"AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?":
THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR A
THEOLOGY OF BELONGING

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INTRODUCTION

After brutally murdering his brother Abel, Cain poses an important (albeit dishonest) question in the subsequent confrontation with God: "am I my brother's keeper?". This question, we know from the text of Genesis 4, is meant to avoid answering God's interrogation of Cain, and thus to avoid taking responsibility for Abel's murder. But Cain's use of the question as means of avoiding a general sense of responsibility for his brother's current whereabouts and activity raises further questions about the nature of responsibility. Do we bear any sense of responsibility for one another? If so, what sort of responsibility might we bear? Are we, so to speak, keepers of one another?

The possibility of responsibility for one another is not new to Christian theology. Indeed, theologies that emphasize belonging and accountability often highlight our responsibility to care for the flourishing of others as central to our own flourishing. This also tends to include responsibility for the sinfulness and holiness of others. For example, scholars like Susan Eastman have found in Paul's writings, a "pattern of talking about persons in which the self is never on its own but always socially and cosmically constructed in relationship."[1] Because the self is never fully autonomous, but instead relies on social relationship to authentically be a self, Eastman criticizes readings of Paul which understand responsibility and freedom "through the language of individual rights, which inevitably come into conflict with others' rights. Paul's theology points in a different direction, through an enduring and christologically grounded affirmation of every human body based on the human incarnation of the divine."[2] Rather than reducing responsibility to an output of individual free will, theologies of belonging will follow Paul in emphasizing our belonging to others in community. At the heart of this communal conviction is Christ's transformation of human life. This feature of Christ's reconciling ministry has been especially noted in several indigenous theological epistemologies in the Pacific context. Terry Pouono, for example, describes this communal emphasis in Samoan ecclesiology and Christology thusly: "a new life in Christ must find expression in the life of the church at all levels…renewal is never for our sake alone. It is for the sake of the renewal of the human

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[1] Susan G. Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 8.
[2] Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 179.

community."[3] Indigenous Christian theology in the Pacific Islands, one scholar argues, maintains a unique and salient emphasis on shared history and community grounded in the interconnection between Christology and ecclesiology.[4] This salient emphasis on community, especially given its clear corollary in Pauline ethics, ought to be explored further in its implications for freedom and responsibility.

While this emphasis on community is clearly grounded christologically, the importance of community is not simply a conclusion in this context. Scott Fisher argues, "the *starting point* for Pacific Island theology, then, is to recognize the primacy of community, and the need to preserve it at all costs."[5] Community, specifically the divinely wrought community of the Church, can be a starting point for rethinking various aspects of our theology that have become isolated and atomistic in harmful ways. While I do not claim to do Pacific Island theology, not being from that context myself, I do hope to have my theology shaped by this valuable insight (among others). Freedom and responsibility are especially important topics to approach from this emphasis for reasons that will be shown below as well as the Apostle Paul's own emphasis in his ecclesiological ethics. Our belonging to one another in community, therefore, becomes a vitally significant *starting point* for approaching the topics of freedom and responsibility. As Willie Jennings puts it, "we belong to each other, we belong together. Belonging must become the hermeneutic starting point from which we think the social, the political, the individual, the ecclesial, and…the educational…The cultivation of belonging should be the goal of [the body of Christ]."[6] I have argued for this perspective in previous work, arguing that the *telos* of all humanity is to belong to God and others in community.[7] In belonging to Christ in the Pauline sense, we also belong to one another in the body of Christ; union with Christ entails a union with other believers. In such a belonging, we are responsible not simply for our own flourishing, but primarily for the flourishing of others.[8] Belonging to others, and thus taking responsibility for them in some fashion, appears to be an essential component of what it means for human beings to flourish.

Such a conception of belonging, and the responsibility that comes with it, appears to be problematic for what is typically meant by responsibility. When philosophers and theologians talk about responsibility, especially moral responsibility, they usually do so in a way that would seem to rule out such theologies of belonging. Responsibility of the relevant kind requires, for one, autonomous free will. For an agent to be

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[3] Terry Pouono, "'Teu le Va': The Samoan Cosmic Community in Aotearoa. Preserving Harmonious Relationships… Where is the Harmony?," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 50 (2013): 96.

[4] Matt Tomlinson, "The Pacific Way of Development and Christian Theology," *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology & Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 28.

[5] Scott G. Fisher, "Reconciliation as a Call to Justice: Isaiah and the Legacy of Nuclear Colonialism," *Asia Journal of Theology* 17, no. 1 (April 2003): 79. Emphasis added.

[6] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 14-15.

[7] D. T. Everhart, "*Communio Dei* and the Mind of Christ: Relational Christological Anthropology in Psychological Perspective," *Theologica* 6, no. 1 (2022). Theologically, such a conception of belonging must be sourced in a robust sense of Christological belonging. There is no room to explore this in the article, but the aforementioned article explores more closely the fundamental relationship between belonging in community and belonging in Christ. At the heart of what follows, then, is a Christological impetus to belong to and have responsibility for one another.

[8] See D. T. Everhart, "Communal Reconciliation: Corporate Responsibility and Opposition to Systemic Sin," *IJST* (*forthcoming*).

considered responsible for a given action, they must be the primary actor and have freely chosen to take the action. This would, at least at first glance, seem to undermine the sense of responsibility entailed by theologies of belonging.[9] Indeed, how can we take responsibility for the actions of others which are not born out of our own free will? Do free will and responsibility, traditionally conceived, rule out theologies of belonging or *vice versa*? This question will help us to approach the main question of the paper, namely whether we are bound theologically to bear responsibility for one another in some meaningful sense.

WHICH RESPONSIBILITY, WHOSE FREE WILL?

It will help our purposes here to clarify what exactly is meant by responsibility, especially when used in the philosophical and moral-theological sense that appears to pose a problem to theologies of belonging. Responsibility usually refers to some duty or obligation for a state of affairs which arises from an agent's choice. Responsibility is usually taken to refer specifically to moral responsibility, though there are other kinds of responsibility which are sometimes invoked as arising from an agent's choices. For our purposes, however, it is primarily moral responsibility which poses this alleged threat to belonging (or to which belonging poses a threat). The other relevant kinds of responsibility function similarly enough to moral responsibility that, should they be relevant, they will be included in the solution which I offer below. The reasons for this will be shown below, and so it is this sense of responsibility that I will use throughout the rest of the article.

On most accounts of responsibility, a responsibility can only arise from something which the agent chose freely. Free will, in other words, is a necessary and sufficient condition for responsibility.[10] While there is not space here to lay out the many arguments in favour of this understanding of responsibility, we may recognize that there is something intuitively attractive about this widely-accepted understanding. How can I be responsible for a state of affairs that I cannot control? On the other side of things, it seems obvious that I *am* responsible for a state of affairs which I caused. Moreover, there seems to be a problem with saying that someone else might be responsible for a state of affairs which I cause because it intuitively means that they bear that particular responsibility instead of me. This is an important feature of the issue at hand: does belonging (and the responsibility for others which comes with it) eradicate personal responsibility?

To answer this, we should look more closely at the necessary condition for responsibility: free will. Free will is usually thought of in one of two ways: alternate possibilities and self-determination. When free will is thought of in terms of alternative possibilities, it is described in terms of a particular agent making a choice when they could have chosen otherwise. This has been called the Principle of Alternative

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[9] See for example the criticisms of the concept of systemic sin in Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (Vatican: Libreria Editirice Vaticana, 1984), 16. Therein, he claims that to espouse a corporate responsibility is to eradicate the sense of personal responsibility essential to the Christian doctrine of sin.

[10] Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 829.

Possibilities, which states that "a person only has free will if he could have done otherwise."[11] On this view of free will, then, "a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise."[12] It is only the potential for alternative choices that makes a choice truly free. The important implication of this view is that any choice made by an agent in which they did not have alternatives is not actually free, and therefore they cannot be responsible for that choice.

Recent accounts of free will have begun to move away from the principle of alternative possibilities. One of the most persuasive and wide-spread reasons for this is something called F-cases. F-cases, first raised by the philosopher, Harry Frankfurt, "drive a wedge between responsibility and alternative possibilities."[13] Frankfurt set out to untangle responsibility from alternative possibilities as a means of defending compatibilist free will, though many who espouse libertarian free will have also picked up the argument for their own purposes.[14] Because the Principle of Alternative Possibilities had been so widely accepted historically, it also came to be used in arguments against the reality of morality. In a deterministic world, no one can be morally responsible for any action because there are no alternative choices. Compatibilists faced similar (albeit mitigated) problems. Frankfurt found that some similar situations arose in compatibilist accounts, where certain choices for which we ought to be considered responsible lacked alternatives. Frankfurt, then, was burdened to describe cases in which an agent could freely make a choice, but for which they had no alternative possibilities. F-cases, then, are counter examples which demonstrate a choice made by an agent which is clearly free and for which they should clearly be thought of as responsible, but which lacked real alternatives.

Let us take the following example F-case from Linda Zagzebski:

Black, an evil neurosurgeon, wishes to see White dead but is unwilling to do the deed himself. Knowing that Mary Jones also despises White and will have a single good opportunity to kill him, Black inserts a mechanism into Jones's brain that enables Black to monitor and to control Jones's neurological activity. If the activity in Jones's brain suggests that she is on the verge of deciding not to kill White when the opportunity arises, Black's mechanism will intervene and cause Jones to decide to commit the murder. On the other hand, if Jones decides to murder White on her own, the mechanism will not intervene. It will merely monitor but will not affect her neurological function. Now suppose that when the occasion arises, Jones decides to kill White without any "help" from Black's mechanism. In the judgment of Frankfurt and most others, Jones is morally responsible for her act. Nonetheless, it appears that she is unable to do otherwise since if she had attempted to do so, she would have been thwarted by Black's device.[15]

Jones, at first glance, seems to be responsible for killing White despite the murder of white being inevitable. For Zagzebski, we have this intuition because the decision by Jones to murder White and the

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[11] Kevin Timpe, *Free Will,* 2nd Ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 70.
[12] Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities," 829.
[13] Linda Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?," *Philosophical Perspectives* 14 (2000): 234.
[14] Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?," 233-234. While Frankfurt aimed therefore to undermine libertarian free will, Zagzebski goes on to demonstrate that libertarian accounts also do not require alternative possibilities.
[15] Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?," 234. This is Zagzebski's adaptation of Frankfurt's original example of a neurological device which prevents alternative possibilities.

lack of intervention from Black's device indicates to the reader that Jones would have chosen to kill White even if there had been alternative possibilities.[16] There is a clear qualitative distinction which we can make between Jones killing White in virtue of the machine's intervention and Jones killing White because of (and only because of) her own decision.

This would seem to dethrone the Principle of Alternative Possibilities, but it deprives us of the usual mechanism for determining responsibility. What, in other words, makes someone responsible for a given state of affairs if they can be responsible for a choice in which they had no alternative possibilities? According to Zagzebski, "once we have identified who or what makes an act happen we have identified the potential bearer of responsibility for it. In Frankfurt cases in a non-deterministic world the agent makes her act happen in as ultimate a sense as you like."[17] When the murder happens because Jones chose to murder White, then Jones is the primary cause or source of White's death. When the murder happens because Black's machine intervened, thus causing Jones to murder White, then the machine is the primary cause of the murder (and by extension of invention, Black). Rather than alternative possibilities being the condition for free will, this view holds that the self-determination or the autonomy of the agent making the given choice is what makes the choice free.

Such a view of free will is called a sourcehood account of free will. Sourcehood accounts of free will hold that a choice is free if the agent making the choice does so in a self-determined way. For such accounts, the ultimate source or cause of the particular action or choice is the agent who made it. As Kevin Timpe puts it, "according to [this] approach, free will is primarily a function of an agent being the source of her actions in a particular way . . . nothing outside of me is the ultimate explanation of my action or choice."[18] Another way of putting this has been to say that the particular action or choice arises from the autonomy of the agent, as opposed to being ultimately determined by forces or factors external to that agent.

This is where responsibility, traditionally conceived, poses a potential problem to theologies of belonging. There seems to be a rejection of responsibility for that which is outside of our control as agents. This is true both for alternative possibilities *and* sourcehood accounts of free will. In general, it is understood that "people cannot be morally assessed for what is not their fault, or for what is [ultimately] due to factors outside of their control."[19] At first blush, it seems that we must choose between a theology of belonging, in which we bear some sort of responsibility for one another, and a typical theological or philosophical construal of responsibility, in which we cannot have responsibility for that which exists beyond our control. If we are to move beyond this impasse, we would need to show a way in which external factors and autonomy can co-exist non-competitively in a person's actions.

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[16] Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?," 245.
[17] Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?," 245.
[18] Timpe, *Free Will*, 10.
[19] Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 25.

ACTING TOGETHER: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POSSIBILITY OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

While it is certainly the intuition of moral philosophy (and perhaps theology by extension) that a certain level of autonomy is required for responsibility of the relevant kind, that intuition is being readily challenged in several fields. Some developmental psychologists, in studying the development of the faculties that we typically understand as required for agency, have observed that these faculties actually develop in joint attention between infants and their caregivers.[20] In other words, faculties like cognition, identification, and intention (which are necessary for deliberate decision making by free agents) depend in some way on our social interactions with others, and thus on external factors. Drawing on such studies, I have previously argued that dependence on others for agential capacities does not undermine autonomy, only certain versions of autonomy that require absolute autarchy over one's actions and intentions.[21] Because the relevant conditions for free agency require some level of dependence on social relationships, any *viable* version of autonomy is inevitably going to rely on some external factors. This need not rule out autonomy entirely, but does require that we rethink its function in relation to the social relationships that form it. If some version of autonomy can be maintained through the influence of social relationships, what might the psychological sciences teach us about the nature of responsibility in our dependence on others for our agential capacities?

Recent psychological work on social relationships and their effect on behaviour will help clarify the relationship between belonging and responsibility. In particular, the Social Identity Approach (SIA) to group behaviour has become a rather influential psychological model for understanding the influence that social relationships have on the behaviour of individual, freely acting agents. SIA is principally concerned "with the processes which surround the way that people define themselves as members of a social group."[22] In essence, SIA attempts to understand social behaviours as a function of belonging to social groupings. SIA developed as a combination of multiple psychological theories to explain the relationship between the behaviour of individuals and the cooperative behaviour of social groups. As one group of psychologists puts it, SIA "provides substance to the notion of a socially structured field within the individual. It thereby explains how large numbers of people can act in coherent and meaningful ways, by reference to shared

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[20] Barbara Sipsova and Melinda Carpenter, "A New Look at Joint Attention and Common Knowledge," *Cognition* 189 (2019): 260-274; Gideon Salter and Richard Brehany, "Removing Shared Information Improves 3- and 4-Year-Olds' Performance on a Change-of-Location Explicit False Belief Task," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 187 (Nov 2019).

[21] D. T. Everhart, "Free Together," in *Free Will: Proceedings from the 2020 Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop, ed.* Olli-Pekka Vainio and Aku Visala (Routledge Press, *forthcoming*). I go on to argue that, at least from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, these stronger accounts of autonomy are in fact impossible.

[22] Stephen Reicher, Russell Spears, and S. Alexander Haslam, "Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology," in *Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. M. S. Wetherell and C. S. Mohanty (London, UK: Sage Publishers, 2010), 45.

group norms, values and understandings rather than idiosyncratic beliefs."[23] Because SIA provides an explanation for the coordination between the relationships that form various groups and the behaviour of individual group members, it offers a way of coordinating our belonging to others in community (as a group) and our responsibility for others in those communities (as individuals).

The central mechanism of SIA is social identification, namely, how we as individuals see ourselves (and don't see ourselves) as members of various socially structured groups.[24] This is thought to be both comparative and contrastive: "I am like other members of my group in way *x*, but different from other members of my group in way *y*." Likewise, one's relationship to others who are not in one's group provides a further lens for the clarification of one's social identity: "members of my group share the feature *x*, whereas other groups do not share this feature."[25] Social identification is not simply about identifying the essential features of a given group, rather, it is about how our belonging to any given group helps us to identify ourselves as individuals and what aspect of that group's shared identity is operative at a given moment in personal identity. Our identification of ourselves in terms of social realities helps to explain more fully the sociality of our behaviour as individuals. It provides, in other words, "a bridge between the individual and the social and how it allows one to explain how socio-cultural realities can regulate the behaviours of individuals…social identity provides a psychological apparatus that allows humans uniquely to be irreducibly cultural beings."[26] Our belonging to community, and to others in community, partially defines who we are as individuals.

This is highly relevant for thinking about the nature of responsibility, especially responsibility for the actions and intentions of other agents beyond ourselves. On SIA, behaviour is at least partially a function of identity; we act in certain ways because of how we understand ourselves and perceive ourselves as active agents. Said another way, "(inter)personal behaviour is not simply underpinned but also *made possible by* a salient personal identity, just as (inter)group behaviour is both underpinned *and made possible by* a salient social identity."[27] Because SIA implicates shared group identity as a formative force in personal identity, our belonging to others in social groups plays a role in forming agential behaviours. This was one of the primary outputs of the approach; the ways that we belong to and are identified with various social groups becomes a basis for cooperative group actions. More precisely, "shared social identification transforms relations between people in such a way as to enable them to act together harmoniously and productively."[28] These are still individual actions of individual agents, but they are influenced by the shared identity of the group, coordinated in such a way as to achieve some shared goal. We are capable of acting together precisely because we can belong together.

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[23] Reicher, Spears, and Haslam, "Social Identity Approach," 48.
[24] See, Fergus G. Neville, David Novelli, John Drury, and Stephen D. Reicher, "Shared Social Identity Transforms Social Relations in Imaginary Crowds," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 25, no. 1 (January 2020): 2.
[25] Neville, et al., "Shared Social Identity," 5.
[26] Reicher, Spears, and Haslam, "Social Identity Approach," 50.
[27] Reicher, Spears, and Haslam, "Social Identity Approach," 52.
[28] Reicher, Spears, and Haslam, "Social Identity Approach," 57.

This raises several new questions for the nature of responsibility. Traditionally conceived, the one responsible for a given action is the agent who ultimately caused it. But how can only one agent be responsible for a group action if it was caused by many individual agents acting in coordinated ways? Who is responsible? If a given action is coordinated by several individuals, then it would seem that they would each bear some responsibility for the coordinated action. The temptation here might be to reduce responsibility back down to the individual level: the responsibility for such and such a group action is the sum total of responsibilities for individual actions taken which, coordinated, result in the group action. But this does not quite get at the role of social identification at play in SIA. The problem with such reduction is identified by Stephanie Collins' work on group duties (or responsibilities). She argues that the group's

> decision is not merely the conjunction of members' decisions. The members' decisions were *to assent to the collective's doing such-and-such.* By contrast, the collective's decision was *to do such-and-such.* The collective's decision was determined by the members' decisions, but it is not to be identified with the mere conjunction of them for two reasons. First, it has a different content: the collective's decision is 'the collective will do this'. Second, the collective's decision arose out of two things: the conjunction of member's decisions *plus* the fact that they are all committed to the unanimity rule.[29]

Because of the distinction that Collins draws, the responsibility one has for certain actions is at least partially a function of the way that one belongs to a given group.

To illustrate, let us suppose I identify with a group called "X," and we propose to knock over a large sculpture in our town. I am incapable of knocking over the sculpture on my own, but as a coordinated group, X is able to knock the sculpture down. I cannot, therefore, be solely responsible for the sculpture's destruction because I cannot act as a mere individual to knock down the sculpture. Nor is the responsibility for the sculpture's destruction reducible to the sum total of actions taken by X's members, because those actions alone, even in summation, do not result in the sculpture's destruction. It is the commitment of the group members to the shared goal of destroying the sculpture *and* our individual actions coordinated towards that goal which result in the sculpture's destruction. According to Collins, such coordinated actions result in shared responsibility for the group action in addition to the responsibility that each member of the group has for the respective role in the coordinated action.[30] That such group actions are possible and result in shared responsibilities opens up new possibilities for understanding belonging and responsibility.

One such possibility is to consider the influence of group action on individual actions within the group. Let us remember that, according to SIA, shared identity contributes something to individual identity. Salient identity becomes the basis, on this view, for behaviour in key ways. As such, shared action and intention contributes something to the actions and intentions of individuals. This is very much in line with Collins' point; a summation of individual actions is insufficient to explain group actions, rather a shared intention or action is also required. The ways in which the group behaves (or intends to behave) play a role

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[29] Stephanie Collins, *Group Duties: Their Existence and Their Implications for Individuals* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 169.
[30] Collins, *Group Duties*, 199.

in how an individual perceives themselves and their role within the group.[31] Thus, in the same way that individual actions and intentions contribute to the shared identity of the group through coordination, the group can influence individual actions and intentions, creating a kind of feedback loop between the individual and the group.[32] No action, in other words, can be entirely reduced to the pure, autonomous intentionality of an individual agent. Because agents act within the bounds of their social relationships, those social relationships play a key role in the formation of intentional decisions within said agents.

Acting together and acting individually influence one another, calling into question the more exclusive accounts of responsibility previously alluded to. This is not to say that we are not responsible for our own actions, or that we can reduce our responsibility for actions that we take as individuals to a shared group responsibility. Such a reading, I think, misses the nuance of SIA. SIA does not purport to eradicate individual agency or autonomy. Rather, it demonstrates that such agency does not appear in a vacuum; it arises within a socially-constructed environment and is consistently shaped thereby. To ignore this is to ignore the fundamental relationality of the human creature. Rather, SIA would seem to imply that our social relations contribute to the formation of agency in a way that creates further responsibility beyond our mere responsibility for our own actions as individuals. I am responsible for the things that I do as an intentional agent. However, I am capable of acting as an intentional agent (and thus of having responsibility) because of others to whom I belong in community. This would seem to imply that there is an additional kind of responsibility had by group members for other group members in virtue of shared identification. Other members of my community are responsible for me and I am responsible for them precisely because we are a part of the social environment that shapes one another. Let us return to the imaginary group, X, that hopes to knock down a local sculpture. Even if I do not participate in the event itself, I am an identified member of X. This means that I bear some responsibility for my fellow group members to whom I belong and who belong to me. This does not undermine my free will to not participate in the destruction of the sculpture, nor get me off the hook if I choose to participate. Rather, I am responsible for my fellow group members, either to dissuade them from their petty vandalism or to get the group to repent of its collective destruction and compensate the offended sculptor. Responsibility and free will thus pose no threat to theologies of belonging; our belonging only adds to our responsibility in virtue of our contributions to the free agency of others.

"MY BROTHER'S KEEPER": TOWARDS A HAMARTIOLOGY OF BELONGING

If we are to take seriously the possibilities which psychology can provide the theologian, then we by no means must commit ourselves to the view that belonging somehow compromises moral responsibility, nor that the high demands of autonomy typically required for responsibility somehow rule out the possibility

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[31] Neville, et al., "Shared Social Identity," 4.
[32] Everhart, "*Communio Dei*," 20.

of belonging. If anything, our belonging to others in the communion for which we are created adds to our moral responsibility. We gain a responsibility to cultivate holiness and repentance in others. Where our brothers and sisters in Christ fall into sin, we are responsible to see them restored to communion with God and the body of Christ. This is precisely what Paul prescribes when a fellow believer is caught in sin, saying that we are responsible for carrying one another's burdens by calling others to repentance and reconciliation (Gal 6:1-2). Where our brothers and sisters in Christ are weak, we are responsible for not encouraging their weakness with blocks of stumbling. The Apostle Paul writes of this as well (Rom 14:13-23). Our hamartiology, that is to say, our doctrine of sin, should reflect this broader sense of responsibility that comes with belonging. This is what is meant by a hamartiology of belonging: we ought to think through the implications of sin and its effect on human living not only in terms of individual actions and responsibilities, but through the lens of our belonging to one another, our contributions to the agency and activity of others, and our shared responsibility for one another. Sin is not a purely individual struggle, but something that believers ought to struggle against together. When we belong to one another in the *communio Dei*, the failures of fellow-believers become our failures and the successes of fellow-believers become our successes. Not only is this a more holistic version of what it means to belong to one another in Christ, but it seems clear that New Testament writers like Paul had something like this in mind when developing ecclesiological ethics.

Returning to the question which opened this article: are we to be keepers of one another? From the reflections above, I believe the answer to be an emphatic Yes. Where Cain posed this question to avoid responsibility for an action that he committed, I think this question also fails to avoid the responsibility which we have for others. In our belonging to one another in Christ, responsibility becomes an irreducibly social concept. We are not simply responsible for not sinning ourselves, but for the holiness of our fellow-believers in Christ. This opens up new possibilities for thinking (or re-thinking) theological categories of repentance, reconciliation, and forgiveness. To belong to one another in community is to accept that we are keepers of one another, responsible for our own flourishing in union and communion with God *as well as* the flourishing of others.