Philosophy In The Flesh*.

5.6 Those Opposed

As one would expect, there has been strong opposition to the type of work Johnson and his colleagues are doing. They have rejected many of the assumptions which are held dear to philosophy and linguistics but also much of what have become the cultural assumptions of how things are. Johnson’s most vocal and sustained critics are John M. Kennedy and John Vervaeke.

Kennedy and Vervaeke first wrote a critique entitled *Metaphor And Knowledge Attained Via The Body* where they raise questions pertaining to Johnson’s 1991

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

article *Knowing Through The Body*.⁷² In this article Johnson proposes his version of epistemology as an alternative to the foundational epistemology that he sees in the work of Richard Rorty. Johnson applauds Rorty's logic but insists that he has made an error in an underlying assumption, namely, that "all knowledge of the 'knowing that' sort is sentential."⁷³ Johnson argues for an inextricable connection between knowing (the verb) and knowledge (the noun) is how embodiment becomes central to epistemology. This brings the role of the "organism's embodiment in its interaction with and knowing of the world" into focus. Johnson goes on to argue that it is our temporal/spatial, perceptual and motor capacities that provide our knowledge. He then links this to his preceding work on metaphor, showing how it is this embodied knowledge that forms the metaphors which are then projected onto more abstract domains that form our abstract thinking.

The main concern that Kennedy and Vervaeke have with this article is the link Johnson makes between metaphor and more abstract domains of thinking. For example, they point out how Johnson takes the source-path-goal schema and jumps from using it as a connection to using it as a projection.⁷⁴ They call this a "curious twist" and highlight it as "a motion or transfer in a particular direction, from source to target, rather than just a link, a junction that ties two equal domains together."⁷⁵ They do not see this as an obvious leap to make, suggesting Johnson merely makes a verbal distinction without elaborating upon the distinction or providing justification.⁷⁶ They see Johnson as being stuck in a

⁷² John M. Kennedy and John Vervaeke, "Metaphor And Knowledge Attained Via The Body," *Philosophical Psychology* 6, no. 4 (December 1993): 407-412; Mark Johnson, "Knowing Through The Body," *Philosophical Psychology* 4, no. 1 (March 1991): 3-18.

⁷³ Johnson, "Knowing Through The Body," 5.

⁷⁴ The source-path-goal schema is another major schema that Johnson and Lakoff have identified as structuring our thought (along with the containment schema and verticality schemas explored briefly above). A detailed account of this schema can be found in Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 32-34. This schema can be found implicitly in discussions on reasoning. E.g. "You lost me somewhere in the middle", "I am back on the right track again", and "It took me a while, but I got there" are all phrases that are used to talk about following or achieving an abstract thought process.

⁷⁵ Kennedy and Vervaeke, "Metaphor And Knowledge Attained Via The Body," 408.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

chicken-and-egg problem, finding his justifications are based on a schema which must be present in the first place in order to use the connections and projections that are formed through the schema's presence. Their concern is that this is impossible, and it is merely glossed over by Johnson.

They ultimately conclude that "many of Johnson's proposals for actions and experiences that are related to the ability to know might indeed provide good metaphors for states of knowledge. But he has been just a bit too reductionistic, important distinctions escape his analysis, and the distinction between metaphoric and non-metaphoric representation is, ultimately, unstated."⁷⁷ They hedge their criticisms by affirming Johnson's claim that there are underlying and organizing networks of metaphor, and say Johnson's subsequent analysis is "one of the most interesting and promising approaches to metaphor today."

Johnson answers some of these criticisms. He confirms that Kennedy and Vervaeke are correct to "insist that there could be no metaphorical projection without pre-existing 'common features' of both domains."⁷⁸ However, he points to their confusion of mappings based on pre-existing features (common to both source and target domains), with constitutive projections (where source domain determines some of the conceptual structure of the target domain).⁷⁹ Contrary to what Kennedy and Vervaeke think, "it is not the case that conceptual structure either pre-exists in a finished and fixed realm of its own, or else that it is all radically constructed."⁸⁰ There is a reciprocal relationship between domains which create an ambiguity between which features are constitutive and which are pre-existing.

Johnson highlights five criticisms Kennedy and Vervaeke have pointed out. He takes seriously their criticism that he had not provided adequate criteria for identifying image schema and for determining which schemas are

⁷⁷ Ibid., 412.

⁷⁸ Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor and Embodied Structures Of Meaning: A Reply To Kennedy and Vervaeke," *Philosophical Psychology* 6, no. 4 (December 1993): 415.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 417.

indispensable.⁸¹ He claims that “the image schemas that turn out to be indispensable are those that turn out to be necessary in order for us to do the semantics and syntax of natural languages and other forms of symbolic communication.”⁸² This is determined through experience and practice, and not through an *a priori* structure of pure reason. The image schemas which are indispensable in one context may not be so in another. Johnson avoids being prescriptive with his approach because this would be antithetical to it.

Johnson notices that Kennedy and Vervaeke give special attention to their misrepresentation of his position when they claim that the experiential grounding of logic is found in the commonalities between domains. Johnson points out that, for him, the “differences between two domains are just as important as their similarities.”⁸³ Metaphors are always partial mappings, highlighting certain aspects while hiding or diminishing others.⁸⁴ Johnson admits that his is a work in progress and that some of these critiques will help to tighten these developing theories.

Kennedy and Vervaeke have continued their engagement with Johnson and the conceptual metaphor camp as the years have passed. Their 2004 essay *Conceptual Metaphor and Abstract Thought* engages with David Ritchie and Raymond Gibbs who write in defense of Johnson and the conceptual metaphor approach.⁸⁵ The heart of this conversation is the dispute over the extent and nature of the function of metaphor in conceptual experience and reasoning.⁸⁶

⁸¹ See, Kennedy and Vervaeke, “Metaphor And Knowledge Attained Via The Body,” 410.

⁸² Johnson, “Conceptual Metaphor and Embodied Structures Of Meaning: A Reply To Kennedy and Vervaeke,” 419.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See, Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 10-13.

⁸⁵ See, John M. Kennedy and John Vervaeke, “Conceptual Metaphor and Abstract Thought,” *Metaphor and Symbol* 19, no. 3 (2004): 213–231, and Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., “Evaluating Contemporary Models of Figurative Language Understanding,” *Metaphor & Symbol*, 2001, Vol. 16 Issue 3/4: 295-317, and David Ritchie, ““ARGUMENT IS WAR”-Or is it a Game of Chess? Multiple Meanings in the Analysis of Implicit Metaphors.” *Metaphor & Symbol*, 2003, Vol. 18 Issue 2: 125-146.

⁸⁶ Kennedy and Vervaeke, “Conceptual Metaphor and Abstract Thought,” 215.

The danger that Kennedy and Vervaeke see is that if, through metaphor, abstract thought is rooted in embodied experience, then the more nuanced and abstracted thinking “is being reduced to a more primitive material (with fewer aspects and nuances).”⁸⁷ This critique is an important one, highlighting a concern for Johnson (who is firmly against reductionism), but one that he would surely disagree with.

The inclination to see this type of metaphoric thinking as being reductionistic is plausible and tempting because of how metaphors are related to one another. A specific and explicit metaphor often draws upon a more hidden fundamental metaphor. The metaphor “Life is a Highway”, for example, made popular by Tom Cochrane’s 1991 hit song, draws upon the more basic metaphor ‘life is a journey’.⁸⁸ The existence of this metaphor draws upon the image schema of source-path-goal. So, in life we are on a journey, we are traveling along a trajectory from our source to our goal and we are somewhere in the middle. The highway metaphor, through its relationship with these other more basic and informing images, could be seen to be a reductionistic tendency. Johnson views these types of relationships between the concepts and language to be strong and even states that there are causal relationships between these metaphors and how we experience the world.⁸⁹ Kennedy and Vervaeke have a fundamental disagreement. They hold on to the view that metaphors express literal meanings, and that there is no causation between the metaphors we speak and how we think.⁹⁰

The key issues at stake between Johnson and his critics come down to a few vital points: (1) the ability of metaphors to cause thoughts, and (2) whether or not Johnson’s understanding of conceptual metaphors are reductionistic in nature.

⁸⁷ Ibid. The conceptual metaphor ‘camp’ would argue that the opposite is actually the case, that nuance is actually gained through an embodied understanding of rationality and metaphor.

⁸⁸ Tom Cochrane, “Life Is A Highway” in *Mad Mad World*, (Capitol Records, 1991).

⁸⁹ The conceptual metaphors held cause a certain disposition to the world which allow for experiences to be understood in a particular way.

⁹⁰ Kennedy and Vervaeke do admit that there is some influence saying, “Metaphors do influence thought, because we communicate vital ideas via metaphors.” They see metaphor analysis as a vital practice.

Johnson contends that he has satisfactorily answered these criticisms. In any case, Kennedy and Vervaeke's engagement with Johnson is focused around his early work in developing a new approach to metaphor. Much of Johnson's later work uses metaphor as an entry point into how humans think and ultimately make meaning. It is here that some of his strongest philosophical work has been done. Johnson's work on aesthetics and meaning-making are presented in his latest work, which moves beyond the concerns that Kennedy and Vervaeke raise. An analysis of this later work will now be undertaken.

5.7 Towards an Aesthetic of Living

One of the more compelling aspects of Johnson's work, beyond his ability to provide an alternative to the rationalistic models of abstract thought, is his work on aesthetics, specifically, the relation of aesthetics to life.

Johnson states in the preface of *The Meaning Of The Body: Aesthetics Of Human Understanding*, that "Meaning grows from the visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life."⁹¹ What becomes meaningful is not only mediated but created through the body. He notes here a slight departure or development from his previous work, saying:

My work over the past three decades has focused primarily on the bodily sources of meaning, imagination, and reasoning. I drew from phenomenology, linguistics and the newly emerging cognitive sciences to explain how aspects of our bodily experience give rise to our conceptualization and reasoning. However, I have come to realize that, even though I then regarded these earlier efforts as revealing the very heart of human meaning-making, nevertheless, I had not grasped the deepest and most-profound bodily sources of meaning. In retrospect, I now see that the structural aspects of our bodily interactions with our environment upon which I was focusing were themselves dependent upon even more submerged dimensions of bodily understanding...what is now needed is a far deeper exploration into the qualities, feelings, emotions, and bodily processes that make meaning possible.⁹²

Johnson realizes that although he appeared to have been working with fundamental aspects of human meaning-making, there is another level still hidden from view. While being productive and effective, his work still could not escape the heritage of elevating the concept, which has been characteristic of

⁹¹ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body: Aesthetics Of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), ix.

⁹² Ibid., ix-x.

modern philosophy. He calls for a renewed and broadened understanding of aesthetics as “the study of everything that goes into the human capacity to make and experience meaning.”⁹³ He is proposing, then, that instead of being relegated to the periphery of philosophy (the realm of art and beauty), aesthetics will become central to philosophy, enabling a new basis of knowledge and logic. This allows a new understanding of mind and language. To achieve this he argues that meaning is not merely in the realm of concepts and proposition, but it “also reaches down into the images, sensorimotor schemas, feelings, qualities, and emotions that constitute our meaningful encounter with our world.”⁹⁴

For Johnson, “what we call ‘mind’, and what we call ‘body’ are not two things, but rather aspects of one organic process.”⁹⁵ He argues that “all meaning, thought, and language emerge from the aesthetic dimensions of embodied activity.”⁹⁶ This is his central thesis in *The Meaning of the Body*, and all his arguments and findings follow from it. Each person is a unique collection of body, mind and environment: “Change your brain, your body, or your environments in nontrivial ways, and you will change how you experience your world, what things are meaningful to you, and even who you are.”⁹⁷

This, of course, runs in opposition to the understandings of the disembodied mind and the objectivist assumptions of modern thought. Johnson acknowledges, however, that the separation between body and mind is not a fabricated theory, but indeed has its origins in how we experience the world. Our bodies hide themselves, to an extent, from our minds. Johnson notes that “all our acts of perception are directed *to* or *at* what is experienced and *away from* the body doing the perceiving.”⁹⁸ He cites Polanyi, who says, “our body is the only assembly of things known almost exclusively by relying on our

⁹³ Ibid., x.

⁹⁴ Ibid., xi.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 4, emphasis is Johnson’s own.

awareness of them for attending to something else...Every time we make sense of the world we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts.”⁹⁹ Johnson reflects that “we are aware of what we see, but not of our seeing.”¹⁰⁰ We experience the world as being outside of, and separate from, ourselves because of the sensory phenomenon of our bodies hiding themselves within perception.

It is to be expected, then, that the strict dichotomies between mind and body have arisen. There is, moreover, a whole host of related dichotomies which give rise to the idea of fundamental ontological separations: cognition/emotion, fact/value, knowledge/imagination, and thought/feeling.¹⁰¹ These are “so deeply embedded in our western ways of thinking that we find it almost impossible to avoid framing our understanding of mind and thought dualistically.”¹⁰² Our language repeats it and enforces these dualisms over and over until they are assumed.¹⁰³

A fundamental shift is required, involving a de-emphasis on propositional forms of knowledge and meaning. Johnson does not go so far as to deny its existence, but states plainly that propositional thinking is “dependent on the nature of our embodied, immanent meaning.”¹⁰⁴ It is through living in the world and making experiential connections through the input of our bodies that things become

⁹⁹ Michael Polanyi, *Knowing And Being*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), cited by Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 5.

¹⁰¹ See, Ibid 7.

¹⁰² Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 7.

¹⁰³ Wittgenstein affirms this in his well known passage, “A Picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.” Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), §115, 48.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 9. Here the crossover with the language of Christ is interesting, especially in the context of this thesis where the biography of the immanent embodied Christ enables others to participate in a particular way of living. Later in the thesis these links will be made, and an argument for biographical theology and embodied immanent meaning making will be with more force and clarity in light of Johnson’s insights.

meaningful to us. “Meaning is relational”, Johnson claims, “it is about how one thing relates to or connects with other things.”¹⁰⁵

This approach to knowing and meaning has significant ramifications for how problems are faced. Johnson highlights seven of these implications of taking embodiment seriously: 1. there is no radical mind/body separation; 2. meaning is grounded in our bodily experience; 3. reason is an embodied process; 4. imagination is tied to our bodily processes and can also be creative and transformative of experience; 5. there is no radical freedom; 6. Reason and emotion are inextricably intertwined; and 7. human spirituality is embodied.¹⁰⁶

Johnson argues that the body is central and must be embraced fully if we are to be faithful as humans in engaging how we interact, experience, and think of our social and physical environments. This involves perception as much as it does cognition. Johnson moves on from this point to explore the human phenomenon of felt physical sensations and how this may be a basis for meaning. He explores movement and how this has metaphoric connections throughout our thought-world.¹⁰⁷ Movement is known to us through its qualities. It is the qualitative differences that make one type of movement mean something other than another type of movement. Johnson identifies four of these qualities. Tension, linearity, amplitude, and projection each provide a qualitative sense of what a movement is, and what it means in its context.¹⁰⁸

Admittedly, Johnson uses meaning in a broader way than what is common to philosophy, but this is located at the very center of his argument: “The key to my entire argument is that meaning is not just what is consciously entertained in acts of feeling and thought; instead, meaning reaches down deep into our corporeal encounter with our environment.”¹⁰⁹ This creates a less stable, more dynamic understanding of meaning which is always “in the making”. What these

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson treats each of these briefly in *The Meaning of the Body*, 11-15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 19-22.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson describes each in *The Meaning of the Body*, 22-24.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 25.

qualities mean is learned in part throughout our lives and in part, perhaps, through the evolutionary process. The meaning is apprehended “by the quality of differing experiences, but that meaning is prepared and developed in our nonconscious bodily perceptions and movements.”¹¹⁰

The language of relationship is effective in this approach to meaning. A responsive pattern is inevitable and appropriate for knowledge. One relates to the other which, in turn, shapes how the other relates back to it. Johnson’s proposals make this the case for meaning. He returns to metaphor to make a point about time and motion. There are significant overlaps in our conception of time with our experience of motion. Johnson presents it as follows:

The Moving Time Metaphor.¹¹¹

Source Domain (spatial motion)	Target Domain (temporal change)
Location of Observer	The Present
Space in Front of Observer	The Future
Space Behind Observer	The Past
Moving Objects	Times
Motion of Objects Past Observer	The “Passage” of Time

There is another similar metaphor concerning motion and time, yet the difference is what is moving and what is stationary. Instead of time moving, it is the observer that moves.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 29.

Source Domain (spatial motion)	Target Domain (temporal change)
Location of Observer	The Present
Space in Front of Observer	The Future
Space Behind Observer	The Past
Locations on Observer's Path Of Motion	Times
Distance Moved By Observer	Amount of Time "Passed"

Here, the subtle differences play out in how we speak about time and our relation to it. We speak of an event moving closer, of ourselves having come a long way since a certain time, of "how that meeting dragged on", "how this week flew by." All of this is in relation to one of these time metaphors. It is through the bodily experience of motion, and how it is mapped on to the abstract concept of time, that we experience the meaning of time. It is mapping that "constitutes our conceptual understanding and guides our reasoning about time. And the mapping is, in turn, the basis for the language we use to talk about time."¹¹³ This demonstrates how, for Johnson, an embodied phenomenon (like movement) is connected with more abstract concepts (like time) through metaphor. This is a pattern of meaning-making, and seeing it as such leads to an understanding of meaning that is not pure in the sense of being unchanging and objective, but is immanent, with its source being human bodies in context.

Johnson goes on to argue that this process of meaning-making is seen in how babies learn. He argues in the chapter entitled "Big Babies" that while babies do not think in propositions or abstract concepts, they are able to make meaning and learn how to navigate the world as they know it. Johnson then proposes that adults are merely big babies using the same qualitative data of the world to

¹¹² Ibid., 30.

¹¹³ Ibid., 31.

make meaning and learn. It is the “immanent, preconceptual, and nonpropositional meaning [that] is the basis for all forms of meaning.”¹¹⁴

A key implication of this is the connection that a child makes between what is said and what is done. For example, when a mother offers a “there, there, there” to a baby while soothing them with a comforting touch, Johnson claims that “what the mother *says* and what the mother *does* manifest[s] the same contour of feeling.”¹¹⁵ There is a qualitative connection between content and method. It is the *way* things affect us, and the feelings they evoke, that create meaning. The content is surely relevant to that, but so is the method or the style, what Johnson calls, “the aesthetic dimension.” Our bodies have various systems in operation at all times creating a complex interplay between hormonal, chemical, mental, emotional and physical experiences. These operate mainly non-consciously, yet in a large part determine what becomes meaningful.

Within this line of reasoning, Johnson looks at emotions in the third chapter “Since Feeling is First” at great length. He argues that the traditional emotional vs. rational dualism is unnecessary and false. In brief: “by the time we feel an emotion, a mostly unconscious assessment has occurred of the situation we find ourselves in....We have *perceived and understood* our situation in a certain light, although with little or no conscious reflection.”¹¹⁶ Because this happens constantly, how we experience the world occurs primarily through our emotions. Our emotions shape the input (of experiential data) prior to our explicitly cognitive functioning and critical thinking have begun to operate or formulate ‘thoughts’.

Johnson draws heavily on the American pragmatists John Dewey (1859-1952) and William James (1842-1910), and finds, in these often overlooked philosophers, something which is now being strengthened through cognitive science. He finds in them (and in the work of Merleau-Ponty) an elevation of the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 43, emphasis is Johnson’s own. Here, Johnson draws upon the work of Daniel Stern’s, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

pre-conceptual and embodied systems at work in thought before the scientific community had empirical evidence to suggest that this was indeed the case. Johnson asserts that “the heart of all pragmatist philosophy is the fundamental understanding that thinking is doing, and that cognition is action.”¹¹⁷ He explains that “conceptualizing [is] a continuous process of attending to various aspects of our experience and putting them to use as part of inquiry.”¹¹⁸ There is indeed something about humans which has evolved to make us different and it is evident within this phenomenon of conceptualization. Johnson says, “It is our capacity for abstract thought—for discerning functional relations and implications—that permit us to plan, reason, and theorize. Herein lies a certain evolutionary advantage that we have accrued when it comes to our ability to identify and solve certain highly complex problems”.¹¹⁹

Johnson finds this pragmatist understanding of thought-as-action compelling, and it directly relates to James’s pragmatic rule of meaning which is “that the meaning of a concept is a matter of its consequence for our present and future thought and action.”¹²⁰ This direct linking of meaning to thought and action adds immediacy to meaning. This, in turn, corresponds with Johnson’s emphasis upon immanent meaning rather than the abstract conceptual-propositional meaning he wants to move away from.

Johnson points out that one of the most important implications of this pragmatist view of meaning is that “even our most abstract concepts will have a meaning which is grounded in perception and bodily experience. This is the only way it can be if concepts are not disembodied.”¹²¹ He continues, stating that “our capacity to abstract farther and farther away from the concrete richness of felt experience is still always and only *abstraction* and selection from the flow of perception.”¹²²

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 91-92.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹²¹ Ibid., 92.

¹²² Ibid., 93. Emphasis is Johnson’s own.

There is both a gain and a loss in this abstraction. What we gain is the ability to generalize and map across situations and types, creating prototypes for cross domain mapping. This was briefly looked at above, by introducing Turner and Fauconnier work on conceptual blending. It allows for the complex rationality and creativity that is indicative of our species. What is lost, however, is the immediate connection with the felt and qualitative dimension of our experience. The constant abstraction through rationalization creates a separation between (the qualities of) our experiences and our subsequent thoughts about them. Only those chosen few aspects of experience that are deemed relevant will be rationalized; all others will be discarded.

In Johnson's proposal of understanding thought, reasoning is "our intelligent-animal way of working through the implications of situations in pursuit of an embodied understanding that allows us to function successfully, more or less, within the problematic situations we inhabit."¹²³ Thinking, then, is part of an embodied process involving actual physical changes and operations in our brains. Over time, the way we think and reason becomes more patterned, and shapes the way we perceive. The perception/conception divide is lessened. Or, as Johnson says, "Logical thinking can thereby actually change experience, because it is in and of that experience."¹²⁴ Johnson returns to this point later in his work as a crucial lesson to be learned from cognitive science and the work of John Dewey.

Describing the connection of philosophy, thinking, and meaning making with the human body, has been the task of Mark Johnson's career. Meaning is difficult. It is made without our conscious making of it, and it shapes us in ways we can only begin to understand. Johnson is arguing for a new understanding of meaning that is fully embodied. According to Johnson, this new understanding has been emerging for a number of reasons:

¹²³ *The Meaning of the Body*, 97.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

1) the re-birth of interest in pragmatist views of experience, meaning, and value (e.g. the new pragmatists)¹²⁵; 2) the phenomenology of embodied mind, especially in the style of Merleau-Ponty and, to a lesser extent, parts of Heidegger and Husserl that focus on the lifeworld; 3) second-generation cognitive science, which pursues empirical studies of embodied cognition (in psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and anthropology; and 4) ecological philosophies that emphasize organism-environment processes of meaning-making that acknowledge the human connection to other animal species and to the more-than-human world.¹²⁶

With these influences upon current thinking on embodied understandings, Johnson proposes that meaning is “a matter of relations and connections grounded in bodily organism-environment coupling, or interaction. The meaning of something is its relations, actual and potential, to other qualities, things, events and experiences.¹²⁷ This understanding, and its corresponding use, holds that meaning has functional and pervasive qualities.

Johnson continues explaining his forming theory of meaning, saying, “Meaning is thus both (1) grounded in our bodily interactions—in the qualities and structures of objective situations; and (2) always social, because it would not exist in its fullness without communicative interactions and shared language, which give us the means of exploring the meaning of things.”¹²⁸ These two aspects of our human lives, embodied and social, form the two main relational spheres of life. The first sphere relates to our physical bodies interacting with our physical environments, and the second relates to the people, communities and traditions we find ourselves within. Because of these relations, “things, qualities, events, symbols, have meaning *for us* because of how they connect with other aspects of our actual or possible experience.”¹²⁹ Through these spheres we organize our thought, forming categories and abstract ideas which help create the way we speak and live in the world.

¹²⁵ Among these “new pragmatists” Johnson cites John McDermott, John Lachs, Hilary Putnam, Tom Alexander, and others.

¹²⁶ *The Meaning of the Body*, 264.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

Through the Enlightenment and into the modern period of philosophy, what has counted as meaningful has been narrowed. Johnson cites Dewey on this point:

Enter upon this road (of abstraction) and the time is sure to come when the appropriate object-of-knowledge is stripped of all that is immediate and qualitative, of all that is final, self-sufficient. Then it becomes an anatomized epitome of just and only those traits which are of indicative and instrumental import.¹³⁰

So, while some important and obvious traits have been given priority, much of what makes those aspects meaningful has been overlooked. This, says Johnson, is a serious problem. He says, “if our philosophies—our most comprehensive accounts of the meaning of things—are grounded on the most partial or superficial aspects of experience, then our entire understanding of life will be drastically impoverished.”¹³¹ And, as Johnson sees it, part of the task of philosophy is to “help us recover the fullest possible meaning of our experience—the pulsating lived world that transcends any conceptual specification of it.”¹³²

This requires attending to the deeper, yet more transient, aspects of life, the mysteries and the vapors of our world, and how to live within them. What this means for philosophy (and as I will argue, theology), is that special attention must be paid to those things which have been overlooked, or, according to Johnson, to those aspects of meaning which he has been highlighting, namely, “image schema, qualities, emotions, affect contours, and conceptual metaphor [which] are dismissed as falling outside the domain of meaning proper.”¹³³ For Johnson, the problem arises when the most simplistic or obvious dimensions of experience (those that are formative in abstract thinking) come to dominate and set the agenda for what is meaningful. These things tend to promote the dualisms that he is seeking to do away with.

¹³⁰ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 1, *The Later Works 1925-1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1925), 106, quoted in Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 270.

¹³¹ Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body*, 270.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 271.

5.8 Summary

In summary, Johnson highlights nine implications of what meaning is and how we as humans make it. He suggests that instead of focusing on the abstract “higher” thought to find what is most meaningful, we should be attending to those things which are more basic, such as the qualities and feelings of experience. The nine considerations are implicated and transformed in this way of thinking about meaning are as follows:

1. *Mind and body are not two things.* The mind is closely interrelated to the bodies we have. They operate so seamlessly with each other that to hold a strict distinction does a disservice to how we operate as humans.¹³⁴
2. *Human meaning is embodied.* How humans learn to function in our roles as physical and social creatures, or how we make meaning, is initiated through and by our bodies. Meaning, therefore, is thoroughly embodied, and our feelings and sensations of experiences are what primarily dictate the meaning placed on events and the learned structures of our lives.¹³⁵
3. *Understanding and reasoning are embodied.* The understanding that our bodies and brains work together in such a way that the perception and conception of events are inextricably linked, has very serious philosophical implications. Johnson notes here that resources for making sense are primarily based in “our sensorimotor capacities, which have neural connections to other parts of the brain responsible for planning, deliberating, and reasoning.”¹³⁶
4. *Human beings are metaphorical creatures.* The use of metaphor in how humans think and speak is indicative of how they form concepts which shape experience. This has been a thesis of Johnson’s for many years and is at the center of his project as it unites explicit, reflective and abstract thinking with qualitative experiences in our lives. The alternative (literalism) “is misleading because it tempts you back into the traditional narrow focus on reference and truth conditions as the sole basis for meaning.”¹³⁷ Literalism leads to

¹³⁴ Ibid., 279.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Johnson notes here as well, that this is a fairly new hypothesis and that while there is only a modest amount of evidence for this claim it is gaining ground and is, he considers, “the most strongly supported hypothesis” that articulates a “nondualistic, naturalistic view of mind.”

¹³⁷ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 280

fundamentalism and other forms of reductionistic thinking which seek to find less things more meaningful, rather than finding more things equally vital for meaning.

5. *There is no absolute truth, but there are plenty of human truths.* Truth within this understanding of human meaning-making is necessarily contextual and embodied, arising out of the social and physical environments of people. Truth is determined within the environments and communities as they form beliefs based on their experiences.¹³⁸
6. *Human Freedom.* This point is not elaborated much by Johnson in his work, but he states that we have a “modest freedom to contribute to transformations of our situation, and thereby to self-transformations.”¹³⁹ Humans are not, then, in complete control of what they believe and experience.
7. *The person you are cannot survive the death of your body.* Johnson here notes that this statement may be shocking and possibly frightening but, according to his view, there cannot be existence as we know it without the body we know it with. Our experience is known through and with our body and to believe otherwise is not founded upon any evidence. He notes that if anything does survive it would not be human as we know it.¹⁴⁰
8. *Embodied spirituality.* I will return to this notion below, but let me make the note that Johnson sees spirituality arising from the depth of the human body. There are human virtues which arise across cultures and environments which point toward a way of being in the world which recognizes a deep and true, though mysterious, dimension that can be understood through the complexities of the human body in interaction with the physical and social world.
9. *Philosophy as a search for meaning.* Johnson sees philosophy as a being concerned with the deepest and most meaningful ways of understanding experience. In pursuits of absolutes or objectivity, philosophy has become abstracted from how humans experience. Johnson argues that the concept of the embodied mind is a way back. Philosophy can be relevant to people once

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 280-281.

again, through highlighting the visceral connections to the world. Johnson understands pragmatism as being concerned with “discerning the full meaning of experience and transforming experience for the better.”¹⁴¹ If understood with these assumptions, philosophy can be “the most meaningful and powerful way we have of trying to live rightly and well.”¹⁴²

Johnson’s project allows a new way forward for philosophy. It takes seriously the work of recent science in the search for an empirically responsible philosophy that seeks to deepen people’s experience of living. Johnson sees that through embracing the embodied nature of our existence, we may be able to achieve more than we would if trying to escape it. This approach to philosophy is relevant to, and constructive for the type of theology McClendon practices. Making these connections will be the task of the remaining chapters, as an empathic response to the work and trajectory McClendon himself left.

Johnson ultimately concludes by stating, “We are born into this world, make of it what we can while we live, and return to its earthliness when, at last, our functional integrity disintegrates forever. The art of our lives is the art of the meaning of the body. In some people, it is beautiful art.”¹⁴³ In method and content, biography tells of an embodied practice of life. The practice of biography as theology can surely gain from the work of Mark Johnson.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 282.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 283.

Chapter Six. Initial Integrations

6.1 The Theological Application of Mark Johnson

Taking Johnson's contributions from a philosophical context and bringing them to a theological context is not an entirely novel undertaking. Johnson himself engages in some explicitly theological categories, and others in the theological world have begun to notice the benefits of his contribution. My aim in this chapter is to apply Johnson's contribution to McClendon's theological method to enhance and renew McClendon's work for contemporary theology. I begin by looking at how Johnson engages with some of the theological implications of his own thought, alongside James K.A. Smith. This will introduce the subsequent discussion concerning the convictional overlap between Johnson and McClendon, before moving on to look at the three key areas where a synthesis of their thought can be achieved.

Mark Johnson in Smith's Imagining the Kingdom

While not extensively so, Johnson has nevertheless been influential in some recent works of theology. One work in particular which stands out as being a relevant contribution to the aims of this project is James K. A. Smith's *Imagining the Kingdom*.¹ In what he calls the "cultural liturgies project", Smith asks fundamental questions of education via anthropology and a phenomenology of cultural liturgies.² In his first volume *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith departs from the educational tradition which places priority upon the concept and knowledge in its propositional form, and instead wants to recover the notion of formation for how Christians educate.³ Smith points to an understanding of the human person as 'lover', which highlights how the desires and longings of a person formulate much of what motivates them, rather than their explicit beliefs which can be systematically stated.

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013).

² *Imagining the Kingdom* is the second volume of the proposed three volume project.

³ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009).

The “core intuitions” Smith unpacks in the first volume are that he:

- Understands human persons as *embodied actors* rather than merely thinking things;
- Prioritizes *practices* rather than ideas as the site of challenge and resistance;
- Looks at cultural practices and institutions through the lens of worship or liturgy;
- Retains a robust sense of *antithesis* without being simply “anti-cultural.”⁴

Smith suggests that “behind every pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology”,⁵ and seeks to develop an anthropological approach which will contribute to formulating a new understanding of Christian education and worship. As a part of this, Smith explores the practices and formative habits of culture versus the formative practices (or lack thereof) of the Church in how worship is approached.

In *Imagining the Kingdom* Smith continues along this path and explores issues concerning embodiment, perception, habit, and finding a faithful place between the purely conceptual and the wholly corporeal. Through the work of Merleau-Ponty, Smith locates resources to find a middle ground between objective knowledge and perception. Merleau-Ponty provides Smith with the means to situate knowledge within perception. Under this view, perception is seen as a “fundamentally different (and primary) way of intending the world, of meaning the world with the body.”⁶ This leaves Smith with the task of “coming up with a theory of perception that does justice to the fact that we don’t, first and foremost, *think* about the world”.⁷ Smith applies Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term *praktognosia*, which is a kind of ‘know how’, to describe an embodied understanding of, or orientation to, our environment.⁸ It describes a tacit

⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵ Ibid., 37.

⁶ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 72. The echoes of Johnson here are obvious. As noted previously, Johnson was heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty. Smith draws mainly from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962).

⁷ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 73.

⁸ Ibid., 56.

knowledge which is beyond explicit verbal or conceptual grasp (the similarities with Johnson here are apparent).

From here, Smith turns to Pierre Bordieu, who has sought to develop a “theory of practice”, which “calls for an adequate understanding of the nature of practice as its own irreducible know-how” while recognizing that “an adequate theory of practice requires a theoretical account of what we’re doing when we scientifically reflect on practice.”⁹ To achieve this, Smith picks up on Bordieu’s use of *habitus* as a concept which seeks to understand “practitioners as practitioners, as fundamentally ‘doers’ who are *acting* in and upon their world, not just ‘thinkers’ who happen to be doing stuff.”¹⁰ Smith is drawn to *habitus* because, with it, Bordieu says “that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions.”¹¹ This is called the *habitus*, “which is constituted in practice and is always oriented toward practical functions.”¹² Smith explains how *habitus* has both a social and bodily emphasis: “I need the community and social body to enable me to perceive the world; however, the social body needs my body to instantiate its vision and practice.”¹³ So, *habitus* combines the idea of perception through a socially constructed, yet thoroughly embodied, formation.

For Smith, both of these thinkers provide the means with which to recognize and approach “the between” which is “the middle space of our being-in-the-world—between instinct and intellect, between reflex and reflexivity.”¹⁴ This ‘between-ness’ is a way to “break out of the false dichotomies between freedom and determinism, intellect and instinct.”¹⁵ This “between” is where Smith is key

⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰ Ibid., 80, emphasis is Smith’s own.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic Of Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52, cited in Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 80-81.

¹² Bourdieu, *The Logic Of Practice*, 52.

¹³ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 82.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵ Ibid., 84.

to developing an approach to Christian worship and formation. Johnson is acknowledged throughout Smith's work for his similarities to Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, but Smith does not engage with Johnson in detail until after these two theorists have prepared the way for Johnson's contribution to perception, human understanding and embodiment.

It is with skill that Smith navigates the middle or "the between" of knowledge, thought, and embodied physical existence with the dynamic social and narrative forces at work. There remains, however, inevitable ambiguity. This middle connects the conscious and abstract with the pre-conscious bodily perceptions involved in our experience and understandings. Smith cites Johnson as evidence of work being done in this difficult place, and as providing an approach to how one takes the step between the (knowledge of) body (which he argues for through Merleau-Ponty and Bordieu) and the mind (which has been the emphasis of a vast amount of contemporary scholarship and Christian worship).

Smith notes that Johnson's project of discovering how things become meaningful to us is based on the form of our incarnation (embodiment).¹⁶ This type of body and this type of environment interact to create meaning that is applied to everything from a look, to a sentence, to a loud noise far away. Meanings like this do not appear out of nowhere, but, as Smith notes, are continually in-the-making from our embodied process. Smith highlights the theological significance of this, saying, "there is a creational, almost incarnational impulse here: a desire to honor the finite (and good!) conditions of our being-in-the-world—just those conditions which God condescends in meeting us and revealing himself to us, and the same conditions by which the Spirit molds and (re)makes us."¹⁷ He claims that if Johnson's account of embodiment is accurate, this type of knowledge is crucial for theology. Smith notes further that the conditions of our experience are then "the conditions under which God's revelation would have to be manifest" in order for it to be received by humanity.¹⁸ This type of reflection on ourselves is vital theologically,

¹⁶ cf. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, ix.

¹⁷ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 111.

¹⁸ Ibid., n16.

Smith enforces, “simply to recognize the conditions of creaturehood to which God condescends to meet us and mold us.”¹⁹

Engaging with Johnson’s theory of meaning-making, Smith notes that what is required for making meaning is threefold: (1) a brain, located in (2) a body that is engaging with (3) an environment. Smith observes that certain Christian readers may be wary at this point that there is no room for God in this meaning system. He urges this type of reader to carefully consider that “God’s revelation and presence can constitute part of the environment of our experience, and our intersubjective relationship to God is the most fundamental aspect of ‘social’ cognition.”²⁰ To accept Johnson’s conditions, he continues, “is far from accepting a naturalism: it can be a way of recognizing the conditions of goodness of creation—conditions God designed to inhabit in an ‘incarnational’ move, both in the Incarnation and in his self-revelation.”²¹

Johnson confirms Dewey’s claim that the mind emerges rather than simply exists. He explains: “It is ... accurate to say that we are not born with minds fully formed and ready for thinking. Instead, we acquire ‘minds’ through our coordinated sharing of meaning and our concomitant ability to engage in symbolic interaction.”²² Mind, then, “is an achievement, not a pre-given faculty.”²³ It is through the course of our lives that we name and recognize our abilities to make meaning and use rationality. Smith recognizes that this will have implications on how one is to have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16 cf. Phil 2:5). Smith suggests, “Perhaps the mind of Christ is also something acquired through practice and formation, something that emerges as a result of sanctification rather than informational deposit.”²⁴ In this way, Smith infers that holiness and sanctification would take on a more embodied role. He speculates that this would involve the Holy Spirit reconfiguring the very

¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

²⁰ Ibid., 112.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 151.

²³ Ibid., 152.

²⁴ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 114.

mappings of our neurons so that one may perceive the world in a way that is holy.²⁵ This incorporates the more holistic approach to knowledge and practice, which Smith wants to use in re-understanding the nature of worship.

What is needed to achieve this approach to worship is a tool that can grasp the complex and hidden ability of being able to communicate meaning beyond what can be explicitly vocalized or put into propositions. Smith notes that what Johnson does with metaphor allows this to happen. Metaphor generates, says Smith, “an excess of meaning that I ‘get’ without being able to say. The metaphorical sum is greater than the analytic parts.”²⁶ Johnson’s work has been fueled through the metaphoric phenomenon, and has led to the development of a much broader theory, but metaphor is still at the nexus of human meaning and the human body. Here, Smith points to another theologian, Jeremy Begbie. Begbie, who grasps metaphor in a similar way to Johnson, says:

A metaphor generates a whole set of new meanings for us, and just because they are generated this way, these meanings can be apprehended only through this metaphor, by being drawn into its life. Thus metaphor is irreducible: it cannot be translated into another form of language without loss of meaning. As we all know, you cannot convert a metaphor into a literal statement without robbing it of its content and power.²⁷

Begbie displays here a deep understanding of the way metaphor functions. The attempt of many people over many years to explicate the meaning of metaphor in literal statements does a disservice to its potential. Begbie, working with music and worship theory, goes on to argue that music is a type of metaphor.²⁸

Smith argues, with Johnson, that metaphor is our way of navigating much of our being-in-the-world.²⁹ Smith notes how Johnson argues that even our abstract thinking has its roots in our embodied perceptions of the world

²⁵ Ibid., 113.

²⁶ Ibid., 117.

²⁷ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), cited in Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 117-118.

²⁸ McClendon makes a similar argument in the chapter on Charles Ives in, *Bio.*, Chapter 6, 114-141.

²⁹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 118.

conceptualized through metaphor. Smith sees Johnson's greatest contribution here. Johnson enables Smith's project to find a new relationship between worship and worldview, between liturgy and theology. Johnson's work "prompts us to think about Christian faith not simply as a set of fundamental beliefs but also as a fund of primary *metaphors* that attune us to the world on an 'aesthetic' register."³⁰ It will, moreover "enable us to consider how liturgies, broadly speaking—and Christian worship, more specifically—function not just on a conceptual (didactic) level but also at the level of conceptual metaphor, indeed, we might think of worship as a constellation of conceptual metaphors."³¹

Smith uses Johnson's work to explain how it is possible that habits and practices, which are rooted in embodied conceptual metaphors, come to form how we perceive the world and act within it.

[B]ecause we first and foremost mean the world as incarnate actors, any meaningful liturgy is going to 'activate,' as it were, some of our primary metaphorical orientations: touch will resonate with INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS; rhythms of movement will active our sense that PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS; the presentation of narratives will find some tangible ways to build on our primary metaphorical sense that TIME IS MOTION; and so forth. Rather than trafficking in abstract concepts that descend from on high, meaning-full liturgies that 'make sense' for us on this deep, aesthetic, metaphorical level successfully meet us in our embodiment and build the *praktognosia* we carry in our bones.³²

The system of conceptual metaphors which is engrained into the structure and perception of our embodied mind will prime us to see and experience the world, God, and others in a certain way. This has developed through our interaction in our physical, social environment. Smith concludes, then, that "we don't 'decide' to 'see' the world as creation or nature; we imbibe a metaphorical inclination, almost unavoidably, by being immersed in liturgical environments."³³ Johnson's metaphorical approach to meaning provides Smith with the necessary theory with which to form his new approach to Christian worship work. It is through a kind of "aesthetic alchemy", Smith argues, that these deep metaphors which

³⁰ Ibid., 119.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 123.

³³ Ibid., 124.

give shape to the practices and liturgies in our world shape our perceptions and desires. Being aware of this, the theologian must respond accordingly.

For Smith, this response should inform churches and Christian educational institutions that the form of their worship and practice matters as much as the content.³⁴ He argues that repetition is a virtue not a vice,³⁵ and that the Christian narrative must be honed, shown, and displayed to counter the narratives of culture.³⁶ Smith's engagement with Johnson reveals much of the potential for his [Johnson's] work to contribute to the field of theology. Through the epistemological and anthropological implications of Johnson's work, a more holistic approach to Christian formation and living can be derived.

Intriguingly Smith does not deal with Johnson's proposal of embodied spirituality. This is an interesting omission by Smith, as it seems to fit with his project. A brief look at Johnson's proposals will round out an account of how he may be used for theology.

Embodied Spirituality

Johnson first introduces the concept of an embodied spirituality in *Philosophy in the Flesh*, when discussing the embodied mind and spirituality. Johnson is critical of any religious conception that holds any sort of existence (i.e. of the mind, the spirit, or the soul)³⁷ that is seen as being possible apart from the body.³⁸ Johnson and Lakoff are clear on this point: "no such disembodied mind can exist. Whether you call it a mind or Soul, anything that both thinks and is free-floating is a myth. It cannot exist."³⁹ This conclusion is based on their research on embodiment through cognitive and neuroscience. They see religion with a concept of an embodied spirit in which the spirit or soul is shaped

³⁴ Ibid., 166-169.

³⁵ Ibid., 181-186.

³⁶ Ibid., 151-163.

³⁷ These concepts are notoriously murky and overlap considerably. Both Johnson and Lakoff mainly use them synonymously yet hold 'mind' as being primary while 'soul' and 'spirit' seem derivative of it.

³⁸ Johnson and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 563.

³⁹ Ibid.

through the embodied experiences of life as a reasonable alternative. This is the kind of soul which they could advocate for, but one which they do not find in most of the world's spiritual traditions. The question they are left with is: "if there is no disembodied mind or Soul, then what is the locus of the real spiritual experience that people have in cultures around the world?"⁴⁰ While they note that at least part of this question should be left to cognitive scientists to explore, some observations can be made.

When seen non-reductively, the body-mind (Johnson uses this term as an indication of his non-reductive theory of the union between the body and mind) has the ability to encompass much of what has traditionally been considered part of the soul or spirit. Our bodies facilitate our connection to the world. Through our actions in and with our environment, we are linked with it inextricably. "Our corporeality is part of the corporeality of the world", Johnson and Lakoff claim, but the mind is not only corporeal, "but also passionate, desiring, and social."⁴¹ These other aspects of ourselves create a vast horizon of possibilities and actualities which allow for a surplus of meaning to be available. Through the dynamic and ever adapting nature of the mind, experiences are formed which transcend its full comprehension or understanding.

Importantly, Johnson (and Lakoff) points to empathy as being chief among the mind's capabilities which leads to the experience of 'transcendence.'⁴² Empathy, or empathic projection allows people to experience or feel something which is not actually happening to them physically. When practiced intentionally, such as with meditation, empathic activities can "enhance our sense of being present in the world."⁴³ It is this empathic phenomenon that Johnson argues facilitates our ability to know our environment—"how we are part of it and how it is part of us."⁴⁴ Due to this, Johnson and Lakoff argue that an embodied spirituality is central to an ecological spirituality. Through empathically responding to the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 564.

⁴¹ Ibid., 565.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 566.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

world and, as Johnson and Lakoff argue, through the recognition that it [the world] is “more than human”, they propose that people can have an embodied spirituality that is not just a spiritual experience, but is “an ethical relationship to the physical world.”⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Johnson and Lakoff propose that it is “through metaphor, [that] the vividness, intensity, and meaningfulness of ordinary experience becomes the basis of a passionate spirituality.”⁴⁶ The connection, once again, is the body. “The mechanism of such metaphor is bodily. It is a neural mechanism that recruits our abilities to perceive, to move, to feel, and to envision in the service not only of theoretical and philosophical thought, but of spiritual experience.”⁴⁷ If, as Johnson and Lakoff argue, metaphor is central to our perception, and the formation of our imagination through which we employ empathy to know and respond to the world, an ethical (in the broad sense of an intentional way of living) posture is produced. How one lives, based on the various ways of seeing, knowing, and experiencing the world, has an irreducible ethical dimension to it.

Johnson clarifies this notion of embodied spirituality by highlighting what he calls *horizontal transcendence*. This is hinted at in his earlier work, but Johnson states it plainly, saying, “transcendence consists in our happy ability to sometimes ‘go beyond’ our present situation in transformative acts that change both our world and ourselves.”⁴⁸ This is tied to the ongoing process of change between a person and their environment, and also points to the finite or limited capacity of our conceptual and perceptual capacity. Within this outlook on transcendence, Johnson addresses some of the major virtues or themes in the Christian faith:

Faith thus becomes faith in the possibility of genuine, positive transformation that increases the richness of meanings, harmony among species, and flourishing, not just at the human level, but in the world as an ongoing creative development. *Hope* is commitment to the possibility of realizing some of this growth—not in some final eschatological transformation of the the world, but rather locally, in our day-to-day struggles and joys. *Grace* is the undeserved experience of transformative growth even in spite of your individual or communal

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 567.

⁴⁷ Ibid 568.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 281.

failures to do what would make things better. *Love* is a commitment to the well-being of others in a way that takes you at least partly beyond your ego-centered needs and desires and opens up your potential to respect and care for others and for your world.⁴⁹

Johnson's focus on reusing these words to describe the here and now of our finite existence gives priority to the achievable, yet limitless, good that is available for people to strive toward. While Johnson implies, and at places explicitly rejects, certain aspects of traditional Christian belief, his proposals nevertheless give a clear picture of how much of it can be preserved under his approach.

Johnson's intentional engagement with theological themes reveals some specific ways that his work changes how some traditional theological concepts may be approached. Johnson's own reflections on spirituality, combined with Smith's use of Johnson's work, provide a very good starting place for revising McClendon's biographical method.

The exposition of Mark Johnson's work in the previous chapter provides a theoretical scaffolding that may help further the reach of McClendon's biographical method. Johnson studies specifically what McClendon does intuitively, providing a philosophical perspective which adds relevance to McClendon's work. The remainder of this chapter will explore how this is so. In keeping with the empathic response to McClendon's work taken in this thesis, I will begin a "creative transformation" of some of his methodological convictions in light of Johnson.

I will first draw out some of the similarities between Johnson and McClendon, including the similar social and intellectual contexts that produced them, before moving on to highlight four of the specific ways in which their concerns overlap (embodiment, experience, image-based thought, and living). In the concluding half of this chapter, I will present how Johnson's insights provide general revisions to a reading of McClendon, focusing on three vital areas: anthropology, rationality, and the relationship between narrative, language and ontology. In each area, Johnson's work brings insights that are resonant with

⁴⁹ Ibid.

McClendon's convictions but focused philosophically beyond what McClendon attains.

6.2 Context

Both McClendon and Johnson were products of America in the Twentieth Century, and as such, were shaped by the American cultural milieu. Accordingly there are many similarities in their formation. McClendon, who was 25 years Johnson's senior, was an adult by the time WWII ended, and his involvement in it had a profound impact upon him, whereas it seems less so for Johnson. J.L. Austin was significant for both McClendon and Johnson. McClendon had firsthand experience of Austin, while Johnson's advisor was an Austinian philosopher. The priority of language and its connection to broader conceptual and behavioral systems is evidently of significance to both men.

One may call this category of thought or tradition that they have in common "Anglo-American Postmodernism." "Anglo-American" distinguishes this as a separate philosophical strand from the continental philosophy tradition, namely the Analytic tradition, and "postmodern" highlights that there is a departure from many of the assumptions followed in the preceding "modern" thinking of this tradition. Murphy and McClendon introduce this category in *Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies*.⁵⁰

Murphy and McClendon develop a series of poles which allow the identification of modern tendencies. In the realm of language the modernist poles are representation and expression. In epistemology, they are foundationalism and skepticism, and in the social and ethical realm, the poles are individualist and communal. Most, if not all, of modern thought can be found on these spectrums. However, Murphy and McClendon argue that "postmodern" is not a certain position along these spectrums, but a form of thinking that is off this grid all together. In the realm of language, they point to Wittgenstein and Austin who argue that language meaning is found in use, or in the actions language

⁵⁰ Nancey C. Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives On Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); Nancey Murphy and James McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (1989): 191–214. See also, McClendon, *Witness*, 224–225.

performs. In epistemology, they promote a holism which does not seek to build a firm foundation, but rather a system of inter-related knowledge. Here, W.V.O. Quine is an important figure for Murphy and McClendon.⁵¹ The individual/communal polarity is surpassed, they argue, by taking a more complementary approach which sees individuals and communities in reciprocal relationships.⁵²

This thinking is elaborated in Murphy's book *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives On Science, Religion, and Ethics*. She insists that some basic terms and categories within English philosophy have drastically changed in the last few decades,⁵³ contending that both "Anglo-American" and "postmodern" are terms which are relevant to the current climate. There has been a purposeful break from Enlightenment modernity, and if "post-modern" is a term used with any sense of cohesion among academics, it at least infers this break.⁵⁴ As such, the concept of an Anglo-American postmodernity will serve as an adequate description of the tradition that both McClendon and Johnson are working within.⁵⁵

6.3 Conceptual Overlap

Beyond their context and tradition, certain aspects of McClendon and Johnson's thinking significantly overlap. Highlighting a few key concepts that are vital for both men reveals their common context and tradition. It also helps to enforce the premise that Johnson's work is able to constructively speak to McClendon's method. Although there are many areas in which conceptual overlap occurs, I

⁵¹ See, W. V. Quine "Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Jan., 1951) 20-43.

⁵² Murphy and McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," 203.

⁵³ Nancey C. Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 1.

⁵⁴ Murphy's work evoked a significant amount of dialogue, led by Philip Clayton in his essay, Philip Clayton, "On Holisms: Insular, Inclusivist, and Postmodern," *Zygon* 33, no. 3 (1998): 467-474.

⁵⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of tradition as "a historically extended, socially embodied, argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition", is helpful here to see how McClendon and Johnson can fall within the same American academic tradition of the late Twentieth Century. See, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study In Moral Theory* (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 222.

have chosen four areas: their emphasis on embodiment; their centrality of experience; the priority of image-laden or metaphoric thinking; and the focus on life or living as the ultimate measure of their practice.

Embodiment

The first area that McClendon and Johnson have in common is their affirmation of understanding humans primarily as bodies. This has epistemological impact and comes with a critique of the disembodied view of mind. Often, the language and concepts surrounding various issues are framed in dualistic and disembodied ways. Language is steeped in the traditions of the past and the underlying assumptions of former uses. Both McClendon and Johnson reject a firm dichotomy and affirm the embodied nature of humanity. McClendon treats embodiment as one of his three features of the whole human (alongside the social and anastatic), noting that within Christian ethical thought, it has become normal and appropriate to “believe that ethics has nothing to do with our bodies, their environment, our mutual needs, our delights and horrors, our organic selfhood in its context.”⁵⁶ In some traditions within Christian expression, the body has not merely been relegated, but has become an enemy to the ‘spiritual’ existence.

There are sources within the Christian tradition that affirm an embodied perspective, however. McClendon looks to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his use of the term “the natural” as a theological heritage for this emphasis. “The natural”, for Bonhoeffer, describes the realm of the world in which we currently exist. It is where “the hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the dispossessed need justice and the lonely need fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave needs freedom.”⁵⁷ This is the realm of the body and its environment. In this natural realm we can participate in what God is bringing about in a physical way. This enables the possibility of having a hope for “the ultimate,” which is what will come in the eschaton.

⁵⁶ *Ethics*, 85.

⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 95.

McClendon elaborates on what having this embodied concern entails. His context of discussion lies within ethics, so he is acutely aware of the challenge of being caught up in either too narrow or too broad a focus. He acknowledges the impulse to separate and isolate aspects of our lives into various categories, but insists on struggling to maintain a unity. “Our life as Christians”, McClendon insists, “is our life as organic constituents of the crust of this planet.”⁵⁸ There are those who would resist this aspect of our human lives and instead point toward an afterlife as being the ultimate existence, relegating this life to a less meaningful and an inconsequential existence. McClendon insists, however, that to see our lives as fully embodied is a Christian conviction. He asserts, “What is still clear in Scripture from beginning to end ... is that believers ‘live and move and have our being’ (cf. Acts 17:28) in ongoing relation to God...he is absolute context, the everlasting environment (Ps. 139) of life.”⁵⁹ It is this “Christian materialism”, as McClendon calls it, that insists upon the creator having equipped us as humans to live fully in our embodied existence. Our drives, needs, capacities, and manner of existence are all possessed by Jesus Christ and are a part of our faithful life, not separate from or a detriment to it.⁶⁰

As a virtue of this embodied existence McClendon highlights ‘presence’, “the quality of *being there* for and with the other.”⁶¹ This “being there” is a function of our embodied existence, says McClendon, and it is only “by metaphor or analogy that we can speak of disembodied presence.”⁶² This would include ‘spiritual’ presence, and how someone may be present through objects or ideas etc. Physicality, though, does not necessitate presence in McClendon’s sense of the word. For example, with technology as it is, one may be physically present with another person but engaged with a phone or computer in a way that neglects the other. McClendon expands, “Presence is being one’s self for someone else; it is refusing the temptation to withdraw mentally and emotionally; but it is also on occasion putting our own body’s weight and

⁵⁸ *Ethics*, 95.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶² *Ibid.*

warmth alongside the neighbor, the friend, the lover in need.”⁶³ McClendon affirms that presence is not fully grasped with the organic bodily perspective, but it does fulfill elements of it: “our existence as creatures [is] bound to our environment, needing the support of our fellows, [and being] involved in a psychic structure that cries out for realization in such a way as *this*.”⁶⁴ McClendon deeply affirms the importance of embracing what it means to be creatures involved in the vast ecosystem of planet earth. The complex interrelation of organism and environment is also central to Mark Johnson’s philosophical endeavors.

Johnson develops much more of the implications of having a thoroughly embodied view of mind. His development (with George Lakoff) of a detailed account of embodied realism “relies on the fact that we are coupled with the world through our embodied interactions.”⁶⁵ Johnson believes that “as embodied imaginative creatures, we were never separated or divorced from reality in the first place.”⁶⁶ Through the qualities of life experienced through our bodies, we are able to learn and discover how to make meaning amidst this reality. For both Johnson and McClendon embodiment must be understood if any claims of meaning and truth are to be legitimately sought. Johnson’s account of embodiment allows McClendon’s theological account of embodiment to take on further significance by showing how embodiment determines thought and rationality.

Experience

Both McClendon and Johnson pay special attention to experience which serves as data in how each approaches their respective discipline, yet not in the way experience has been approached in the past. McClendon points to Schleiermacher for whom “experience is a systematically ambiguous word, referring sometimes to evanescent, private, inward feeling; sometimes to

⁶³ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

matters of communal and public knowledge.”⁶⁷ For McClendon, experience is “what we have lived through and lived out in company with one another, constituting our share in the Christ story.”⁶⁸ By understanding experience narratively, McClendon unites and validates various groups of Christians as continuations of the narrative of Christ in different times and places. Theology, then, is worked out in these various narrative places. “Every theology is linked to some narrative; successful theology, knowing this, discovers and reclaims its proper narrative base.”⁶⁹ McClendon simultaneously highlights and transforms an understanding of experience that embraces the significance of the past, yet, through his baptist vision, sees the present as just as crucial to the story.

Similarly, Johnson finds that experience lies between the subjective and the objective, and has spent most of his career trying to solve how our experiences mean what they do, based on how our bodies work. Much of how we understand and experience is unable to be grasped in explicit concepts and, Johnson argues, “we mistakenly regard something that is only a conceptual limitation (i.e., our inability to adequately conceptualize qualities) as though it were actually a limitation on our experience of meaning itself.”⁷⁰ The meaning is dependent on the qualities which affect us bodily, emotionally, and mentally. The meaning we make comes from *how* we experience a thing, not only what is experienced. As I explored in the treatment of Johnson in the previous chapter, our ability to use abstract concepts which enable us to progress and discover, are still directly linked to how we experience the world. The ability to maintain the connection between our abstractions and our experiences may have been lost, Johnson argues, but it is nevertheless still connected.⁷¹

Either through the qualitative dimensions felt in our bodies, or through a narrative account of what we have lived through, experience proves to be a vital concept which McClendon and Johnson use in a deliberate way in their work.

⁶⁷ *Ethics*, 37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 70.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

Image-based thinking

The image-based or metaphoric focus of both men has been explored at length in the previous chapters. McClendon's transition from looking at images explicitly to a more implicit and underlying image-based thinking was traced in Chapters Three and Four. In the previous chapter (Chapter Five), Johnson's work was seen as progressing from explicit analysis and exposition of the role of metaphor to discussion of how metaphor allows new ways of asking important philosophical questions, before ultimately asking how humans make meaning. In both McClendon and Johnson's work, an image-based thinking allows for a perspective which goes beyond a literal and rationalistic approach to language and thought, and provides unique contributions to their respective fields.

Living

The final conceptual similarity between McClendon and Johnson involves 'life', or peoples' living of it. This concept is of central importance to both thinkers. McClendon insists that the "truth of faith is made good in the *living of it* or not at all",⁷² and Johnson attempts to re-connect philosophy to the visceral connections in people's lives so that philosophy may become "the most meaningful and powerful way we have of trying to live rightly and well."⁷³ There is a common *telos* here; to enable living with new depth.

For McClendon, showing lives lived well was part of his biographical method. It is also at the heart of the structure of his systematic theology. By putting ethics first, McClendon argued that the Christian life is primarily *lived* prior to it being thought out doctrinally. Lakoff and Johnson's distinctive approach to metaphor theory was based on the hypothesis that metaphor and the inferences people make with them shape how they understand and experience the world. They say in the afterword to the 2003 printing of *Metaphors We Live By*, "We live our lives on the basis of inferences we derive via metaphor."⁷⁴ There is an underlying concern from the beginning of their project that through the study of

⁷² *Bio.*, viii.

⁷³ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 282.

⁷⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors we Live By*, 273.

metaphor, there is the ability to shape how people live. This common *telos* is a significant reason why turning to Johnson as a response to McClendon is an appropriate and fruitful exercise.

The description of these four similarities in the work of McClendon and Johnson is not a mere comparison of corresponding concepts. It is a key component of the method employed in this thesis. Showing that the conceptual overlap of these important convictions confirms that the empathic response I have made to McClendon's work, through engagement with Johnson, enables insight into how McClendon's work may be revised for practical use today. Johnson provides a detailed account of what McClendon does intuitively, and because of this he provides the analysis and exposition to take what McClendon has done a step further.

Theologians have used philosophy to engage their convictions from the beginning. McClendon does this throughout his work, both to understand the past contexts of earlier theology and to critically revise or transform convictions to fit the current context. This, in turn, is how I will use Johnson: to bring some of McClendon's methodological convictions up to date.

6.4 Synthesizing Convictions.

Having looked at how the concerns and convictions of McClendon and Johnson overlap, it will become clear that reading McClendon in light of Johnson is an appropriate response. Johnson's work has had limited influence in the field of theology, but Smith's use of it in his cultural liturgies project shows its potential. Smith finds in Johnson the ability to connect the embodied and the linguistic, using metaphor as a nexus to express the fusion of content and form in Christian belief and practice. Smith's work highlights many of the theological implications of Johnson's insights. This thesis has traced McClendon's theological method beginning with biography, through to image-based logic and systematic theology. Johnson's contribution supplements McClendon's intuitions with detailed, empirically-responsible philosophical work that can drive McClendon's work into the future. In order to illustrate the potential fruitfulness of this connection, Johnson's categories will be used to explore and enhance McClendon's approach to anthropology, rationality, and the

connections between language, narrative, and ontology. Through this application it will be seen that a renewed reading of McClendon is made possible.

Anthropology

Johnson's exploration of the embodied nature of humanity has significance for understanding McClendon's version of anthropology. McClendon's anthropology, as seen through his three-fold holism within *Ethics*, has an embodied, a social, and an anastatic dimension. Each of these categories describes part of what constitutes people as people. McClendon names the first two categories as the natural and the social setting of human existence, while the final dimension forms the phenomenon of human transformation.⁷⁵ Also fundamental to McClendon's anthropological understanding is his treatment of creation. McClendon insists upon seeing humanity among the creation of the creator. In this way, his anthropology is meant to "point toward a Christian ecology."⁷⁶ He acknowledges the tradition within Christian doctrine of having anthropocentric doctrines that lean towards world-transcending or even world-denying views, but also a varying doctrinal tradition of teaching a world-affirming or nature-affirming view.⁷⁷

McClendon highlights three fitting responses – to the ongoing relation and encounter between God and creation – from this world-affirming perspective: creatureliness, createdness, and the creature's own creativity. Creatureliness is the sense that as humans we are not separate from the earth, referring to a "sense of the numinous rising from its strong contrast to our creaturehood."⁷⁸ Creatureliness is a more embodied response to the vastness of everything other than ourselves. Similar but different from this is the sense of createdness, which is more conceptual in nature and results in a rational recognition of "God as

⁷⁵ *Doctrine*, 157. Aspects of Johnson's re-description of Faith, Hope, Love, and Grace can be seen as fitting a similar sort of human transformation dimension as McClendon advocates in his anastatic dimension within *Ethics*.

⁷⁶ *Doctrine*, 157

⁷⁷ McClendon draws upon. H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁷⁸ *Doctrine*, 159.

[the] first and final cause.”⁷⁹ This is the response of the finite to the infinite.⁸⁰ To these more common responses, McClendon adds the third—the creature’s own creativity. Here, he notes that it is not only human creativity which affect a person’s own circumstance, but the whole of creation through the evolutionary process. He observes that in nature, “one cannot even in principle predict what variations will take form in its ecological web, what new forms will emerge, and how these will creatively alter the symbiotic system they help constitute so as to enable still new emergents—new creative possibilities.”⁸¹ Creation is intrinsically creative, and McClendon not only affirms this but echoes it in his theological method.

McClendon’s three proposals have a clear correlation with Johnson’s understanding of humans as embodied organisms operating in various environments. Johnson highlights the immanent and embodied existence of our species and traces the implications of this to see how we experience anything as meaningful. His understanding of the mind (which is commonly accepted as the defining feature of individuals) says that minds are “processes that arise through our ongoing coupling with our environment. Mind is in and of this embodied experiential process, not above it.”⁸² It is the qualities of this existence which the mind encounters that creates meaning. This perspective of the mind has significant anthropological implications that shape how one engages topics such as theology and philosophy.

Neither Johnson nor McClendon spend time detailing a specific explication of their anthropologies. But both have a method which depends very much on some underlying convictions of what it means to be human. As noted above, experience plays a vital role for both McClendon and Johnson, and influence the direction of their work. Both reject the dualist conceptions of mind and body, and insist upon a holistic account of the human. In *Ethics*, McClendon’s three

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ McClendon notes, here, the similarity of this to Schleiermacher’s sense of dependence.

⁸¹ *Doctrine*, 167.

⁸² Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 130.

dimensions provide three distinct areas that have to be taken into account when answering the question, “how are we to live?” However, McClendon avoids an extensive engagement with science, psychology, and sociology to see the full implications of his anthropological view. This is where Johnson can enrich a reading of McClendon. Johnson’s entire project has been to explore the implications of an embodied, physical, holistic approach to humans, and he draws upon scientists, psychologists, and sociologists to support his approach.

Johnson has traced an embodied anthropology through ethics, epistemology, and abstract thought, to meaning-making itself. He views humans as organisms in an environment, both changing and being changed by the other. Johnson also shows how bodily-based image schemas lead to conceptual metaphors which are mapped onto more abstract realms of thought, creating new possibilities for understanding the world. These ideas offer McClendon’s use of image-based thinking the kind of technical and philosophical support it needs to have an expanded validity.

In part, this has already been achieved. Murphy suggests that McClendon’s writing explores much of the theological implications of a physicalist (embodied) anthropology. She credits McClendon with the influence to guide her in exploring this topic in her field.⁸³ Murphy has developed a rich account of a Christian physicalism in her recent work, a natural extension of this feature of McClendon’s thought.⁸⁴

The anthropology that McClendon employs can be nuanced and extended through Johnson’s work. This kind of anthropology will become more refined as the scientific and psychological background to this understanding of human functioning continues to grow. In theology, a holistic embodied approach to

⁸³ Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature at the Intersection: Philosophy, Science, and Baptist Theology,” *Carson-Newman Studies* 11, no. 3 (Fall 2008):130.

⁸⁴ See, *Ibid.*, also, Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

anthropology, such as that seen in Smith's work, will likely become more common in the coming years.

Rationality

Early in *Ethics*, McClendon notes that the rationality of theology cannot be decided upon prior to its practice, that is, there can be no philosophical foundation upon which to build a theology.⁸⁵ There is, however, an internal relation to how one works out the truth of theology. McClendon explained mathematical logic as a similarly functioning way of thinking: "The transformation of an equation leaves everything the same, yet creates possibilities the original formula had not conveyed."⁸⁶ Theology inherits its convictions, yet in a context that is under constant change. It is up to the "theologian-in-community" and the "theologian-in-dialogue" to discover what and how these convictions *mean* in light of the particular context.

As has been seen, McClendon employed an image-based logic. In *Biography as Theology*, McClendon was interested in images and how these relate and reveal the guiding convictions of the characters in his studies. McClendon then departed from the specific analysis of images, opting instead to look at the more subtle, yet profound, ways images function in theology. His baptist vision is the prime example of how this was realized in his theological method. As I have demonstrated, McClendon's baptist vision is a way of (imaginatively) mapping the logic and meaning from one context (mainly Scripture) on to the current context, revealing a faithful way of life. Similar image-based approaches were found in McClendon's use of picture thinking (via Wittgenstein) and through catachresis, both of which involve a metaphoric projection to think in particular ways, or to solve problems.

Johnson's much more extensive account of metaphor provides more than a justification of McClendon's intuitions. It also reveals how these intuitions function. Johnson's project begins with the belief that metaphor plays a much more pervasive and formative role in the daily experiences of people than

⁸⁵ McClendon, *Ethics*, 38.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

previously thought. Johnson has investigated and discovered the vast network of connections between the body, the mind and the environment. This formed a distinct approach to rationality that departs from the former understanding of a disembodied mind with its objective and literal approach to knowledge, embracing the connectivity of knowledge and truth to a social and physical context.

How rationality is conceived is paramount in any academic practice, and theology is no different. Theology is unique (according to McClendon) in that its subject is not predetermined. This may be a departure from much of the theological tradition or how theology is perceived in the public discourse, but, in coming to this understanding, McClendon wanted to have an inclusive approach to the practice to which he dedicated his life. Recall that, for McClendon, convictions are the subject of theology, and that convictions are not limited to specific content. If they pass the test of being persistent and significant in the lives of their bearers, then they are worthy to be discovered, understood, and revised to move across time and space in communities. This is the work of theology. The process or method of this discovery, understanding and revision is approached with great variety and diversity.

Johnson's equivalent in philosophy is conceptual metaphor. There is a close link between McClendon's "convictions" and Johnson's "conceptual metaphors". Admittedly both of these concepts are difficult to speak about because most of the functional work of each happens in the pre-conscious. Convictions direct our lives, but often before they are discovered. As such, they may do so without conscious identification. Conceptual metaphors operate to organize and structure the connections between domains so that the world makes sense and has meaning, but mainly in a tacit dimension.

Both shape the place and priority of various states of "mind" determining how rationality is worked out. During the formational times of adolescence and early adulthood, convictions and conceptual metaphors are working their way out through the trial and error of lived experiences in communities at the time an individual questions beliefs, practices, and habits, and experiences new things. This formation is honing conceptual metaphors which have been in process

since birth, and are working their way into convictions which will ultimately determine desires, actions and attitudes.

Certain conceptual metaphors serve to aid our function in our physical environment. For example, conceptual metaphors based in image-schematic structures, such as the verticality or containment schema, serve to produce a mental structure and categorization grid to understand and experience our physical space. This is then projected onto the more abstract things so we can say and understand sentences like “her words were overflowing with meaning” or “that sentence was top shelf”. This is an example of conceptual metaphor serving to structure rationality. It does so primarily implicitly, or tacitly, below the level of awareness. Once one becomes aware of how pervasive this type of metaphoric projection is, it is seen everywhere. It is literally impossible to speak without drawing upon conceptual metaphor. This is not to say that literal speech is not possible. Literal language is the skeleton beneath metaphor which is the flesh. It is metaphor which makes language functional and interesting. For our present task, there are certain conceptual metaphors which may play a vital role in structuring our experience of the world, but which may play such a hidden role in shaping our convictions that the connection is nearly impossible to trace.

There are other conceptual metaphors that are closer to the surface of consciousness and social influence, and which bear significant influence upon our convictions. Metaphors which are culture- or subculture-specific yet still commonly used, form specific folk-theories and can influence specific convictions. An example of this kind of conceptual metaphor is the GOD IS FATHER (a common understanding within Christianity) metaphor which leads to masculine language to refer to God, who is of course not gendered. What this can lead to is the relational and conceptual mapping of human maleness onto the understanding of and relation to God (not to mention the underlying metaphor of God as personal being). The potential problems in this metaphor are not difficult to see. People draw from various male generalizations, stereotypes and particular male relationships to form a prototype understanding of what maleness is. God, the target domain, is mapped with the information, feelings, and memories from the source domain. The

interpretation and meaning of God as father, then, is shaped by past experiences and culturally learned beliefs about masculinity. Only once this metaphor is made explicit can it be understood as a metaphor which allows the unseen metaphoric projections to be seen.⁸⁷

Early in McClendon's work on biography, his method of choosing to highlight images that direct and shape his subjects' lives was an attempt to grasp this type of metaphor. McClendon noticed the ability of images and metaphors not only to take hold of imagination, but also to then shape and direct the lived convictions of that life. He notes that this type of application of images is not unique to the Judeo-Christian tradition but distinctive of religion in general. This being so, McClendon believes that there are images beyond Scripture that are available for use, and at its center, the Christian faith "comprises images applied to life."⁸⁸ He continues by stating that once enacted-imagery is accepted as being part of believing, "the closer [one can get] to seeing why the understanding of that faith must involve the examination of the role of images in actual lives, the role of images in the experience of life."⁸⁹ Johnson's work enables this connection between images and life to be seen with much greater detail.

The relationship between image-based rationality and an embodied anthropology should be commented on before continuing. Under the Cartesian model, the human is primarily a thinking being for which pure rationality is elevated and bodily or spiritual considerations have a diminished role. How one conceives what a human is and how a human functions determines the priority, structure, and method of rationality. As we have seen, an embodied anthropology necessitates that the knowledge of the body plays a central role in the shape and meaning of human experience, and as such, will play a major role

⁸⁷ See Janet Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models Of God In Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 8-10.

⁸⁸ *Bio.*, 77.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

in how rationality is approached. Both Johnson and McClendon seeks to ground rationality in experience through image-based thinking.

Johnson does significant work in showing how this connection is made. He describes how metaphor becomes embodied:

(1) It is embodied through bodily experience in the world, which pairs sensorimotor experience with subjective experience. (2) The source-domain logic arises from the inferential structure of the sensorimotor system. And (3) it is instantiated neurally in the synaptic weights associated with neural connections.⁹⁰

In addition, this process happens in what Johnson (and Lakoff) call the “cognitive unconscious”. While active, it is beyond the direct assessment and control of a person. This process is relevant on many levels and highlights that thinking abstractly connects directly with embodied experience. The reciprocal nature of experience and thought and rationality is also present here, that is, as metaphors become embodied, they shape perception and rationality which hone the metaphoric sources experienced in the world. It is a progressive cycle that is in constant revision. It also evokes the principle of neural plasticity which is a lesson learned from neuroscience that our brain undergoes physical changes based on how and what we experience in our lives.⁹¹ The brain can be “trained” in a way to think differently through habits.

Johnson’s work lends itself to the explication and revision of McClendon’s approach to rationality. Both seek a contextually relevant, image-based, and embodied understandings of rationality that is inextricably linked to a person in a (narrative) community in an environment. The result of synthesizing their approaches is a rich understanding of how this type of rationality is suited to contribute to today’s context.

⁹⁰ Johnson and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 73.

⁹¹ Catherine Malabou has written on the philosophical implications of plasticity in *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Malabou says in the introduction that “talking about the plasticity of the brain thus amounts to thinking of the brain as something modifiable, ‘formable,’ and formative at the same time. Brain plasticity operates, as we shall see, on three levels: (1) the modeling of neuronal connections (developmental plasticity in the embryo and the child; (2) the modification of the neuronal connections (the plasticity of synaptic modulation throughout life); and (3) the capacity for repair (post-lesional plasticity).” See *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, 5.

Narrative, Language and Ontology

The role of narrative for McClendon is paramount, and as the focus of this study is his biographical method (biography coming under the category of narrative), it is especially relevant. There is an interconnectivity between the various subjects that make up a system of thought. Anthropology affects, and is affected by, rationality, and rationality cannot be separated from the narrative context that it takes place within, and narratives tell the story of an organism within an environment. Each part has an influence upon the other in an holistic system of thought like those displayed by McClendon and Johnson. Highlighting every one of these connections and inter-relations is not necessary, but the connection between narrative, language, and ontology has significant implications for a biographical theology.

McClendon's narrative approach is the strongest unifying force in his theology. The view that all things—past, present, and future—are united through a great story, the origins of which are told in the Scriptures, provides his theology with a unique system of organization.⁹² McClendon argues that narrative is latent in all theology, and successful theology knows this and recognizes its proper narrative home.⁹³ Through the narrative lens McClendon is able to explore the various loci of theology in a non-reductive way. McClendon claims that this echoes the method of the Gospels (which he sees as ethical narratives) through which morals are taught “by identifying characters (Jesus and the disciples) and a realm or setting (the coming kingdom). These are unified by a plot—the gospel story.”⁹⁴ This gospel story invites participation, rather than beckons to be analyzed and reduced to principles, values, and doctrinal propositions.

Narrative is also significant for Johnson, albeit not as vital in its scope as it is for McClendon. Johnson addresses narrative in *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* where he explores action and self in relation to

⁹² McClendon's systematic theology would barely fit the conventional understanding of the systematic genre.

⁹³ *Ethics*, 37.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

the synthesis narrative provides.⁹⁵ He broadly argues that “narrative characterizes the synthetic character of our very experience, and it is prefigured in our daily activities and projects.”⁹⁶ The unity of the self and its actions is a narrative unity. While often not an explicitly stated narrative, we use a narrative structure to understand ourselves moving through time and space in encounters with people and environments. The undergirding metaphor for this is the source-path-goal schema, briefly explored previously.⁹⁷

Johnson argues that the source-path-goal schema is active at three levels in our lives:

First, stories often involve actual physical journeys of characters from a starting point, along a path, toward some destination. Second, we follow the story itself metaphorically along its path, as it proceeds from start to finish. Third, via the PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS metaphor, we can understand all purposive activity metaphorically as movement (physical or mental) directed toward a goal (physical or abstract), according to the following mapping:

The PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS metaphor

<i>Motion in Space</i>	<i>Purposive Action</i>
Physical starting point ----->	Initial state
Motions along a path ----->	Intermediate states
End point (physical) ----->	Final state/goal ⁹⁸

Narrative, then, involves a complex series of metaphors operating at both explicit and implicit levels. Its whole shape is fueled through metaphoric structures. By using the source-path-goal schema and the PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS metaphor, we can use metaphor as a unifying force for both our physical and extra-physical (social, spiritual, and relational) experiences of life.

There is a further reciprocal relationship present between metaphor (and its subsidiary categories) and narrative. Narrative is made up of various images and metaphors which, in turn, find their meaning through their use within the context of that narrative. Just as words find meaning in their use, metaphor finds its meaning when it is used within a particular narrative. The relational

⁹⁵ Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁹⁷ See pg. 153.

⁹⁸ Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 166-167.

dynamic is that a metaphor gains meaning as it is used in a narrative, and that meaning is retained (perhaps not entirely) in subsequent uses.⁹⁹ As a snowball gathers more and more snow as it tumbles down a hill, a metaphor gains meaning as it is pressed into use in novel places along its narrative journey.

In this thesis I have focused on the cognitive functions of metaphor. However, metaphor also manifests linguistically as an expression of the cognitive function. The relation between metaphor and narrative also exists in the telling of stories. Biography is the telling of a particular story, so this has important relevance here. Language is action (as we learn from Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin et al.) and as such, it conveys what we believe. The analysis of language is distinctive of the Anglo-American strand of philosophy. Language is involved in the complex relational exchange of meaning that involves metaphor and narrative. It is where all of this surfaces and provides explicit data for analysis. Language is the tip of the iceberg, not telling the whole story of convictions (and the various relational considerations that influence them), yet revealing them in significant ways.¹⁰⁰

It is as though each of these (language, metaphor, narrative, and ontology) levels relate reciprocally to the level above and beneath it.¹⁰¹ Language is the top

⁹⁹ This is seen throughout Scripture, where an image is used and meaning is compiled and deepened through each use. Bread is an excellent example of this which I have presented on previously, “Influencing the Experience of the Because: Embodied Metaphor as a Lived Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, Colloquium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture, Laidlaw College, August 2011.

¹⁰⁰ There is indeed a much wider debate about the relationship of religious language and reality. Is language an expression of our inward thoughts and feelings or a correspondent description of an objective reality? Is it action for achieving one’s goals or completely dependent upon context and used to decipher meaning? See Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 1985), especially sections VI, VII, and VIII. McClendon has explored the linguistic debate in *Convictions*, Chapter 2. Since the linguistic turn in philosophy, there have been countless philosophical and theological treatments on how language functions, and many of the post-Wittgensteinian thinkers (like McClendon) have absorbed this thinking in their work, while others still debate the issue.

¹⁰¹ I am aware of the verticality schema that is at work in this description. I am not wanting, however, to imply that there is a priority or increased significance to those seen as ‘above’.

and most visible level.¹⁰² Metaphor is often revealed linguistically, but also functions below the level of conscious awareness. Closely linked and often overlapping the conscious, pre-conscious ‘line’ are convictions. These deeply held beliefs are formed through our experiences in the world, and shaped through the metaphoric patterns and priorities that influence our perception. This whole process is united in a narrative which involves the past (including traditions) and the present, including the physical environment, personal and social actions and practices, and the future as a projected narrative.

Each level has significant bearing upon the others, and on what and how experiences are conceived. This is where ontology becomes pertinent. Because experience is such a vital concept for both McClendon and Johnson, and experience is determinative of how the world is constituted and understood, these categories (language, metaphor, and narrative) shape how one *is* in the world. Ontology is only understood through organism-environment interaction, the metaphoric categories that are produced, and the narrative which unites it all. Johnson and Lakoff affirm that metaphor can impose a “non-literal ontology” which shapes conceptualization about the world in ways that literal thinking cannot.¹⁰³

This approach to ontology overflows the traditional options of idealism, transcendentalism, and materialism. A common theme in both McClendon and Johnson is this refusal to allow the categories of the past to dictate viable options for the present. In ontology, they both reject a transcendentalism that is escapist in any way, while affirming that there are realities which are beyond our comprehension. They refuse to affirm that reality is only in the mind, as with idealism, but acknowledge the central role of the mind in forming how the world is encountered and understood. They are more closely tied to a type of materialism, but still acknowledge the unseen or untouched phenomena of social, cultural, and historic influences which are beyond the material world. While they have similar convictions in this regard, McClendon and Johnson differ in how they arrive here in their work.

¹⁰² I am fully aware of both the irony and aptness of using metaphor in this context.

¹⁰³ Johnson and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 72-73.

Johnson accomplishes this in a technical way with his (and Lakoff's) exploration of embodied realism, and its relation to truth. This exploration is identified in part by the overcoming of the subject-object dichotomy through embodiment and placing truth in context (that is, truth comes after understanding takes place). They explain it as follows:

Embodied truth requires us to give up the illusion that there exists a unique correct description of any situation. Because of the multiple levels¹⁰⁴ of our embodiment, there is no one level at which one can express all the truths we can know about a given subject matter. But even if there is no one correct description, there can still be many correct descriptions, depending on our embodied understandings at different levels or from different perspectives. Each different understanding of a situation provides a commitment to what is real about that situation. Each such reality commitment is a version or a commitment to truth.¹⁰⁵

The kinds of things that are real, then, are dependent upon context, and the personal and social histories that make up the imaginative structures that form understandings. This is a modest approach to reality, one that is practical and unable to be separated from being realistic, stated otherwise, this approach to reality is, "in order to function successfully to survive, to achieve ends, and to arrive at workable understandings of the situations we are in."¹⁰⁶ Universal claims of what is real are not relevant for this pragmatic and functional approach to reality.

McClendon achieves the ontological work with narrative. With his baptist vision, McClendon sees Scripture as informing and shaping the reality we live. As he says it, "Scripture presents us with reality intending stories—these have power to speak to readers as somber discursive prose never does."¹⁰⁷ Narrative is a way of remembering the past and embracing history as a rational practice to inform the present. Beyond this consideration, McClendon argues that narrative itself constitutes life for the believer. To believe in the story is to participate in it,

¹⁰⁴ These levels -- neural embodiment, the phenomenological level, and the cognitive unconscious -- nuance their embodiment thesis and are explained in Johnson and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 102-103.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *Witness*, 354.

which involves knowing and telling the story, and “telling the story locates the teller’s role in it.”¹⁰⁸

Faithful followers of the Christian story are governed “by Christian rules (i.e. in line with Christian faith and morals) [which] constitutes taking the way of Jesus as one’s own, since that is where the story leads.”¹⁰⁹ The story of Christ has a mystical and unifying narrative role for Christian adherents.¹¹⁰ It stories and constitutes life in a way that encompasses the cosmic whole, while accounting for the particular time and place. “The gospel that saves is not an escape from time and place but a theological encounter with what is most real and most true in all time and space.”¹¹¹ At the same time, McClendon acknowledges that there are numerous and various stories which make up one’s identity. A competition of narratives shapes and forms the priority of convictions for a person.

Narratives in general, and the Christian narrative in particular, play a determinative role in the construction and constitution of reality, language, and the type of metaphors used. Narratives provide a big picture that can take into account the particularities of contexts. In Johnson’s account, what is gained is the ability to explicate how the process works, from narrative, to language and metaphor, to ontology. What people experience as reality in their lives is formed through a vast network of variables or considerations that are not a part of focal awareness. Through the network of meaning which is shaped through narratives, metaphor and our daily encounter with our physical world, reality is formed. Our reading of McClendon’s narrative approach is deepened and expanded through Johnson’s insights, allowing biography to be seen as a compelling and effective theological method beyond its current scope.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 356.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ McClendon’s Christology becomes central here, and it will be explored in the final chapter as a testing of the insights seen through Johnson’s work for McClendon.

¹¹¹ *Witness*, 356.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has explained the potential of Mark Johnson's work to transform certain convictions that McClendon himself displays in his theological method. I began by considering how Johnson may fit within a theological conversation, by looking at James K.A. Smith's engagement with Johnson, and considering Johnson's own consideration of traditional theological categories. As well as sharing a similar context (within Anglo-American postmodern academia), Johnson and McClendon both use experience, embodiment, image-based (metaphoric) thinking, and a priority of 'living' in their work.

Three loci in particular demonstrate how Johnson's work can be used to transform and nuance an understanding of McClendon's convictions. Anthropology, rationality, and the relation between language, narrative, and ontology are vital to the outcome of a theological work. These are areas where McClendon's work may be revised according to Johnson's influence, allowing McClendon's work to have renewed force for the current theological climate. Anthropologically, McClendon's display of the threefold dimensions (embodied, social, and anastatic) of humans is paired with Johnson's detailed work in embodiment and its implications for thought and identity. Rationally, McClendon has displayed an approach that, like mathematics, changes how a problem is considered to reveal new possibilities, yet keeps everything the same. It embraces the struggle of considering context-dependent, yet historically grounded, thinking. McClendon achieves this thinking by delving into the realm of images and image-based thinking. His intuitions regarding images are confirmed through Johnson's insights into metaphoric thinking and image schemas, and how these shape the way we think about and experience the world. This approach to rationality reaches towards an integrated vision of the complex relationship between some of the major components of life, namely, narrative, language, metaphor, and ontology. McClendon's use of narrative brings these all together. Through Johnson's work, the connections can be made in more clear and detailed ways.

In each case (anthropology, rationality, and ontology), Johnson provides a perspective which is similar enough to McClendon's that there is overlap, but different enough to revise and deepen. McClendon's focus was on theology,

discovering, understanding and revising convictions and how they may be embodied in various contexts from a distinctly baptist perspective. Johnson is also interested in these issues, and creates a system to understand how they are related. How McClendon practices theology can be refined and understood with greater clarity after considering Johnson's work.

Bringing Johnson's work to enhance a reading of McClendon represents well the possibilities of the empathic method. We have taken seriously McClendon's own understanding of what theology involves, namely discovery, understanding, and *critical revision*. This revision is sought via an imaginative synthesis of Johnson and McClendon.

McClendon's method is best understood in "its actual use."¹¹² McClendon makes a point of not reducing his theology to a catalogue of normative propositions or principles; instead, it has a narrative quality to it. At the center and climax of McClendon's narrative theology is the man and the figure of Jesus Christ. McClendon's Christology forms the heart of his answer to the central question posed in *Doctrine*: what must the church teach to be the church now?¹¹³ The convictions that reside within Christology are related to all other convictions in the practice of Christian theology. Through the three categories highlighted in this chapter (anthropology, rationality, and narrative-language-and-ontology) McClendon's Christology will be analyzed to reveal not only how it can be critically revised, but how a deeper understanding of his method can be gained.

¹¹² *Ethics*, 327.

¹¹³ *Doctrine*, 21.

Chapter Seven. McClendon's Christology: The Unification of his Method

I have argued throughout this thesis that McClendon uses image-based structures in his theological method. He uses theological and philosophical resources from the past and present in this practice. The most important influence for his theological method is his understanding of the significance and content of the narrative of Jesus Christ. McClendon himself claimed that the success of his whole project is its “relevance to shared life in the body of Christ.”¹ As is the case in much of Christian thought, the understanding of the person, life, and significance of Jesus Christ informs and transforms all else. In this chapter, I describe McClendon's Christology and relate it to his methodological convictions as a whole. I then employ the philosophical insights of Johnson to develop a revised reading of McClendon's treatment of Christology and relate that to his biographical method. This will work as a test, on the most vital of Christian doctrines, to illustrate the usefulness of Johnson's work when applied to theology, but most importantly to enable an enriched understanding of McClendon's theological project.

7.1 Introduction

McClendon's unique engagement with Christology comes directly in the middle of the second volume of his Systematic Theology, *Doctrine*, providing a natural center for his trilogy. This center is not only a theologically vital, but also a culmination of method. In Christology, the methodological impulses McClendon displays are united. The way McClendon treats Christology is not a traditional approach; his two narratives model is founded in the conviction that the identity of Christ cannot be separated from that of God. McClendon's use of narrative and the images produced therein are distinctive of his theological approach.

¹ *Doctrine*, ii. This is an allusion to the Church, and it works its way out in McClendon's ecclesiology, but it also highlights the centrality of Christ in his whole project which will become clearer as the chapter progresses.

The centrality of Christology to McClendon was evident long before he wrote *Doctrine*. A brief look at how McClendon's convictions concerning Christology developed will serve to introduce a few pertinent themes.

In an unpublished essay from 1967, McClendon classifies religion as "response." He used this term to mean that "religion occurs in reaction to some reality, real or putative, and that the reaction is intentional."² In Christianity, what is responded to is revelation (God's movement toward humanity), known through the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in "the whole life of Jesus of Nazareth."³ McClendon describes Jesus as both the channel of God's self-disclosure, and the ultimate human responder to this revelation. He claims that "his was full faithfulness, [a] perfect human response to God."⁴ Herein lies part of what, according to McClendon, is "good" about the good news of the Gospel, namely that "the religion we exercise is marked not merely by sinfulness and failure, but also by the faithfulness which passes from Christ to us."⁵

He critiques two trends of modern theology in *Biography As Theology* (1974), arguing that both scholasticism and fundamentalism must "be confronted by Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ."⁶ McClendon addresses the two narrative parts that eventually make up his two narratives model: the story of the human Jesus, and the story of the divine Christ. Here, and elsewhere in his early work, McClendon pays special attention to history in forming his understanding of Jesus. History in general, and the biblical accounts of the New Testament in particular, are of utmost concern. He argues that "theology is truly Christian only if it bases itself afresh upon its own origin."⁷ What this implies is a necessary attention to one life, the life of Christ.⁸ McClendon shows sympathies

² James McClendon, "Must Christianity be a Religion?" (unpublished paper 1967) McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Bio.*, 167.

⁷ Ibid., 166.

⁸ Ibid., 167.

to the historians seeking to know the Jesus of history, and concludes that “the quality and reliability of the information thus shown to be available about Jesus is sufficient to enable biographical study of him to proceed in the spirit of the present work.”⁹ He argues that we have the resources we need to know the things about Christ which are the most meaningful, namely, “the way” of Jesus Christ.

In a 1981 essay entitled *The God of the Theologians and the God of Jesus Christ*, McClendon further develops his Christological understanding.¹⁰ He maintains that Jesus must be known in context, in relation to the religious and social world of which he was a product. As such, the Jewish heritage of Jesus becomes vital in understanding him. McClendon argues that the eschatological aspect of Christ’s life, and the subsequent emphasis of his disciples that followed, must be understood in its Jewish historic context, and its relation to apocalypticism and the Hebrew prophets themselves.¹¹ McClendon sees transformation (located in the anastatic realm in his threefold anthropological treatment) as a central dynamic of what Christ reveals about God. “Transformation”, McClendon states, is “the recreation of the created: it is that power by which, contrary to all expectation, what *is to be* appears out of that which is.”¹²

McClendon’s more Hebraic reading of the burning bush story, specifically the “name” of God as “I will be what I will be” (or more narratively put, “I will always be ahead of you; find Me as you follow the journey”), allows the transformative nature of God in Christ to be consistent with God’s nature.¹³ Rather than a reading which finds God unchanging and fixed, McClendon’s interpretation allows God to be always present and calling, seeking a faithful response as circumstances change. So instead of transformation being needed to

⁹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁰ James William McClendon, “The God of the Theologians and the God of Jesus Christ,” in *Is God God?*, ed. Axel D. Steuer and James William McClendon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981). McClendon draws upon Blaise Pascal for the title and aim of this essay.

¹¹ McClendon explores this in “The God of the Theologians...”, 191-195.

¹² McClendon, “The God of the Theologians...”, 194. Emphasis is McClendon’s own.

¹³ Ibid. McClendon returns to this interpretation in *Doctrine*, 285-286.

expiate the sin of humanity, it is a gift of God, regardless of sin. This adventurous move of God toward the new and the unknown is seen and participated in through Christ.

McClendon's Christological convictions followed this development and eventually led to the synthesis that serves as a center to his whole project. McClendon begins this treatment in *Doctrine* by looking at how it is that Christians speak of Christ as present here and now. The grammar of knowledge is discussed to achieve this.¹⁴ McClendon recognizes that how the word 'know' is used varies greatly depending on the content of what is known. In the context of 'knowing a person', the knowing, here, implies a reciprocal knowledge since one cannot claim to know a person without being also known by them. Christians have always claimed that they know Jesus through the traditionally Christian ways of knowing, which McClendon labels as worship, work, witness and word.¹⁵ Each of these ways of knowing allow a reciprocal encounter between the present Christ and the follower.

Without a genuine reciprocal encounter, the claim of knowledge makes no grammatical sense. McClendon accepts that the claim is not to a complete knowledge, however, and he echoes Paul's recognition of this in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." This evokes the eschatological element of the faith, which was briefly mentioned above. Paul seems to have this reciprocal notion of knowledge in mind here as he points out that while it is a partial knowledge, it is still a true knowledge. Knowledge, then, when used in relation to persons, comes out of encountering others even if this other is not physically present, as is the case with Christ. The claim that McClendon makes, in motto form, is that "knowing is a social, not a solitary accomplishment."¹⁶

¹⁴ McClendon does this in an "excursus on knowing" in *Doctrine*, 242-244.

¹⁵ *Doctrine*, 244.

¹⁶ Ibid., Empathy, in line with the methodology of this project, and explored in section 1.3, is evoked here.

This claim of knowledge, and its grammatical necessity of being a reciprocal reality, is significant in the resurrection becoming central for McClendon. Consistently throughout his theological method, McClendon focuses on living and the truth revealed through lived experience. The experience of Jesus Christ (in this life by his followers) is a mystery, but one such that the resurrection must be given significant weight. As McClendon states it: “The resurrection ... is the link between the earthly Jesus and ourselves.”¹⁷

After engaging with some of the traditional models of Christology (logos [251-253], two natures [253-257], historical [257-261]), McClendon is left with many options, but senses there is work yet to do. Within each of these models there was something lacking in what he saw as the three main emphases the church must teach about Christology: The lordship of Christ, the unity of God, and the authenticity of life in Christ for his followers.¹⁸ McClendon is faced with forming a newly relevant Christology, which he says “is not a matter of preserving past orthodoxies, for neither the two-natures model nor its most recent successor, the historical model, is adequate to specify the identity or display the centrality of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ This is what he faced, and, he says, what each generation must face as their own.

7.2 Philippians 2:5-11

To accomplish his revision of Christology, McClendon needed to achieve what was the third portion of his understanding of the theological task, namely, the creative transformation of what had come before. McClendon turns to the earliest Christological reflection of the church, used by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11. Commonly considered an early Christian hymn, this is one of the earliest insights into the Christology of the first generation of Christians, and it is a passage that is acknowledged as a key text for the thought and theology of Paul. The amount of scholarly writing on and around this passage is astounding, and

¹⁷ *Doctrine*, 250. It is for this reason that the resurrection is highlighted throughout McClendon’s systematics. The third section of *Ethics*, anastatic ethics, is an ethics in light of the resurrection, and in *Doctrine*, it is used to set the trajectory of his Christology.

¹⁸ See, *Doctrine*, 263.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

the diversity in its interpretation is striking.²⁰ Michael Gorman argues that this passage displays the master plan of Paul. Gorman so highly regards this passage, and its place in the thought of Paul, that it is central to the thesis of two of his books, *Cruciformity* and *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*.²¹ The *kenosis* verse (2:7) is commonly translated as “self-emptying” and contains the hermeneutical key to the passage. A prevalent interpretation is that the self-emptying of the divine (pre-existent) Christ is an example of extreme denial of the intrinsic divine nature. McClendon is in a group of readers, however, who, along with Gorman, propose an alternative reading.²²

It is possible, says McClendon, to read “the Godlike image attributed to Jesus (*morphe*, v.6), *not* as a characteristic of his heavenly pre-existence but of his human circumstances as he set out to make his career.”²³ With this interpretation McClendon hoped to avoid the metaphysical problems that come with considering how a deity empties himself of divinity in order to join the human race. McClendon must, then, re-understand how the expression in this passage ‘being in the form of God’ is being used. If this poetic narrative was a story that its hearers were familiar with (and this seem quite likely), then the early Christian interpretation was in the tradition of Origen.²⁴ Within this understanding, the image of God is “not a designated state but a task set, not an ontic level enjoyed, but an ideal to be realized.”²⁵ This ideal which had been set

²⁰ See, Ralph Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 In Recent Interpretation and In The Setting Of Early Christian Worship*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997); and Ralph Martin and Brian Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays On Philippians 2*, 1st ed. (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), for a thorough introduction to the scope and depth of the interpretation.

²¹ See, Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality Of The Cross* (Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), and *Inhabiting The Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, And Theosis In Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009).

²² McClendon first explored these ideas in a 1991 article. See, James McClendon, “Philippians 2:5-11,” *Review and Expositor* 88, no. 4 (1991): 439-444.

²³ *Doctrine*, 267.

²⁴ McClendon explores the earliest interpretation of this passage (Phil 2:5-11) to see its development over time. Origen advocated for a more human interpretation of the emptying image, rather than the divine one. See, *Doctrine*, 266-7.

²⁵ *Doctrine*, 268.

out for Adam could not be achieved by humanity due to the obstacles of greed and pride which hindered humans from attaining what Jesus, in his voluntary servitude, achieved.

McClendon's own translation of the Philippian hymn reveals how some of the translation issues could be solved with this interpretation (key translation choices are in italics):

Take to heart among yourselves our being in Christ Jesus: who, mirroring God *on earth*, turned back the temptation to rival God and poured out his life, taking a servant role. Bearing the likeness of *Adam's* race, sharing the human lot, he brought his life low, obedient to death (death on a cross). So God raised him up, and gave him the name outreaching all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend—in heaven, on earth, and in the depths—and every tongue together say, "Jesus, Christ, Lord," to the glory of the Father God.²⁶

This version, with just a few significant variations in translation, makes clear that it was the earthly life of Christ, and his servant role, that eventually brought about his glorification, not his innate deity. It is this voluntary servitude in this life, patterned after Christ, that Gorman labels "cruciform". Our ability to participate in voluntary service (what Yoder calls "radical subordination") is our ability to participate in the very nature of God.²⁷

While McClendon does not go into the same level of detail as Gorman, he does allow this passage to shape the response he makes in forming a Christology. The Gospels tell an expanded version of this narrative and McClendon engages the biography of Christ to unearth some of his identifying characteristics. McClendon picks up some of his traditional roles (prophet, priest, and king) and relates them to certain characteristics: expectancy (characteristic of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Gorman writes convincingly on these points and exegetes the text carefully, discovering 13 recurring images in Paul's writing, which are central to his understanding of what it means to be in Christ. 1. Obedience/Righteousness/Faith(fulness). 2. Love. 3. Grace. 4. Sacrifice. 5. Altruism/Substitution 6. Self-giving/Giving. 7. Voluntary Self-humbling/Abasement. 8. Culmination of a story that includes "incarnation" and suffering. 9. Paradoxical power and wisdom. 10. Interchange. 11. Apocalyptic victory and liberation for new life and transformation. 12. Reconciliation and justification. 13. Prelude to resurrection/exaltation. All of these find their climax in this passage which is the Christ narrative in poetic, crystallized form. See, Gorman, *Inhabiting The Cruciform God*, 82-87.

eschatological prophet), openness (priestlike bridging of the divide between humans and God and one another), and creativity (disclosing himself as the king of the kingdom of God).²⁸ In Philippians, we have the most compact version of the Christ narrative, where imagery and content combine in a few short lines to reveal a comprehensive message. McClendon acknowledges this and seeks a wider narrative expression for his fully developed Christology.

7.3 Two Narratives Christology

McClendon looks in greater depth at the beginning and “end” of the story of Christ to fill out what is expressed in the Philippian hymn. Each of these events tell us something, McClendon argues, about the identity of Jesus and how this narrative relates to the rest of us. The birth narratives (Matthew 1:18 - 2:23, and Luke 1:1 - 2:52) both provide genealogies and identify Jesus’ conception as being “by the Spirit” (cf. Matt. 1:20, Luke 1:35). How McClendon reads this claim is not to name a necessarily miraculous virginal conception (though he does not deny it) that serves as a “dogma to be believed on pain of damnation”, but instead to affirm that this “human event is understood to have been a divine action.”²⁹ The main doctrinal implication of the birth of Christ, McClendon claims, is “a *sign* of faith for the faithful, speaking to many believers of what is signified by this sign, namely, *the full presence of God in the full story of Jesus*.”³⁰

The resurrection has been alluded to briefly above, but McClendon returns to it to highlight a further significant aspect of the event. For McClendon, the resurrection is not merely an act in the world that God ordains, it is *the* act of God in the world. He explains that it is

itself God’s great historic act creating that new presence among us. The resurrection is the historic sign by which other great historic signs are measured (the Reed Sea crossing, the birth of prophesy, the mission of the church), and it is these great historic signs that the remembering signs (prophetic preaching, Lord’s supper, baptism) and providential signs (significant events in Jesus’ life, the answers to our own prayers, other blessings) must evoke and reclaim.³¹

²⁸ *Doctrine*, 269.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis is McClendon’s own.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

McClendon also names the Gospels “resurrection documents” because “had there been no resurrection of Jesus from the dead, there would have been no Luke or Matthew, or any gospel at all.”³² He affirms once again, that in the resurrection, there is the identification of the entire life of the earthly Jesus, from birth to death, with the immortal life of God.

This becomes vital for the two-narratives model that McClendon proposes. Within the *story* of God, God identifies with the *story* of the earthly Jesus. There are obvious tensions here with how Christology has been traditionally treated. McClendon avoids many of the traditional problems of substance and ontology and how this mystery of “two natures” can be a possible reality. McClendon is shifting the focal point of Christology. His approach says that in the life and resurrection, and the divine identification through that act, “God tastes human death at its godless worst; here two stories, human and divine, finally—converge.”³³

This is the central tenet of McClendon’s two-narratives model of Christology. As with most of his theology, McClendon focused on what he saw as being most important for believers in the present day. What we have in the Bible, and the subsequent history of the Church, are stories. Instead of making abstractions and propositions from these stories, McClendon sees the potential in leaving them as stories, and trying to see them united to a current story in a way which allows mystery, yet evokes participation. The story (which is constituted by the multitude of stories from the past) continues, McClendon believes, so that we (humanity, and to a fuller extent faithful Christians) are now participating in this same narrative.

McClendon thus sees theology, and the specific quest of developing a Christology with concern and reference for the historical mission of Christ, as dealing with two narratives rather than one. The first story is the story of what God has been doing to make a place for his people. This story, through the

³² Ibid. This is an echo of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:14.

³³ *Doctrine*, 272.

narratives we have of it (Scripture), shows God as “a holy God whose patterns of living are patterns that make for wholeness and life, not death, a God who chastises only to restore, who comes to comfort, to heal, [and] comes with a lover’s caress.”³⁴ McClendon draws on P.T. Forsyth who names this story of a God continuously reaching out to his creation as *kenosis*, and God as “self-giving”.³⁵ Running parallel to this story is another story: the story of humanity. This is a story that is related to, yet separate from the story of God. This is a story in which humanity is at times faithful, and at times forgetful of its relationship to the God that created it. From Adam and Eve onwards, every character tries to understand and participate in the world within this story. McClendon says, “The greatest of these men and women of faith was that very Jesus who against all odds, in what must have seemed the worst of times, lived a life of full faithfulness, fulfilled his mission and was fully rewarded by his heavenly Father.”³⁶ McClendon, following Forsyth, labels this story as the story of *plerosis*, “the divine fulfillment in human life, God’s self-fulfillment by way of human investment.”³⁷ Jesus is both the call and the response, the *kenosis* and the *plerosis*, God’s greatest gift, and the perfect recipient.

These stories are distinct in that they both affirm the separation between God and the world. Creator and creation, though in interaction with each other, are not inhabiting the same realm, nor (very often) involved in the same plot. The human side of the story often displays a “failure and fragmentation”, which from Cain and Abel, to Babel, through to Babylon and Rome, displays a “dark side.”³⁸ Despite this disposition to darkness, there is also a tendency to return, and to acknowledge the story of the creator and those within the human story who have lived faithfully.³⁹ In the person of Jesus Christ, the two stories become

³⁴ Ibid., 275.

³⁵ See, Peter Taylor Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London: Independent Press, 1909). These are a collection of lectures that this Scottish theologian gave, and its final two chapters are on *kenosis* and *plerosis* of Christ, which were influential to McClendon.

³⁶ *Doctrine*, 275.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ McClendon acknowledges the likely resistance to his claim of there being two distinct stories. Perhaps, as others have claimed, there are just two distinct

one. It is the story of “divine self-expense and human investment, of God reaching to people even before people reach to God, of a God who gives in order to be able to receive, and a humanity that receives so that it shall be able to give.” This, McClendon states, is the biblical story in its fullness, and “the capstone word is this: these two stories are now indivisibly one.”⁴⁰

For Christians, this ‘one’ story is good news once we discover that it is their story as well. Two stories are now indivisibly joined and that same story, now of God and humanity united, continues today. The understanding of this narrative comes through participation in it. McClendon proposes that through voluntary service, a defining characteristic of this story, participation is achieved. The emphasis of Philippians 2:5-11 is highlighted here. The notion of voluntary service is not only a characteristic of the later part of the story, but McClendon sees this as being distinctive throughout the biblical story, claiming, “Abraham’s God (and now the risen Christ) is thereby disclosed, by serving all, to be the God of all the earth (Gen. 12:3).”⁴¹ It is the radical servitude of Christ that epitomized perfect participation with the story of the Father, fusing the story of humanity with the story of God. Radical servanthood is what McClendon, following Yoder, places at the core of this most central doctrine of Christology. The priority of this doctrine and the perspective that it is through voluntary servitude that people may participate in God’s way in the world, is evident in McClendon’s theological method.

McClendon’s narrative Christology differs profoundly from the traditional formulations of Christology. One common critique of McClendon’s proposals is

perspectives on the same story. McClendon admits that this is a possible option for how this could be expressed, but the point of his two-narrative assertion is meant to highlight the ‘twoness’ of the story. Although God can be seen to have been ‘in’ the forgiveness that Joseph gave to his brothers, he was not ‘in’ their selling him into slavery in the first place (story told in Genesis 37). Similarly God can be seen as being ‘in’ some of the ‘evil’ that manifested in the life of Jesus, i.e. his opponents, the bumbling disciples, the ubiquitous power of Rome etc., creating opportunities for the distinct life of Jesus. The difference, McClendon states, is that for “the place of God in Jesus’ own story, no qualifiers are needed; the action of Jesus is God’s action; what Jesus suffers, God suffers.” *Doctrine*, 276.

⁴⁰ *Doctrine*, 276.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 278. Gen 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (NRSV)

that it dismisses the long standing formula that in Christ there were ‘two X’s in one Y’, or, in other words two natures in one person. Jonathan R. Wilson investigates these questions and the possible responses in his 2006 essay *Can Narrative Christology Be Orthodox?*⁴² McClendon’s confession takes the form of ‘two X’s in one X’, which according to the old formulation is illogical. Wilson’s interlocutor voices this critique: “If we use the same concept to specify both duality and unity, the outcome will not be mystery or even paradox, but simply contradiction.”⁴³ He continues, “Since two X’s cannot be one X, [this position] eliminate[s] the belief rather than explicate[s] it.”⁴⁴ This critique in its simplest view, however, is not just about logic, but about narrative; “narrative does not so much explain as stands in need of explanation.”⁴⁵

McClendon acknowledges that his approach does create some challenges to those thinking in traditional ways. McClendon writes:

To reply to the objection that all this talk of twoness and oneness in narrative does not correspond very well to classic two-natures-in-one-being Christology would only be to repeat what I have said earlier in the chapter: It does not. Two-natures Christology has had its day, and we need not return to it save as to a monument of what has gone before. All honor to Athanasius and Basil and Leontius, but they did not write Scripture, and it is to Scripture that we must return in fashioning our convictions.⁴⁶

It is not that McClendon disregards the work done in the past, but sees the role as informing rather than mandating the terms. McClendon treats the Chalcedonian “definition” previously to the passage above, noting that its five adverbs (unconfused, unaltered, undivided, inseparable, in one hypostasis) have become the standard assessment of orthodoxy in regards to Christology. McClendon’s treatment comes within his categorization of the “two-natures model” of Christology. So, whereas McClendon sees the merit in the work that

⁴² Jonathan R. Wilson, “Can Narrative Christology Be Orthodox?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 4 (October 2006): 371–381.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 371

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁴⁶ *Doctrine*, 276.

has been done, and the underlying questions that were asked, he is wanting to change how the answers are approached.⁴⁷

Wilson acknowledges this as one of three possible responses to the critiques raised which are: “1. The logic of narrative is simply different from the logic of ‘substance’ (used loosely for the metaphysical framework with which the Councils were working); thus, no response is really necessary.⁴⁸ 2. In Jesus Christ, we see two agents acting in one narrative. 3. In Jesus Christ, two narratives come together in one agent.”⁴⁹ Wilson explains how narrative does not operate in the same logical ways as do the metaphysical categories with which the originators of the early Church Councils were working. Drawing on McClendon’s application of his Christology, Wilson claims that “the event of Jesus Christ is unique and requires that we conform our categories to its reality, not that we conform the event to our categories.”⁵⁰ Wilson effectively expands and clarifies the distinctions (numbers 2 and 3) for how McClendon’s narrative Christology can be altered to be more acceptable to those coming from traditional Christological positions.⁵¹

What McClendon does is return to the dynamic narrative style of the earliest Christological formulation (Phil 2:5-11), which surpasses the ability to attain complete logical mastery. It is precisely because of the poetic and even metaphoric nature of the early hymn and the narratives of Christ that our logic is surpassed. So, for a Christian, understanding this narrative involves embodying its subversive logic through its captivating image-laden narrative and living in a way which participates in the story which climaxes in Christ. This quite naturally leads McClendon into biography.

⁴⁷ McClendon’s notion of the rationality of theology being like that of a mathematical equation is evoked here.

⁴⁸ This is how McClendon mainly deals with this critique.

⁴⁹ Wilson, “Can Narrative Christology Be Orthodox?,” 372.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 373. This is another example of where McClendon can be seen to employ an empathic method.

⁵¹ See Wilson, “Can Narrative Christology be Orthodox?,” 374-380. Wilson draws on Julian Hartt, Frank Matera, Richard Bauckham, and Richard Hays to expand the narrative Christology position.

While the historical validity of the facts of Jesus' life are much more difficult to confirm, we can have (through the Gospels as we have them) a 'picture' of his life and character.⁵² This picture exists in concentrated form in Philippians 2:5-11, and through it (and the Gospels) we can know "what Jesus taught and meant, what images he employed and lived by, what he did, and what he suffered . . . We know where he stood; and we may be permitted to know where we stand in respect to him."⁵³ There is a sense that, like Yoder, McClendon is interested in the shape or qualitative dimension of this picture, more so than the particular content of it. McClendon is more concerned with *how* he lived, taught, and responded to the challenges he faced rather than the specific actions, teachings and words. According to this perspective then, the clichéd theological question "What would Jesus do?" should be revised to "How would Jesus be?" He infers, then, that, "in this sense, the lives of our saints significantly participate in the life of Christ; telling their stories is a part of telling *the* story."⁵⁴ This is possible by understanding the meaning of Christ's life to be formed through the *way* he lived, rather than through the particularities of his life.⁵⁵ While the particular content of the context Jesus Christ inhabited is not available today, the way Christ lived is. This is how McClendon's biographical method stands in line with the method of the early Church, and indeed with how people experience God's revelation. Lives of the saints, here and now, are conduits of the same divine way or quality that Christ himself embodied.

While it would be possible to reformulate the definition of Chalcedon with this narrative emphasis in place, (and indeed it may be an interesting project to

⁵² McClendon does affirm that historical studies of the man Jesus-of-Nazareth do affirm certain facts, namely, that this man existed, drew disciples, ate at banquets with 'sinners', encountered opposition, and was eventually executed on a cross by the Romans. See, McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 168.

⁵³ *Bio.*, 169.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 170.

⁵⁵ "An important term for McClendon is "way". He uses it extensively in *Ethics*, as a metaphor to understand how the Hebrew people saw themselves. "They were a people on a path" and it became for them the "metaphor by which their life under God was envisioned." This, argues McClendon, continues into the New Testament and today. See, *Ethics*, 49-51.

undertake) McClendon's purpose to revise as an aspect of the theological task does not seem to indicate that this is necessary for a faithful Christology.

With the development of this 'picture' of Christology, the way that it is conceived and the questions asked as a response are significantly changed. Following from the Wittgensteinian account in Chapter Four, it is a picture which shapes the initial questions and overall sense of how the world goes. Given a particular picture of Jesus, there are certain implications that follow. Indeed, McClendon's theological project can be seen to be the exploration of the implications of having this particular "picture" of Jesus Christ.

7.4 Methodological Connections

McClendon's theology originates from, and culminates in, his understanding of the place, priority, and story of Jesus Christ. His two-narratives Christology, represents the 'picture' which McClendon responds to through the method and content of his theology. The three manifestations of his progressed version of image-based thinking (explored in Chapter Four) are a good example. Firstly, through his baptist vision, McClendon sets out a way of reading Scripture, connecting it to the present and creating a way of making meaning which informs the very lives of the faithful. Secondly, in picture thinking, McClendon harnesses the ability of complex, meaningful images that have the ability to shape the way things are seen and conceptualized. These pictures have the ability to captivate and take the imagination in either positive or negative directions.⁵⁶ Thirdly, through the process of catachresis words are created through cross domain mapping allowing language to be used with loyalty to the experiences of the past. This process was practiced by the early apostles who were trying to describe and express the new existence that was available post-resurrection. It is also practiced now as followers seek to contextualize faith in an ever-changing world.⁵⁷ These three practices make up a distinctive pattern of

⁵⁶ There is an underlying metaphor present here. KNOWING IS SEEING is a common metaphor for knowledge that is present in much of the language around knowledge.

⁵⁷ These three practices (baptist vision, picture thinking, catechresis) interestingly account for three spheres which Mark Johnson's work speaks to: meaning-making, cognition, and language use. These will be traced through Johnson's work in the final chapter and I will make the connection to McClendon's practices then.

McClendon's theological method, namely the image-based thinking that pervades his theology, but they must not be seen *only* as this, however, because of their intimate and inextricable connection to biography. In other words, McClendon's theological method, as a response to this particular picture of Christology, resists the (modern and academic) urge to separate the lessons of a life (propositional statements) from the life itself. Accordingly McClendon's practice of theology has no merit unless it is directly linked to how life is lived. The image-based thinking McClendon displays in his theology is a methodological step to understand the natural connections between a life and the practice of theology.

This requires further explication. The philosophical clarity of Johnson's contribution makes this explication an attainable task. Rationality, and more specifically metaphoric rationality, must be seen in context. For Christians, knowing the 'Great Story' is crucial to the meaning-making and rationality of the present. McClendon notes that this Great Story "must include the whole account of Israel, of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed, and of the church that followed."⁵⁸ It is not that theology and its sub-disciplines (ethics, doctrine, cultural engagement) are merely stories themselves, nor do they merely tell us a story, but rather that theology is concerned with the lives of those who live with these certain convictions.⁵⁹ This, quite naturally, finds narrative expression. Theology "investigates, analyses, criticizes, a way of life, a morality, that is itself story formed."⁶⁰ McClendon resists the tendency to reduce the story down to smaller propositions (principles, values, or foundational truths) because *this* story is of a "living Lord, whose timely life confronts our stories with his own."⁶¹ No reduction can fulfill this.

There is a kind of intra-rationality that takes place in this narrative approach. McClendon acknowledges this while defending his use of narrative in *Ethics*, saying: "To be true, Christian theological ethics must know *this* story, must

⁵⁸ *Ethics*, 329.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 331.

understand *this* story, must give a lead for the appropriation of *this* story; when it does so, it thereby constitutes itself a narrative ethics [and theology].”⁶² There is not a judgement criterion outside itself that may be used for its justification. This is a philosophical approach which McClendon had explored in his early work with James M. Smith. Conviction sets, which express the notion that convictions never exist in isolation but always in relation to many other inter-related convictions, are integral to the philosophy developed in this work.⁶³ A ‘worldview’ or belief system, or any organizing set of convictions that forms a certain community, is, therefore, a conviction set.

Conviction sets, while only being properly understood from within, are not impossible to observe from the outside. McClendon suggests,

the assessor of the truth of conviction sets may be like the interpreter of an unclear photograph, composed of many blurred spots and indefinite blotches. Attention to the spots alone (the several singular convictions) may never yield results. Yet the interpretation of the whole photograph cannot be achieved save by bringing each blurred part of it as sharply as possible into focus.⁶⁴

He also stresses that while ‘truth’ is often the benchmark of the justification process, to be true or false is not often absolute but exists on a continuum. ‘True’ and ‘false’ “are members of a class of terms that includes also ‘accurate’ and ‘careless,’ ‘rough’ and ‘exact,’ ‘fair’ and ‘hasty,’ and a host of others.”⁶⁵ Truth, understood in this way, is one of many descriptors, and not necessarily the ultimate judge of its relevance. Any voice, as long as it is human, can be understood in part. Communication (among differing conviction sets) is able to take place, though often with significant difficulty. This is to say that while the truth of the story may only be seen from within, it can still be communicated to those who do not identify with it.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., 330, emphasis is my own.

⁶³ See, *Con.*, especially 91-101.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ This is also true of how I can use McClendon’s perspective in this research. While I empathically project from McClendon’s convictional perspective only partially, it is still a possibility to do so.

Within McClendon's conviction set, the narrative of Christ acts as a central root system, manifesting various methodological practices including: biography (the method through which we encounter Christ in the Gospels); picture thinking (seen in the condensed poetic narrative of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11); catachresis (the early Christians response to the events of Christ in the early church); and the baptist vision (a way of reading and making meaning of the present context from previous times and places, an interpretive practice which Jesus himself displays throughout the Gospels). Each of these methodological devices allows events taking place in the daily lives of people to be seen as integral to the understanding and revision of one's convictions. The unity of these devices is most clearly displayed in the lives chosen as biographical subjects, such as Bonhoeffer, Day, or Hammarskjöld. McClendon's treatment of Christology, then, demonstrates the way in which biography and its corresponding use of image-based thinking is of central importance to his project, and not merely tangential.

This is where Johnson's insights add clarity. In McClendon's use of biography we see metaphor, image-schema, narrative, and embodiment unified in a single approach to theology. Through Johnson, each of these methodological tools takes on a significance beyond McClendon's use of them. The previous chapter explored the ways Johnson synthesizes with McClendon in three specific areas: anthropology, rationality, and the relationship between narrative, metaphor and ontology. Through a renewed understanding of each of these areas, via Johnson, McClendon's Christology can be read in a revised and updated way.

McClendon, like Johnson, does not eliminate propositional statements from his practice, but qualifies their use by suggesting that propositions must not be taken as being somehow above or separate from the lived context of their formation. McClendon's response to this involves highlighting the lives of those who have done this with success, and in a compelling way. The methodological considerations he has used to achieve this have been noted, and now, according to his own understanding, they may be revised.

At this point I will advance by looking at how a reading of McClendon's Christology, with the insights of Johnson in mind, illuminates McClendon's

method, bringing an increased clarity to describing what is taking place. I will also highlight the revision that this reading provides to a biographical method. Through Johnson, the connections between meaning-making and living are made explicit allowing for an added dynamic in understanding how theology can, and must, involve biography. In what follows I will provide a renewed reading of McClendon and propose a revision for how biography as theology can be practiced today.

Anthropology

In the context of Christology, bringing the anthropological implications of Johnson's work to bear affirms McClendon's intuitions that the way of Christ in the world (non-violent subversive servitude) can be as meaningful as facts of his historical life. Through Johnson's elaboration of the implications of embodiment, many of the distinctions that have been held in the past can be put to rest. In this context, the distinction between form and content is significantly lessened, allowing for the *way* of Christ to be included in the divine. The centrality of the Philippians hymn for McClendon is paramount here. Johnson explores this notion in looking at how humans make meaning through the qualitative dimensions of experience.⁶⁷ The qualities of how something exists in its environment and how it is experienced by a person are essential to what it means. Theologically, this allows for a reading of Scripture which, like McClendon's expands the relevant material of the text rather than reduces it to the quantifiable or historically verifiable.

Johnson also allows for a renewed understanding of immanence. His understanding of the reciprocal and relational way that an organism and an environment interact opens up the possibilities of an embodied holistic understanding of humanity. What this does for Christology is to provide an understanding of how the human man Jesus was like any other human. He was an organism interacting and responding to his environment. The distinctive way he did this (as McClendon's Christology emphasizes) was fully identified with

⁶⁷ Johnson explains his argument from *The Meaning of the Body*, as "meaning is not just a matter of concepts and propositions, but also reaches down into the images, sensorimotor schemas, feelings, qualities, and emotions that constitute our meaningful encounter with the world." *The Meaning of the Body*, xi. See Chapter V for a fuller exploration of Johnson's argument.

God's action in the world. This not only provides a better understanding of how we may participate in the same story in which Jesus Christ lived, but also of how (including the physical social and transformative dimensions) he was in the world. By locating transcendence within immanence, Johnson provides an account of the surplus of meaning that goes beyond our capacity to completely understand, while not trying to explain away the experience of transcendence that occurs in the world. This resists the disillusion that many who seek scientifically responsible ideas come to have. McClendon's narrative Christology highlights this immanent dimension, but affirms that the transcendent narrative of God is present here also.⁶⁸ Through Johnson, we see that these are not mutually exclusive but can co-exist, as McClendon has shown in his two-narratives approach.

Johnson's account of the human provides a dynamic picture of the relational condition that pervades all parts of our living. With this in mind, reading McClendon's conclusions that the story of Jesus Christ *is our story* requires a relational encounter to take place. If we are a body and a mind in constant engagement with an environment, stories about the past constitute the environment in significant ways, and must be attended to. The Christian story is a story with human beings as its central player, and this has implications for how it ought to be read. Participation in this Great Story is central to McClendon's theology. It is a primary reason why biography became central to his work. Johnson's anthropological understanding allows participation to be understood in ways that are more direct. Everything is connected and the ways that vast narratives like the Christian narrative shape a person's perspective become more established. The connection of embodiment to abstract thought is the location of this participation.

Accordingly, the anthropological implications of reading McClendon with Johnson's contributions in mind provide a hermeneutical approach to reading the Bible, and specifically the Gospels, in a way that affirms biography and

⁶⁸ The well known *Grundaxiom* of Karl Rahner "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa", is similar in many respects to what is affirmed here. See, Karl Rahner, "Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam," *Theological Investigations* Vol. XVIII trans., Edward Quinn (New York, Crossroad, 1983), 114-115.

narrative as appropriate responses. The (embodied and contextual) immanence of Jesus, was—through the “way” he lived, responded to the call of God by sustaining the dignity of the other with radical servitude—divine, the Christ. This life story climaxes in the cross and resurrection and transforms history by its subversive power, calling followers on this “way” to participate in the divine narrative through living with the same qualitative and empathic shape.

McClendon engages this theme of “way” in his treatment of salvation acknowledging a cluster of terms throughout the Old and New Testaments that relate to it.⁶⁹ He acknowledges that the community of Christ’s followers were called “those of the way” (Acts 9:2, for example), that the image of walking is common throughout (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 7:17; Gal. 5:16; 1John 1:7), and that Jesus himself acknowledges that he is the “way” to the Father (John 14.5-7).⁷⁰

McClendon points out that to appreciate the allusion to the Old Testament, “where ‘way’ (*derek*) meant simply road or street, but had come also to mean characteristic life pattern: the habit of the eagle or of the serpent, the conduct of a human being, the way of a man with a maid, while *halak*, ‘walk,’ provided a word for law derived from the Mosaic law given at Sinai (*halakah*).”⁷¹ This qualitative category of terms reveals a resonating tone that unites the two stories of God and Man, brought together in Christ.

In respect to McClendon’s biographical method, this approach to anthropology sees a person’s existence in the world as a natural occurrence. As part of an organic ecosystem, humans participate in the world in a physical way. For a biographical method, this anthropological understanding allows a perspective that broadens the material that is meaningful in the life of a biographical subject. In this vein, McClendon sees the lives of people who come to inspire and symbolize faithfulness in various generations as involved in the same process as other parts of creation. He states, “There is a significant continuity between the delight of the amoeba in its food and the delight of the saint in the beatific vision.”⁷² Each piece of the organic world interacts and responds to its

⁶⁹ *Doctrine*, 119.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² James W. McClendon, “Three Strands of Christian Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no. 1 (1978): 54–80.

environment according to its makeup. This anthropological perspective overcomes the anthropocentric tendency that has been characteristic of many modern theological programs, while deepening the understanding of the human condition.⁷³ Humanity will always exert an overwhelming influence on the rest of creation, yet, we are not separated from it. Further, we are becoming more aware of how fragile our ecosystems are and how mistreatment of the creation leads to significant and potentially dangerous disruptions. Here, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, an account of creation is evoked. How the world goes cannot be separated from the individual characters-in-community who dwell upon the earth's crust and participate in its ecosystems.

From reading McClendon and Johnson together, an implication of this character-in-community-in-environment anthropological approach is the quite natural phenomenon of what Johnson calls "horizontal transcendence."⁷⁴ That there are things in the realm of experience which are beyond our capacity to explicate or understand requires acknowledging the beyond. McClendon names the tri-fold response of creaturehood, createdness, and creativity (found in his account of creation) as the appropriate response. A life that displays the combination of experiencing horizontal transcendence with the awareness and response of creation in a significant context, and shows the ability to successfully live in a way that expands the vision of their community, is a life worthy of study.

With this anthropological approach to how meaning is made (qualitatively, embodied), and with an eye to the future via eschatology and transformation, theology must attend to lives who are living in communities facing the challenges that will define the future. A look at McClendon's subjects shows that convictional growth and challenge comes via conflict with the status quo. A life that mirrors the path of Christ (the way of the cross) will be a life ripe for

⁷³ Sallie McFague has been a leading voice in engaging theologically with the relationship between people, God, and the earth. See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); and *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008).

⁷⁴ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 281.

biographical theology. This anthropological strategy helps the biographer determine the priority of data to study in order to gain the desired convictional clarity.

Rationality

Johnson's renewed approach to rationality connects the realm of abstract thought and embodied living through metaphor. Metaphors, being conceptual in nature, are formed through the mapping of physical experientially learned lessons and thoughts onto more abstract realms of thought. McClendon views experience narratively and, as such, the story of Christ is a part of our (communal) experiential past. The metaphoric patterns and categories provide a sort of grid through which all life is viewed. This is a cyclical process. How we conceptualize the world is determined by the metaphoric database available to us. According to McClendon, the available resources that shape this database are not limited to our own personal narratives, but also include the accrued wisdom of generations of people who have been involved in the similar task of seeking to live faithfully in response to the mysterious story of Christ.

As with any narrative there are going to be parts that stand out as being more significant than others. The Christ narrative is central to the biblical story and central to the Christian faith as a whole. As such, the meaning found therein provides a natural place to look to assess the personal and communal narratives we now inhabit. An encounter with the present Christ is the result. In Christian practice what takes place is enacted and embodied imagery that shapes and enforces the images that are present within the story we have received as a part of our heritage. Through this input of enacted imagery, and the acquisition of an imagination that is shaped by the Christian story, people can live in a way that becomes a natural response to the Christian narrative. James K.A. Smith affirms this view as well. Smith tells a story of a man who, week after week, attends a church service that has the confession of sins as a part of their liturgy. At times he fully engaged in this confession while at other times he merely went through the motions. This man was formed through the constant practice of this confession. When put in a position where he was to be the forgiver, forgiveness was given as an automatic response due to this formation. Enacted imagery takes the images and metaphors within a narrative and shapes physical practice

by them.⁷⁵ Eventually these become neural habits which shape how we think and act.

These enacted images have become part of the sacramental practice of how God is made present in the world here and now. With a holistic rationality in place, sacraments are not just an unaccounted mystery, at best, or a fairy-tale falsehood, at worst; they can be understood as a manifestation of the interrelated connections that create meaning and which make God manifest in our presence. As we have seen through Johnson's work, many of the dichotomies and dualisms that have limited understanding can be overcome, and holistic understanding of the inter-relatedness of all parts of life can be described in this way.

With this type of approach to how the mind is formed, a new type of rationality is achieved. The *a priori* philosophical speculation of the past is able to be left behind, and this new holistic approach to thought can take its place. While the image of objectivity and ultimate certainty are lost, the self-deception they bring with them are no longer as hindering. An imaginative rationality is what takes its place. This contextual relational perspective encourages one to see the connections between the inner and the outer realms as involved in a reciprocal relationality that is in constant motion. What counts as constant in this system is not as much the content of what is known, but the method through which meaning is made and knowledge is formed.

McClendon's Christology, with its focus on narrative, can be nuanced through highlighting how metaphor pervades any narrative. To use Johnson's image, it is metaphor that provides the muscle, tendon and flesh onto the bone of literal language. It enfleshes a story. This takes on greater significance once the embodied sources of metaphor are understood. Quite literally, metaphor comes out of our bodily participation in a social and physical environment. Christ embodies the images of his faith and transforms their meaning. Christ is the bread of life, he is the Lion and the Lamb, in each case Jesus himself embodies the image and through this embodiment transforms how it functions.

⁷⁵ The three ways that metaphor becomes embodied are how Johnson sees this as taking place. Cf. Johnson and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 73.

McClendon's narrative allows for this reading to take place. McClendon refuses to allow the traditional metaphysical concerns of the past to determine the approach he saw as apt to the present. His Christology is not merely a concern with what has traditionally been 'rational,' but with the story that invites lived participation.

Johnson's emphasis on how metaphor overcomes many of the traditional dichotomies that have shaped philosophical and theological habit of thought is vital here. For McClendon, part of what struck him during his conversion experience (via Yoder) was Yoder's ability to speak about "the way" that Jesus Christ was in the world and which constituted Jesus' divinity. The radical subordination of which Yoder speaks is not merely civil demonstration of objection, it was "itself a participation in the character of God's victorious patience with the rebellious powers of his creation."⁷⁶ Yoder's understanding of Christ affirms that Jesus was involved in political activity and a distinctive characteristic of this activity was the rejection of violence as a means of coercion to achieve his ends. Similarly, in McClendon's narrative Christology it is Jesus earthly narrative that is fully identified with that of God's. The distinction between the content of Jesus' life and the way in which he embodied the events is diminished. It is the *way* which was the cause and the content of Jesus' glorification.

The images and metaphors shape and form this 'way', this 'quality' of life, and enable it to be transmitted to others. McClendon himself acknowledged how metaphor works within narrative to facilitate a successful encounter. In reflecting on biography as theology (as theological method), McClendon acknowledges that it is metaphors (images) that "are the means by which our stories may pass through the 'collision' with the biblical and Christian story."⁷⁷ It is through these images or metaphors, of which Christ was the ultimate fulfillment, that participation takes place. Or, as McClendon puts it (evoking a qualitative term), "the images reverberate with[in] two stories."⁷⁸ McClendon

⁷⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 209.

⁷⁷ McClendon, "Story, Sainthood, and Truth: Biography as Theology Revisited," 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

acknowledges the role of metaphor as a conduit between the past and the present, and through Johnson's elaborations and explorations of metaphor theory McClendon's intuitions are affirmed. Metaphor enables participation in the way of Christ by drawing upon the same metaphoric database that Christ had.

The merit of Johnson's categories is perhaps most obvious here. McClendon's use of images is clarified and expanded upon by means of Johnson's work. The metaphoric intuitions McClendon espouses early in his development of this method find their natural continuation in the work of Johnson and Lakoff. A post-Johnson reading of *Biography as Theology* makes the use of McClendon's images as a centerpiece in his method an obvious choice.

The development of McClendon's theological method in general (from his early to his later work) is also made through this revised rationality. As we see in the shift from images, from specific correlation of an image to a doctrine to a broader implication of what images do in the vision and thought of his subjects, the trajectories of Johnson and McClendon mirror one another. Johnson moves from a direct look at the metaphoric phenomenon to how metaphors facilitate meaning making, thinking and the experience of the world. In this way, the implications of McClendon's use of biography and image-based thinking are broadened to be included in his answering of wider questions involved in his systematic project. The focus was no longer on how a particular life used images in order to investigate an issue of theological importance. Rather, the focus was on how a person's life embodied an understanding of Christ within a larger theological community, and the methods used in these communities to see the world and to respond to it in a faithful way. Participation in the life of Christ, rather than the content of specific images, became the concern in McClendon's method.

This progression in use of images is significant because it reveals the acceptance of an holistic rationality. With the specific use of metaphor or image there can be a tendency to allow reductionistic habits to continue. An holistic approach to metaphor accepts the role metaphor has beneath the explicit manifestations of these images. Through Johnson's work, we can see how this is the case.

With this type of rationality in place, what becomes valuable for reflection is much broader than under the assumptions of Enlightenment thought. The interconnectedness between a person's body and the physical and social communities they relate to (including the narratives of the past), provides a nearly endless source of relevant material to reflect upon. McClendon's understanding of convictions as the subject of theology allows for this breadth of material to be relevant as long as the required criteria are met.⁷⁹ Biography by its nature is open to telling the story with the variety of material that each life reveals.

Propositional statements find meaning in a narrative, social, and embodied context. This disrupts the tendency that exists in modern discourse to affirm that propositions have meaning regardless of contextual considerations. Biography provides a method where the context is affirmed and highlighted so that propositional statements find meaning in a life. McClendon explains this approach:

Biographical theology need not repudiate and should not ignore the propositional statements of theological doctrine. What it must insist is that this propositional statement be in continual and intimate contact with the lived experience which the propositional doctrine by turns collects, orders, and informs. Without such living contact, theological doctrine readily becomes (in a pejorative sense) objective – remote from actual Christian life, a set of empty propositions more suited to attacking rival theologians than to informing the church of God.

Johnson provides the theoretical means by which propositional statements are connected to the lives that produce them. This new approach to rationality enables this. For McClendon it was an intuitive knowledge, and Johnson explicates how this is so. Biographical theology is clarified through the connection of rationality, metaphor and the embodied nature that Johnson's account offers to its practice.

Narrative, Language and Ontology

This final category is where we see how all of life is related to Christology. The physical and the extra-physical participate in the same kind of holistic system of

⁷⁹ These criteria are persistence and relevance, explored in the opening chapter.

being. Austin Farrer provided the impetus of this line of thinking in McClendon's project. His insistence that *what is*, is intimately linked with the resources available to describe the mysteries that surround us, implies that the mental structures and categories (which are now enriched through the contribution of Johnson) determine what reality is. According to McClendon, *what is*, for Christians, is primarily known and understood through the lens of the Christ story, which climaxes each person's own narrative.

Through Johnson, we can see more clearly how *what is* can be constituted through our various systems of relation to the world. Both internal (mental) and external relations constitute reality. McClendon's account of the story of Christ reclaims the power of the story itself, without the desire to reduce or explain. This allows for people and communities to encounter the story with its images, mysteries, and affective qualities intact. The response made by those communities and individuals who have taken this story as their own is a contextual embodiment of the same narrative. What McClendon's systematic project seeks to describe is an embodiment of the narrative that credits the radical reformation as a defining historic event.

It is the central conviction that narrative is a faithful methodological response to the (narrative) gospel via Scripture which unifies McClendon's theological method. McClendon, purposefully and throughout his work contextualizes within the "Great Story" insights and propositions that answer his driving questions in each volume. While remaining faithful to the theological tradition that he had received, McClendon returns consistently to narrative as a means of shifting the priority of emphasis from many of the problems that arise to reveal a compelling narrative that necessitates engagement rather than being primarily concerned with answers. Narrative is more faithfully responded to, in his eyes, through a wondered reverence and appreciation than in explicating problems within it to be solved.

Aesthetics come into focus here as well. Johnson uses the category of aesthetics as a broad term encompassing everything that goes in to what makes something meaningful. It is related to the qualities and feeling of the perception of the world as much as it is the content and material of it. This is true of both the

cognitive and the physical levels of experience. If Johnson's work is taken to be the case, then it becomes much clearer how a narrative shapes a community. Its physical and linguistic practices shape the imagination, categories, and metaphors which give affective and qualitative shape to the world as it is known.

Communal practices are one example of how narrative, language and ontology come together in a formative way. In repeated practices performed by a community, we see the process of formation taking place, not only on the sociological level, but on a deeper physical level as well. Johnson's explanation of how metaphors become embodied is relevant here.⁸⁰ Even on the neural level, the physical makeup of the brain is shaped and formed through the repetition of these practices. The physical actions which signify and embody symbolic (metaphoric) aspects of communal narratives give rise to linguistic forms of expression (including catachresis) providing the categories through which the world is known and experienced. The Eucharist is one such practice.

McClendon writes that in the Eucharist meal, solidarity and redemption are symbolized and instantiated in the practice of taking the bread and the cup. Such a practice, McClendon argues, is essential for establishing and maintaining the Christian community. Ryan Newson has written about this very point in *Embodiment Takes Practice: The Neurological Necessity of Counter-Practices in Transforming Culture*.⁸¹ In this article Newson explores how McClendon argues that embodied practices play an essential role in moral formation, long before people in the mainstream academic community were resonating with this notion.

⁸⁰ Johnson describes this process in *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 73.(1) It is embodied through bodily experience in the world, which pairs sensorimotor experience with subjective experience. (2) The source-domain logic arises from the inferential structure of the sensorimotor system. And (3) it is instantiated neurally in the synaptic weights associated with neural connections. While put in quite technical language this process is vital to how Johnson's theory of connecting the mental and the physical world via metaphor.

⁸¹ Ryan Andrew Newson, "Embodiment Takes Practice: The Neurological Necessity of Counter-Practices in Transforming Culture," *The Other Journal*, March 6, 2014, <http://theotherjournal.com/2014/03/06/embodiment-takes-practice-the-neurological-necessity-of-counter-practices-in-transforming-culture-3/>.

In the Eucharist, and other Christian practices, the story of Christ is physically and socially instantiated in our context to form the minds of Christian adherents. Or, stated differently, Christ is made present, and his story and ours intersect. McClendon's theology reflects this conviction, and his narrative method allows him to explore many of these implications in a synthesized way.

With this awareness in focus, biography is able to be seen as more than anecdotal or coincidental tales, but as an embodiment of a system of relations between the narrative past, and the physical and social present. Biography provides the requisite context for convictional conversation to take place. The systems of meaning making and living provide the commonality needed for convictional exchange to happen. McClendon insists that biography as theology, done well, should challenge and expand the vision of living that community has. It should cause the reader to question the status quo of their lives and seek to respond more faithfully to the current social and physical world. The saints among us reveal what participation in Christ looks like.

The conviction that the world is formed through the relational processes involved in an individual-in-community-in-an-environment is continually strengthened through the ongoing research in psychological and scientific communities. Thinkers like Johnson draw on these sources to form an holistic theory of existence, and can now change how we see the potential for biography as a theological method. Many of the implications of this change have already been implied in this and the previous chapters, but I would like to highlight here two implications that have not yet been discussed.

The first is the potential for ecological theology through biography. Ecological theology sees humanity's rising dependence on fossil fuels, and the cost of this dependence, as being a matter of theological significance. The global consensus on the crisis of greenhouse gas emissions and its relation to climate change is a concern that has grown to the point of being impossible to ignore, and increasingly has become a topic of theological consideration.⁸² With the

⁸² The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the chief example of this. Jointly established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the IPCC has produced studies revealing the impending crisis of climate change,

understanding of the inter-relatedness of the world, presented here, ecological theology becomes not merely a peripheral topic of lesser consequence, but a primary ingredient in all other theology. The health of the physical environment inevitably shapes the health of its occupants.

An immediate example of a potential subject for biographical study within ecological theology would be author, activist and farmer Wendell Berry. Berry has devoted his life to the thinking and writing about the interconnection between humans, the land and the Christian faith. Berry left his life as a blossoming writer in New York City to return to his family's farm. There, he continued to be an advocate for the family farm and ecological responsibility, writing about how this is a part of our calling as created beings within wider creation. Our relationship to the food we eat is a large part of this. Berry's life reveals many theological insights that are worthy of being biographically recorded as his theological contribution. Others have been involved in looking at Berry's contribution and reflecting theologically upon it, but a full study of his life and work would be apt for a biographical theology in the spirit of what is proposed here.⁸³ Berry's life reveals a way of living which calls into question the status quo or our hyper-productive, hyper-consumptive ways of growing and eating and caring for the earth. A life and character like Berry's has the compelling and aesthetic quality to be very fit for this type of application.

The second implication is a significant one for theology's meaning more broadly. If McClendon's understanding of theology is held, and this understanding of relational ontological system of existence is affirmed, then theology has a broad scope of influence beyond what has traditionally been studied under its heading. Of course, traditional Christian doctrines must be attended to, but their meaning is no longer limited to the propositional content of their conclusions. This perspective allows meaning to emerge in the process of life, in the interaction between a bodily person living and their social, mental

and is one of the largest unified global scientific projects. For publications and studies see, <http://www.ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml>.

⁸³ One such example is this collection of essays: Joel James Shuman and L. Roger Owens, eds., *Wendell Berry and Religion: Heaven's Earthly Life, Culture of the Land* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2009),

and physical world. A community of disciples of Christ participate in the life of Christ through their rituals in hopes of embodying the “way” of Christ in their own lives. Beyond this, it is the affective and qualitative dimensions within this interaction that shape how meaning is made. The way that theology shapes these unseen, and traditionally unexplored, dimensions which have persuasive influence on people’s lives is now able to be studied.

It is the *way* that theology shapes living, where the truest impact of theology is seen. If the qualitative and aesthetic dimensions of life are to be the future of academic inquiry (as Johnson predicts), a theological method of biography as theology is the best way forward. Biography as theology studies a life and the convictions of the character that are revealed. The interconnectedness of these multiple dimensions highlights how the changing of any part of life can significantly change the reality of that person and community. The scope and impact of this is monumental, as is the potential for harnessing this for positive impacts in the lives and communities who engage in it.

Biography as a theological method has the potential to display, ostensibly, how various lives engage reality at a depth that is not normally seen, with a beauty that is inspiring. This is part of the compelling nature of McClendon’s requirement for the subjects chosen, and it relates to the aesthetic dimension that Johnson indicates. The compelling and aesthetically pleasing quality of deep engagement in difficult circumstance confronts others’ way of life. Both at the explicit linguistic and underlying convictional level this type of theology has the ability to see options previously not considered, and lead to deeper levels of faithful participation in the grand narrative of God and humanity. In McClendon’s original conception of the method, it forces people to re-understand and revise their own version of life and faith. This potential is strengthened and broadened under a revised understanding of this method.

McClendon’s two-narrative Christology, in which the divine and human stories come together in the person of Jesus Christ, sets him apart from the theologians of the late Twentieth Century. I have argued that in this Christology we see significant methodological distinctives exemplified in McClendon’s work. Further, I have suggested that by applying Johnson’s philosophical perspective

to a reading of McClendon the potential for significant insights and expansion is opened up. Many of McClendon's convictions were based in intuitive knowledge and wisdom. Johnson's project delves into the depth of human meaning-making in the spheres of language, thought, and embodiment which were the subjects of McClendon's intuitive work. The synthesis yields fruitful results.

Through this response of bringing Johnson to bear upon McClendon's work, and specifically with focus on method, a revised understanding of McClendon's theology is formed. This response is fitting because it seeks to follow the same path McClendon was on, while seeing possible routes not previously available. McClendon acknowledged the potential of metaphor in both speaking and thinking and uses it throughout his work, and, as I have argued in this thesis, it fuels much of his practice. My reading, then, provides a corrective to his work. Potential gains in terms of clarity of voice and a depth of insight that McClendon had not considered (because they were unavailable, or tangential to his goals at the time) can now be seen. Transformation is one of the three main tasks McClendon gives theology, and it expresses the necessarily creative dimension in its practice. I have shown one possible transformation McClendon's work could undergo.

7.5 Conclusion

In Chapter Three a number of concerns and questions were raised as potential criticisms of McClendon's biographical approach. It is fitting to return to these in order to test the extent to which the insights and expansions I have suggested (emerging from reading McClendon in the light of Johnson) have any material impact.

The first concern highlighted was the seemingly arbitrary selection of images that corresponded to the lives McClendon chose as subjects. The four lives studied in *Biography as Theology* all related to the doctrine of atonement. This seemed to some to be quite convenient. McClendon's progression away from highlighting specific images to the more broad approach of looking at the vision of the subjects (how they see and embody their beliefs) helps to overcome this concern. However, the revision I have proposed entails a return to a kind of metaphoric analysis. The difference is one of direction. The doctrine is not

determined first with the images subsequently found to enable an interpretation of this doctrine in the context of a life. Instead, the life is studied and the underlying metaphoric structures that shape the mind, actions and narrative of the subject are found. The doctrine or doctrines that relate to this are explored in light of this life. As McClendon has stated, “doctrine is bottled life.”⁸⁴ Christian doctrine is a detailed description of the embodied empathic response to revelation. Living comes first, not doctrine.

The process by which meaning is made, including metaphor, narrative, and imagination, (taking place in both the physical and social environment), plays a part in the response that is made. Through Johnson, it is possible to engage in a deeper analysis, revealing the ways that a life participates in the broader narrative of which McClendon speaks. Accordingly, the application of images and its corresponding uses overcomes the charge of being subjective and arbitrary, and instead can be a tool for producing contextually relevant doctrinal engagement. Engaging with specific key metaphors and images from certain lives provides an essential picture of how the world is for that person and community.

The second concern raised at the conclusion of Chapter Three was about the selection of the subjects themselves. McClendon proposes that they must have a “compelling” quality to them, and that they should be “liked”. While acknowledging the ambiguity and briefly trying to bring a level of clarity, what “compelling” is remains on the level of the intuitive. McClendon chose lives fit for the purpose they were used for, but why this life and not some other? Assuredly they would have fit his requisite “compellingness” but how so?

Johnson’s understanding of aesthetics is apt here. Johnson concludes *The Meaning of the Body* by stating that “The art of our lives is the art of the meaning of the body. In some people, it is beautiful art.”⁸⁵ This line evokes the whole argument of his book, indeed his entire philosophical project. The meaning we embody in our lives, with the various relational dynamics therein

⁸⁴ McClendon, “Biography as Theology for Southern Baptists,” 2.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 283.

(what Johnson calls “our humanity” which includes “our animal needs, our personal relationships, our need and capacity for love, our social relations, our cultural institutions and practices, and our spirituality”),⁸⁶ is a witness to others. How life is lived has an aesthetic quality to it; McClendon believed this also and responds in both the method and the content of his theology. McClendon rejects the notion that ethics is a matter of rights or duties and instead prefers the concept of “morality as a kind of beauty.”⁸⁷ He explains further that “beauty in this sense is a certain kind of wholeness, whether it be the beauty of a yellow rose or the beauty of a human life well-formed...”⁸⁸ Johnson’s understanding of aesthetics adds another dynamic to McClendon’s claim that theology and ethics cannot be separated by adding that ethics and *aesthetics* cannot be separated.

In this way, all that goes in to making meaning, accumulates in an embodied character-in-community-in-an-environment who lives out a distinctive perspective in his or her context. From time to time, there are those who do so with such compelling beauty that it causes a re-visioning of life. It is these people that McClendon sees as being fit subjects for biographical theology. Johnson’s aesthetics provide the resources to explain how this (intuitive) beauty is to be understood. Those people who take the inherited convictions of their community and embody them in novel ways compel further attention. The process of how this takes place is revealed through the use of metaphor and its implications for experience, thought, and language. McClendon’s veiled description of compelling lives can be clarified through applying Johnson’s aesthetic approach.

The final issue raised previously concerned McClendon’s understanding of self-deception as a primary reason for highlighting biography over autobiography. Surely if self-deception is inevitable in autobiography it is also an issue for biographers as well. McClendon acknowledges this but sees it as much less of a concern due to the communal nature of biographies. How biography is theology is key here for how this concern becomes lessened. Recall that for McClendon,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Witness*, 402.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 403.

an underlying and ever-present conviction is that a given theology is proven true by the living of, otherwise it is not proved at all. Accordingly, biographical theology is only a relevant theological practice to the extent that it evokes participation. Self-deception, as understood by McClendon, involves a “narrowing or rather a non-enlarging of our consciousness or conscious awareness.”⁸⁹ Biography by its nature of considering multiple sources achieves this enlarging. Understanding this theologically involves the participation that takes place in the Great Story. By taking McClendon’s narrative approach, now augmented through Johnson, the assessor of a life well lived is challenged to see the meaning of that life in relation to the practices, metaphors, and social relation of his or her own life. The *way* of life that was displayed in Christ, and which is then embodied in a new context by a subject of biography, allows a new live option for what faithfulness looks like. This is a perspective broadening practice. Autobiography is less likely to have this same force because of its introspective nature.

A theology of life, McClendon hopes, is what biography as theology can achieve. Through the enhanced understanding of how images, metaphors, imagination and embodiment combine to make meaning, the goal of a theology of life is one step closer to being achieved. I have tried in both method and content to affirm the convictions of McClendon, while pursuing the implications of his thought in a direction he had not considered. By opening more fully the window of image-based thinking that is present in McClendon’s work I hope we may see him gain a renewed influence in Theology. The focused attention to Johnson’s insights makes this step possible, enabling McClendon’s method a renewed relevance. This is my empathic, imaginative response to James McClendon.

⁸⁹ *Bio.*, 165.

Chapter Eight. Conclusion: Toward a Theology of Life

The *telos* of much of McClendon's theological method is to highlight the deep and inescapable connection between theology and life. Indeed, theology is nonsense when it is abstracted from life. In *Biography as Theology*, McClendon concludes with a chapter entitled "Toward a Theology of Life", in which he claims that "we are at a point where biography as theology can make a most significant contribution."¹ With the reading of McClendon I have proposed, in light of Mark Johnson's work, today his statement rings truer still.

In the current academic and social climate, McClendon provides a compelling project that is relevant beyond traditional theological concerns in that it refuses to separate the validity of theological convictions from the actual lived lives of those who hold them. This impulse fueled his initial explorations into biography, and eventually formed the methodological approach taken in his systematic theology. Truth that is separated from the embodied and social context is not truth at all. And as such, faith is proven to be relevant if it fulfills the test of having persistent and significant beliefs that direct one's life. In this enterprise, the beliefs that satisfy these requirements are not merely known in some kind of *a priori* logical way, but must be known through testing and analyzing lived experience. McClendon's biographical method provides a theological method fit for this purpose.

Narrative acts as a uniting theme in McClendon's work and brings together past with present, and individual with communal. It provides for McClendon the source material to form the linguistic and conceptual database which constitutes a person and a community in the world. As demonstrated in the first half of this thesis, McClendon's narrative and biographical method uses image-based thinking. What McClendon does not do is explicate how and why this image-

¹ *Bio.*, 142.

based thinking is effective and faithful for rationality and theological application.

The empathic method I have practiced involves studying McClendon according to his own understandings of what the practice of theology involves. Accordingly, I respond to McClendon by using his theological convictions to guide my reading of him. McClendon requires that theology be revised in each generation to remain faithful and authentic to the current environment. McClendon understands theology as the discovery, understanding, and revision of convictions. The first half of this thesis, therefore, engaged in the discovery and understanding of McClendon's methodological convictions, while the second half was a practice in revision through an imaginative exploration of an under-explored, yet vital, pattern.

In McClendon's narrative, presented in Chapter Two, each stage of his life contributed to the development of his theological method. This extends beyond the academic influences, to the various communities and events that defined his life. As a result, McClendon's life and theology displayed a kind of reforming vision of the baptist tradition to which he belonged. Particularly for baptists, then, McClendon's life and work is of significant importance. My focus, however, has been on McClendon's methodological moves more generally in an effort to see his potential contribution across the theological tradition.

The goal has been to highlight a key strand that runs throughout McClendon's work and to build on it and bring a revised understanding of this strand to bear upon an appreciation and future implementation of his biographical method. More specifically, the intuitive use of metaphor and image-based thinking displayed throughout McClendon's practice can be understood and applied with greater clarity and potency when it is understood in light of Johnson's project, allowing metaphor to be central to understanding how humans experience, make meaning, conceptualize, and speak.

Mark Johnson's work originates from some of the same intuitions about image and metaphor that McClendon employs in his early explorations of biography as theology. While McClendon leaves many of these intuitions unexplored,

Johnson has dedicated his career to their potential. Critically employing Johnson's philosophical perspective enables a reading of McClendon which elaborates the image-based strand (treated in chapters Three and Four) and provides a critical revision of McClendon's work. This in turn helps construct an approach to further his goal of a theology of life. Moreover, the revisions I have proposed to McClendon's biographical method allow its potential influence for the current academic and social climate to be seen more clearly.

Three key areas arise as contributions to theology in the present day from this project. The first is in the study of James McClendon himself, the second is within the use of Mark Johnson's work within a theological project, and the third is within theological method more generally.

8.1 The Study of James W. McClendon Jr.

An initial impetus for choosing McClendon as a research project was to further the academic study of a theologian who has remained on the periphery of the theological conversation despite having a clear and constructive voice.

McClendon refused to separate theology from the stories of lives which embodied it. Yet this is one of the first detailed studies of the place and function of biography (and the image-based intuitions which pervade it) within his work.

In keeping with his determination not to separate theology from the lives of its adherents, this thesis grows out of McClendon's own biography. Previously unpublished sources reveal new information, shedding light on key events of McClendon's life. I have made the case that his conviction about the connection between theology and life plays a vital role in McClendon's larger theological method. There has also been a marked lack of engagement by scholars on this point. In a detailed look at this previously underexplored feature of McClendon's work, in light of current advances in the field of cognitive metaphor theory, I have proposed a creative revision and expansion of his proposals, enabling us to read and apply him anew.

My attempt to apply McClendon's own methods to a study of him may prove to be useful on three levels to those who study McClendon in the future. The first, as just mentioned, is the content of the biographical sketch. This study provides

the context for much of how his work and method developed. This more nuanced account of his life enables a renewed reading of his theology. The second is through my empathic reflection of McClendon's perspective. I have attempted to read McClendon as he would have preferred me to read him. Or stated differently, I have read McClendon in light of his living convictions of what theology entails. This has directed both the content and the methods of my inquiry. The third feature of my study is attention to McClendon's use of image-based thinking. It is my contention that once this aspect of his work is seen, the rationality of his narrative theology is possible to understand with greater clarity.

8.2 The Application of Mark Johnson in Theology

Applying a philosopher's work to the analysis and application of a theologian is a long standing practice in academic theology. In this thesis I have brought Mark Johnson's philosophical perspective into a reading of McClendon. Johnson's work is shown to have many implications for how theology is practiced in light of recent philosophical, psychological and scientific developments.

Johnson argues that philosophy should no longer be satisfied with *a priori* speculation as a method of pursuing truth. Instead, there is research (both quantitative and qualitative) that can enrich and direct philosophy to a more grounded human experience. By rejecting many of the assumptions that philosophy of the past has held, Johnson explores new possibilities of how philosophy can be practiced.

Through the philosophical perspective Johnson brings, the image-based thinking and structure displayed in McClendon's thinking and method can be understood with greater philosophical clarity. Johnson is worthy of engagement in the larger theological realm. His proposals for the centrality of metaphor for thinking, speaking, experiencing, and thereby life, bring a strong philosophical challenge to the theological agenda, and may revise the current understanding and use of metaphor within theological circles.

Christian theology depends a great deal upon metaphor to think and speak about God, and about how people experience the divine in their daily lives. Metaphor, however, is not the only contribution of Johnson's that may serve theology well. His movement toward meaning-making in a broad and general way through the analysis of qualitative affections and aesthetics shifts the priority of data seen as valuable in theological pursuits. James K. A. Smith's engagement with Johnson reveals some of the many ways that Johnson may be appropriated to serve the practice of theology.

Conceptual metaphor theory, and the implications it has for shifting the priorities of what is considered appropriate for consideration in the pursuit of theological truth, expands the possibilities of theological engagement with the world. As theology continues to revise and assess itself in light of changing academic, cultural and scientific advances, Johnson's example, subverting as it does many of the traditional dichotomies, may serve as a functional contribution in this task.

8.3 Theological Method

Empathy and imagination (initially explored in section 1.3) as methodological virtues have significant potential for use in academic theology. Empathy as a hermeneutical approach and imagination as an approach to rationality and mind are not frequent theological approaches, but their potential usefulness is evident. Both facilitate an acceptance of the participatory and located nature of knowledge and truth that is required to have leverage in the emerging "postmodern" age.

Empathy is quickly becoming a vogue topic across academic disciplines. A quick search on any academic database will reveal a mass of material from various perspectives on the current and developing state of research in this area. Psychology and neuroscience are leading the way in this growing locus of attention. Theologically, as noted in the opening chapter, empathy is not a common category of exploration. My engagement with McClendon is an empathic reading which involves responding to his convictions, both in terms of content and method, with a similar mode of practice. This reflexive and adaptive reading posture encourages the reader to take on the perspective of the author

in order to understand the convictions revealed there. This involves taking into account the context of the life of the author and social forces present there.

Imagination is the mental capacity to make this empathic approach possible. The mind consists of dynamic structures formed through various experiences and images from the past which enable understandings of a certain sort. The imagination is a grid or a lens through which all is known. An understanding of the imagination enables thinking from the perspective that all knowledge and truth must have objective (and therefore universal) meaning, and highlights the particularity of meaning, truth and knowledge in a particular context.

Imagination theory represents an understanding of thinking that fits with the expectations of the academy in the Twenty-first Century. The contextual and particular are highlighted and the universal is only approached through the unifying attributes (the embodied participation in an environment) that take place across contexts. In this way, universal claims have more to do with method (how meaning is made) rather than with the content of those claims. Current scholarship on imagination highlights how the mind and body work together to achieve knowledge, and brings a unifying (universal) element to the human mind that claims of universal knowledge (content) cannot.

The best defense of employing new convictions in theological method comes, as McClendon acknowledged, in the actual use of them. The methodological virtues of empathy and imagination are recent developments in theology. Continued research in these areas will allow growth and lead to their increased development and acceptance within wider theological debates. Such a development, I contend, adds to the legacy of McClendon's project.

My engagement with McClendon reveals many possible applications of theology beyond either the church or the academy. Much of my work in this project enables strategies to innovate and hone the convictions of a community through image-based analysis and inquiry. The open understanding of theology that McClendon holds dictates that any community that holds convictions would benefit from a theologian. My proposals enable a method for convictional

analysis that could serve groups, businesses, cities in the understanding, and transformation of their convictions.

In each of these three areas, this thesis offers a way forward. Through the reading and re-visioning of McClendon's biographical method displayed throughout this thesis, theology can offer society, the Church, and the academy a *way* of struggling on, and may contribute to a renewal of its place as a vital discipline.

8.4 Engaging Current Scholarship

To make this case more strongly, and to engage my project with current academic work, I will highlight a few recent works where my presentation of McClendon would be beneficial. The first example is from within the Baptist tradition. McClendon often calls for others to continue his work in places where he has limited his treatment for practical and temporal reasons. Of those who have taken up this task, Curtis Freeman has been the most prominent. Freeman has recently published *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*, which has strong connections to McClendon's work.² While Freeman does not adopt McClendon's use of 'small b baptist' to categorize his type of baptist-ness, he does give McClendon significant credit for influencing his "other Baptist" views. With this in mind, Freeman seeks a vision that "gestures beyond the liberal-conservative alternatives of modernity."³ He locates his project along the post-liberal trajectory highlighting one aspect of his "postconservative, post-liberal, evangelical catholic" perspective.⁴ Freeman argues that theological renewal is required which "demands a sophisticated hermeneutic of reflection, one that accounts for a process of development and reformulation and includes both retrieval and revision."⁵ Freeman sees the potential for Baptists to be a voice of renewal for the whole Church and, as such, catholic sources must be included.⁶

² Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014).

³ Ibid., iii-iv.

⁴ Ibid., v.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ McClendon's image of the catfish in barrel comes to mind.

The synthesis of baptist and catholic categories may strike many as odd, but Freeman reminds readers that within the Free Church tradition Christian liberty does not equal individual freedom. Freeman wants to overcome this seemingly difficult pairing through his work, and describes it as an exploration of a “churchly theology that challenges the assumptions that Baptists historically and normatively epitomize [as] the teleology of progressive fissiparation from catholicity to sectarianism.”⁷ In this way Freeman sets out to provide a “theologically constructive narrative of a contesting catholicity based on a retrieval of sources from the Baptist heritage and in conversation with the wider church.”⁸ His project is a difficult one as he acknowledges that the notion of Baptist catholicity has been described as “postmodern, premodern, liberal and fundamentalist, Catholic and Calvinist, Anabaptist and anti-Baptist.”⁹ This number of (mis)interpretations is amusing and troubling to one trying to articulate a position which may be of use to the Church today.

Freeman sees himself as following McClendon who “explored this revisioned account of contesting catholicity most persuasively and comprehensively. He envisioned a particular ecclesial standpoint that exists in a triadic relation with the more clearly defined Catholic and Protestant approaches, while at the same time seeking to manifest the unity of the one church.”¹⁰ In light of this, Freeman furthers McClendon’s theological trajectory. As such, the implications of the present work on McClendon enable a deeper engagement with Freeman’s project. As two examples of taking McClendon’s methodological implications and engaging them to alternative ends, both my project and Freeman’s provide alternative readings of McClendon’s possibility for the theological present. While Freeman is more concerned with applying McClendon’s ecclesiological perspective, I have looked more closely at the methodological impulses at play.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

Freeman adopts McClendon's use of embodied exemplars and stories of lives lived in communities, expanding the vision of their tradition. Biography infuses Freeman's writing. Without delving into full expositions of the lives of his exemplars, he makes his points by grounding them in the lived example of those who have come before. Take for example his use of Carlyle Marney (1916-1978), whom Freeman uses in Chapter 1. Marney epitomized Dixieland liberalism, and resisted the fundamentalism that had become rampant in the South. Freeman picks up the image of "a pilgrim on a journey" which Marney employed as a guiding metaphor for his dissent.¹¹ Here in particular is an area where my project would help achieve a deeper reading of Freeman. My proposals for a renewed understanding of biography for theology (by way of Johnson's proposals for meaning-making and image-based thinking) provide a way of understanding how and why biography is a powerful tool for theology. Not only would my project reveal ways that Freeman reflects McClendon's work, but it would enable a nuanced understanding of certain methodological devices that Freeman uses. Freeman provides an ideal conversation partner for discovering the implications and promise of McClendon's work for the present and future.

A second recent publication relating to theological method is Christine Helmer's *Theology And The End of Doctrine*. Helmer evokes the paradox of the word "end" with her title, indicating both the end as in termination, but also the end as in goal or fulfillment. Her concern is with the nature of doctrine and how it must be re-understood to retain its relevance in the current setting. She calls for an end to "a monopoly on doctrinal faithfulness without question, paradox, or dialectic, and without reality [which she argues] is an invitation to a new fascination about why doctrine is the theological genre that bears the gift of divine reality in language and history."¹² Her call is for both a termination and a new found fulfillment of doctrine.

Helmer acknowledges the awkward place that theology holds between the academy and the Church, and the intrinsic pressures on both sides to do better. Within the academy, Helmer explains, theology is not respected and is

¹¹ Ibid., "Memoir of a Dixieland Postliberal".

¹² Christine Helmer, *Theology And The End Of Doctrine* (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014) xii.

misunderstood.¹³ There is pressure as she sees it that “theology must stop being theology in order to obtain its visa into the academy.”¹⁴ The academy says “theology is a problem, and doctrine is the issue with the problem”,¹⁵ while in the Church, doctrine represents the “unity of Christian identity across time and space.”¹⁶ Struggling with these issues leaves Helmer with a key question: “how may theology investigate doctrine in a way that acknowledges its responsibility to the church and academy while not falling into the abyss that in recent years has opened between church interests and academic inquiry, between sacred and secular, between normative and the putatively nonnormative?”¹⁷

Helmer achieves her answer in this task by looking at two of the giants of Protestant theology, Martin Luther and Friedrich Schleiermacher. This exploration of history sets the stage for her to make proposals for a new direction for doctrine. She explores doctrine historically, linguistically and epistemologically in order to understand the current state of doctrine within North American theology. Helmer argues for doctrine to be re-understood as production. Her re-imagining of doctrine as production discloses how doctrine is “(1) articulated by human beings in (2) the available light and language of their times, in order to address (3) a living and multifarious audience (4) and in relation to the circumstances of particular times and places, while at the same time always (5) aiming and yearning for transcendence.”¹⁸ In this pursuit Helmer engages with many of the same issues that are treated in this thesis: language, metaphysics and reality, and how these things influence a new approach to theology within the current context.

While Helmer does not engage with McClendon, her work explores many of McClendon’s concerns. This thesis grew out of a concern, like McClendon’s, that

¹³ Helmer works in a Religious studies department at a secular North American university

¹⁴ Helmer, *Theology And The End Of Doctrine*, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

theology could be done better, and it must if it is to achieve the relevance to speak to those issues which are most pressing for our culture today. My proposal to turn to biography with a renewed understanding of how meaning-making is grounded in the embodied organism within a physical and social environment is an alternative to Helmer's. Both seek ways in which theology may regain its posture. Together, the two approaches take steps toward the common "end of doctrine."

Freeman and Helmer are voices in the ongoing academic conversation regarding theology. The discovery, understanding and critical revision within our practices involves many such voices. This thesis, both in its content and through its empathic imaginative method, seeks to add a further voice to this conversation. Reading McClendon in light of Johnson enables a re-imagining of McClendon's biographical method. Thereby, connections between the goals of theology and ways we embody our daily environments are made stronger. In this way theology can recapture the resources to pursue the type of living theology McClendon dreamed of, taking us one step further toward a theology of life.

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