

# Theories of Human Nature and their Implications for Christian Ministry

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# Operative theologies: connecting theology and practical ministry

Every Christian ministry works with:

- An operative theory of grace (assumptions about how God works in human lives)
  - An operative theory of human nature (assumptions about what human beings and how they change)
- *Recognizing this helps us see how theology matters for ministry*

# Divine transformation and the theology of fallenness

Why do we need to be transformed by God in the first place?

→ **Because we are fallen creatures**

Specifically, our wills, minds, and capacities for relationship no longer work the way they should

→ **A good theory of divine transformation is one that has an accurate picture of what has gone wrong with human nature**

# Fallenness as malady of the will

Classically, the most central aspect of our fallenness is the fact that **our capacity to will and desire God**, and therefore to follow his purposes for us, **has become broken, disordered, and dysfunctional**

# Augustine: the Holy Spirit transforms us through changing our desires

*‘We, on the other hand, say that the human will is helped to achieve righteousness in this way: [human beings] receive the Holy Spirit so that there arises in their minds a delight in and a love for that highest and immutable good that is God’*

*(Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter)*

# The fallen will as central problem for Christian ministry

What is unlikely to work:

- Ministry as knowledge-transfer alone
- Ministry as direct appeal to the human will as if it is not broken

What is more likely to work:

- Forms of ministry that view the will primarily as the problem that needs transforming ('the patient on the table') rather than as the tool for accomplishing the transformation

# Technologies of the heart

*A technology of the heart is a tool or technique for helping shape hearts and desires*

Many possibilities here! For example:

- Art and story (e.g., Giotto chapel; movies, novels, film; etc.)
- Music
- Creating open-ended spaces for contemplation and emotional encounter with God
- Fostering sociality and community