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Abstract: The Use of Scriptural Exegesis in David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*

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In *Eccentric Existence*, David Kelsey uses Scriptural exegesis as one strategy for making claims about human beings: what, who, and how we are. The thesis of Kelsey's unsystematic theology is that we are established eccentrically, that is, our reality is grounded from without the center of the self. Immediately, because of the nature of this thesis: God and neighbors, and the community in which they are known, come into view. In this paper I describe the two specific cases in which David Kelsey does an exegesis of Scripture: Job 10 and Matthew 5-7, otherwise known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Kelsey develops his argument (that existence is eccentric) in several chapters in which he presents *meditatio* on Job 10. In this example we read the very context-specific confession from Job: that is, he did not make up his own existence. Rather, Job confesses, "God, your hands fashioned me like clay." That Job created himself is unintelligible for him. Yet, while Job 10 may seem an odd place to begin discussing God's creative relationship to all that is not God, it is warranted in fact because wisdom accompanies God's creative acts. And as such, Job captures one of the main points found in the Wisdom literature, which is a helpful source to learn about God's relating to all that is not God through creatively establishing those creatures, ones such as Job. Samuel Wells comments that David Kelsey's exegetical methodology gives his theology the momentum it needs to make anthropological claims without losing the richness that is found within the Christian tradition. As such, David Kelsey's example is one salient way to use Scripture in order to develop a grammar for speaking about what, who, and how we, humans, are. Such a particular individual named Job reminds us that we are related-to by a creative and triune God, who continues to effect such a narrative. Further, and as such, David Kelsey uses Job 10 to make claims about human response-ability to God. Job's response in the Scriptural narrative is ultimately a humble remembering of where he came: the dusty ground. In so doing, Job recognizes that he is a simple yet complex part of God's creation. As the result of Job seeing his own existence as fashioned from without, in the conclusion of his own story, Job affirms, "Now my eye sees God."

In addition to Job's response to the triune God, David Kelsey reflects on Jesus Christ as the embodiment of the wisdom of God's creative love towards human beings. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the particular prevenient love that we presuppose when we love our neighbors, who are already loved and created by the triune God. Kelsey points out one *applicatio* as the result of his *meditatio* on the Sermon on the Mount: rather than hating enemies, Jesus suggests to pray for enemies. Why? Because that which establishes us from without the center of our own existence is our neighbors' speech to us and also God's Word, the second person of the Trinity, who constantly creates the same love that the Son has for the Father. Therefore, Kelsey makes a strong case that the "existential how" of love should be exercised *wisely*, for the sake of neighbor. Such "how" is in accord

with the love that God has for his creatures and the love that humans show when they respond to the triune God's creating of human beings.

This exegetical unsystematic theology called *Eccentric Existence* is one effective example of Christian literature that holds many different facets of the tradition in the background of the project in secondary theology: the Trinity, the canon of Scripture, the double love commandment, the communion of saints, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. As a result of using Scriptural exegesis, we see a persuasive and compelling case that many of these theological tools are useful for the sake of a modern anthropology. Jim Buckley comments on Kelsey's rather unsystematic theology: that this text should be held in one hand, and yet read with canonical Holy Scripture in the other hand because *Eccentric Existence* is normed by canonical Holy Scripture.