

## **RESISTING REDUCTIONISM:**

### **Why We Need a Truly Theological Anthropology to counter the Dehumanization of God's Humanity**

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**Abstract:** *Many contemporary Christian theologians have recognized the need for an explicit and thoroughly theological anthropology. The loss of the truly transcendent Triune Creator and Redeemer God revealed in Jesus Christ threatens the loss of humanity and human community in the church and in the world. This essay contends that the most fundamental challenge arising in our post-Enlightenment, indeed, post-Christian western and westernized cultures does not consist in the divergence or even disintegration around matters of morality/ethics, or social, economic, scientific, technological or political issues. Rather, the most fundamental matter involves the reductionistic apprehension of the human being, en se. Both Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance recognized this reductionistic danger of the dehumanization and depersonalization of humanity in our modern world. To address it they laid a christological and trinitarian foundation for an essentially theological anthropology. Ray S. Anderson was one of the first English-speaking theologians to build most squarely upon that foundation in order to counter that imminent collapse. This essay surveys and comments on the breadth and depth of Anderson's development of Barth and Torrance's theological*

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*anthropology as represented in his 1982 groundbreaking book, Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology — and offers it as an indispensable contribution to the monumental task of resisting reductionism in our day, first in the One Church of Jesus Christ, and then, by the grace of our Triune God, in this fallen world.*<sup>1</sup>

In 1982, Eerdmans published Ray S. Anderson's groundbreaking book, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*.<sup>2</sup> The rich veins of reflection opened up in that work are deep and continue to yield fruitful theological insight and inform the practice of ministry. The wealth of that work has not yet been exhausted. This essay is meant to assist in further exploration of it especially as it pertains to the depersonalizing and demumanizing trends, influences and forces perpetually impinging upon our world.

Anderson's work, of course, did not arise *de novo* out of thin air but stood on the shoulders of many who preceded him by way of both critical engagement and constructive development.<sup>3</sup> One of those which should not be overlooked, is Thomas F. Torrance, the supervisor of Anderson's doctoral work and an endorser of his *On Being Human* book. Here's Torrance's endorsement:

Biblically grounded, sparkling with fresh insights, this is the most perceptive and incisive work on theological anthropology to appear for a long time. No student, no pastor, no theologian, no Christian psychiatrist should be without this book, for it will open up for them hitherto unprobed depths and offer them ways of grasping more

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on the draft version of the essay "Resisting Reductionism; Why We Need a Theological Anthropology," which was originally published as Chapter 8 of *On Being Christian... and Human: Essays in Celebration of Ray S. Anderson*, ed. Todd H. Speidell (Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> To which the "Bibliography of Works Cited" and the "Index of Names" of that single volume bears ample witness. Following suit, some reference will be made in this essay to the works of those he cited and also to others who preceded or wrote after Anderson published his volume.

profitably what it really means to be a human being.<sup>4</sup>

While Torrance is not extensively cited in this particular volume, Anderson's comprehensive awareness of Torrance's writings can be rightly assumed not only on the basis of his studying under TFT, but by his teaching, other writings, and most especially Anderson's edited volume, *Theological Foundations for Ministry*. Anderson included eight essays from Karl Barth and six from Tom Torrance, which he notes together make up about half of the 775-page long tome. Anderson's 2001 publication of *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, bears further witness to this development by his alignment of his entire project with a touchstone retrieved from Torrance's *oeuvre* cited in the "Preface" and by references throughout this volume. Anderson provides an extensive quotation indicating the profound connection Torrance and he see between Jesus Christ (Christology) and all human beings (anthropology) taken from Torrance's 1966 essay, "Service in Jesus Christ."

The Church cannot be in Christ without being in Him as he has proclaimed to men in their need and with being in him as He encounters us in and behind the existence of every man in his need. Nor can the Church be recognized as His except in that meeting of Christ with Himself in the depth of human misery, where Christ clothed with his gospel meets Christ clothed with the desperate need and plight of men.<sup>5</sup>

*On Being Human* mostly draws from Karl Barth's writings with over 50 main references. However, given the known inter-relationships between Barth, Torrance, and Anderson and the actual content of their central themes, both theological and anthropological, it should come as no surprise that they overlap and that Anderson keys off both of them. My own research and reading, including my own doctoral

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<sup>4</sup> From the back cover of the Eerdmans, 1982 first printing.

<sup>5</sup> Quotation from Torrance cited in Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 8. The original citation can be found in Thomas F. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," in *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (London: Epworth Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 1-16. It is also reprinted in Ray S. Anderson, ed., *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (T&T Clark, 2000), 724.

thesis<sup>6</sup> and editorial work, has amply confirmed that Anderson's theological anthropology is firmly grounded on the same biblical, and trinitarian theological foundation as were the less extensively developed works of Barth and Torrance on that theme with which he was very familiar. While it is not my intent to demonstrate such a thesis, I trust this essay will give, even if only incidentally, ample evidence that Anderson's anthropological work is clearly aimed at the same target that both Barth and Torrance recognized: the danger of a damaging reductionism of human persons in thought, act, relations and being. And as one of the first to further that very task, I believe Ray Anderson ought to be recognized as one of the key contributors to this crucial and ongoing program of a christological and trinitarian theological anthropology given the impetus conveyed by his own two primary mentors to all his works, most especially concentrated in his book, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. It would be remiss to overlook his contribution.

Furthermore, it is my conviction that the most fundamental challenge arising in our post-Enlightenment, indeed, post-Christian western and westernized cultures does not consist in the divergence or even disintegration around matters of morality, or social, economic, and political issues. The most fundamental matter underneath all of these involves the loss of what we mean by being human. I believe a review of all of Ray Anderson's pertinent efforts to formulate a truly theological anthropology would be more than just salutary, but renewing and regenerating, first for the One Church of Jesus Christ, and then perhaps for others.

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<sup>6</sup> For the published version, see Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human*, now published in two volumes (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015).

But for this short essay, I will have to limit myself to only one of Anderson's books, one clearly indebted to both Karl Barth and Tom Torrance.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of Anderson's work in theological anthropology lies not just in the nature of what he published in 1982 (and subsequently) but also in the trajectory which US society, and indeed Western culture, has traversed these past, now four, decades. If the twentieth century chronicles Western culture's loss of God, it seems likely that the twenty-first century may very well be characterized as the subsequent loss of humanity. While there were those in the previous century who valiantly claimed that a humanism without God in the way was all that was needed for human thriving, this present century may indeed expose the impossibility of that possibility. As Karl Barth said, and Anderson's work reflects, there is no such thing as a godless humanity.<sup>8</sup>

As consensus about the nature of humanity seems to grow ever more remote, the escalating public debates on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, reproductive technologies, genetic engineering, and sexuality look intractable. Even the lingering discussions of decades past concerning contraception, the death penalty, mental health, racism, and the nature of gender, marriage and family have eluded final resolution. Not only do these unresolved issues disturb the societal

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<sup>7</sup> The central overlap between Anderson and Torrance's theological anthropology can be found by tracing out the latter's discussions of the Trinity's "personalising" and "humanising" of human persons. See these references to Torrance's discussions, *Reality & Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 43–44; *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1996, 119, 160; "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective" in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, ed. Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 116; *The Mediation of Christ: Evangelical Theology and Scientific Culture*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), xii; "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 141–142; *Test-Tube Babies: Morals, Science, and the Law* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1984), 11; *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, Vol. 1., ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 90–91. For an overview of Torrance's concentration on this topic see also Gary W. Deddo, "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 143–160.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 136 and III/4, 625.

peace outside the church, but they also perturb the fellowship of the church itself. At the vortex of these controversies lies the mystery of human being.

The present context desperately calls for a profound and robust anthropology. Without a firm grasp on the nature of humanity, we face the prospects of what C. S. Lewis called “the abolition of man,” in a book of the same title. If the church as the church of Jesus Christ is to address its own internal challenges as well as offer the surrounding culture the best it has to offer, it cannot afford to provide anything less than a truly theological anthropology. In this brief essay I would like to highlight several crucial aspects of Ray Anderson’s legacy of a theological anthropology that we must build upon if we are to address the powerful dehumanizing trends of thought and action growing around and among us — the same foundation and aim of both Karl Barth and Thomas Torrance. For that foundation seems to me to hold great promise for responding to the ever-growing challenge of discerning the true outlines of humanity in this present twilight.

### **A Truly Theological Anthropology**

Unfortunately, it is still not unusual to hear even from pastors the warning: “Now let’s not get too theological!” Theology has a bad name. And perhaps it deserves it, for the sheer volume of divergent forms of what has passed for theology is mind-numbing. Adding to the confusion is the fact that there seems to be considerable disagreement as to what constitutes good theology, which can lead to skepticism about all theology. In response to this challenge, the church and its leaders will not fare well by offering anything less than a thoroughly and truly Christian theology. What Ray Anderson offers is a serious contender for a theology worthy of that title. But what are the distinctives of such an essentially Christian theology of human personhood? In what follows I offer my own interpretation of lessons gleaned from Ray Anderson’s work. It will become obvious that I along with Ray am also indebted to the profound thought of Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance and James B. Torrance on these matters.

### **Revelational and Christological**

A *theological* anthropology must first of all be essentially oriented to its proper subject, God. Ludwig Feuerbach, in the nineteenth century, scoffed at such a human possibility. He prophesied that the only possibility was for human beings to project themselves on to a cosmic screen and call it God. Indeed, a theological anthropology must acknowledge the human propensity to justify itself by creating gods after its own image. It must also admit that if there is to be any true knowledge of God, such knowledge will first of all be a divine possibility, not a human potential. As Karl Barth wrote in his foreword to Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, God is the great iconoclast who knocks over our idols by setting up his own divine image in their place.

Awareness of this propensity is not the achievement of postmodern insight. It was announced in no uncertain terms in ancient Israel's strict prohibition and continual warnings about idolatry, setting up false images. Enshrined in those negative commands God reserved for himself only the right to provide a true image of himself. The gospel acknowledges this human bent while announcing that in Jesus Christ God has indeed accomplished a *self*-revelation which brings us to repentance and so brings an end to our self-justifying ways. Jesus Christ has given us access to a true knowledge of God which calls into question all other images of God. If there is to be a truly theological anthropology, we must begin with Christology. God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is our only hope of being rescued from idolatry and so from exchanging the glory of the divine for self-justifying image of the creature.<sup>9</sup>

But there is a crucial second reason that a theological anthropology must be christologically oriented. If humanity is to escape its own propensity for self-justification, it must also have access to an image of *humanity* that is not merely a reflection of itself. This is especially true if there is something seriously amiss with humanity as a whole and in its particulars. If there is no north star to orient the ship of humanity, then we are condemned to navigate ourselves by some dim light perched atop our own mast. The gospel comes to us yet again as good news that in

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<sup>9</sup> See Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 1.

Jesus Christ we have not only the revelation of God but also of true humanity. Jesus is the new Adam, both the origin and destiny given to us by the grace of God.<sup>10</sup> He is our only hope of being rescued from the gravitational force of human self-centeredness, being curved back in on ourselves (*incurvatus in se*), as Martin Luther put it. In Jesus Christ we have the revelation of true God **and** true humanity. Our theological anthropology must bear no uncertain witness to this reality.

We must clarify this point to avoid misunderstanding. The Incarnation does not essentially establish the grounds for declaring that Jesus is human just like us. Rather the direction of comparison is the reverse: in Jesus Christ we see who we really are. It is not that he is like us, but that we are to be like Jesus Christ. Any *imitatio Christi* will be the fruit of *participatio Christi* and not the other way around. And the direction of comparison cannot be subsequently reversed. The church cannot make the mistake of assuming that we know what humanity is and then placing Jesus Christ under cross-examination to see if he measures up. Nor can we look to Jesus for mere empathic identification with us as we are and presently understand ourselves. Doing so would only lead us once again into the temptation of self-justification and would propel us towards crucifying him again. Jesus Christ is the revelation of a humanity that we are not entirely familiar with. Although Jesus comes to be with us and accept us as we are, he comes not to leave us there but to take us to where he is going, where we have never been. The Incarnation is not God's permission for us to wallow in self-pity and make excuses for ourselves and our sorry condition because we have been "only human." The truth is that we have been less than human. Human existence has been corrupted by the evil of sin which is alien to humanity. The only escape from our fallen and unnatural condition and so absolute servitude to such pitiful self-justification is submission to the self-revelation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ, for he alone is the one both consubstantial with God and consubstantial with us, as we hear announced at Chalcedon. Jesus Christ calls us not only to repent of our images of God but also of our self-made images of humanity. For in him we see true God and true humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> See Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) for a well-done exposition of the two themes of origin and destiny in Christ.

### **Incarnational and Relational**

What this means is that a truly theological anthropology, along the lines forged by Ray Anderson, will resist all manner of reductionisms. It first of all resists being reduced to mere cultural or philosophical anthropology. But it seems to me that there are indeed many other forms of reductionism that also threaten the enterprise. What follows is really an exploration of how a truly theological anthropology will expose those reductionisms for what they are and uncover the true nature of humanity.

The first and most devastating reductionism tempts humanity to know itself autonomously, that is, apart from the self-revelation of the triune God. Such approaches may or may not be atheistic. But the question of God in connection with humanity becomes secondary, ancillary, optional. They assume that humanity can at least be sufficiently understood for all practical purposes in terms of the disciplines of physics, biology, psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Religion need not be denied, but only subsumed under the category of one object of the investigation of the phenomenon of the human. Such approaches exhibit total confidence in a "bottom-up" approach to investigating humanity. Yes, some will want to pursue what eventually comes into view at the religious "top" of such explorations. But others will be just as content to stop short of the question of God, since all who approach from this direction agree upon the location of the essential aspects of human existence and anything more could only identify something particular, peculiar, esoteric, and subjective and so irrelevant to humanity in general. Consideration of God in relation to humanity certainly could not be set forth as a matter of knowledge.

This is the danger of a methodological naturalism in anthropology. One's methodological approach will color, constrain and most likely control what one says and understands "at the top," for it will be built on a foundation already laid. A methodological naturalism can only warrant a metaphysical naturalism. A theological anthropology will not dismiss or deny such investigations, but it will build from the top down, that is, with the recognition that the essence of humanity is determined in relation to God and on the basis of the revelation of humanity. Other investigations will indeed have their own contributions to make even if

pursued from the bottom up. However, such explorations cannot be given autonomous explanatory power. Furthermore, as opposed to bottom up naturalistic explanations, assuming the truth of divine revelation will not be regarded as a subjective bias that distorts the investigation. Rather, revelation will be regarded as providing the proper objective and subjective starting point for approaching the knowledge of humanity. The knowledge of humanity conveyed in revelation will provide the objective starting point. The proper orientation of humility and receptivity before the revelation will be understood as the only proper subjective orientation required by the knowledge of humanity normatively given through that revelation. Objective knowledge of God's humanity requires a certain subjective posture of humility and trust and commitment to the content of the revelation given.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin is often misunderstood in this connection. Yes, he rightly saw that the knowledge of God and humanity are intimately connected. But he did not believe that one could start with either object and end up the same place. The knowledge of God in Christ was primary for Calvin. Furthermore, Calvin never consented to approaching humanity in a way that was autonomous from a knowledge of God.<sup>12</sup> Calvin cannot be used to justify such inversions, reductionisms.

Now our language about knowing humanity from "above" and "below" can be misleading. By "from above" we do not mean apart from our creaturely existence. We mean, on the basis of God's self-revelation. But that revelation came from above to meet us below. In Jesus Christ "above" came into view "below" giving us access to God's own knowledge of humanity within our human sphere. We know humanity in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

### **A Christological Orientation**

What do we discover about humanity in Jesus Christ? That in essence humanity has no origin, existence, meaning or destiny except in deepest connection with God

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<sup>11</sup> See Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), for the discussion behind this affirmation.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, new edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Jesus Christ is who he is by being completely one with God and one with humanity. Jesus has no being except by being entirely from, with, and for God and humanity in all that he is, says, and does.<sup>14</sup> In Jesus Christ we see true human being as one who is completely oriented to intimate and involved communion with the Father in the Spirit. The Gospel of John, especially chapters 13-16 and culminating in chapter 17, provide profound insight into how Jesus' identity in act and being was constituted by his *relation* to the Father in the Spirit. He was one with the Father and the Spirit and desired no life outside of that sphere of communion. It is really impossible to imagine Jesus turning to the Father in prayer and, while thanking him for all his love and fellowship, nevertheless reminding the Father of his need to have his own "space" and requesting that he be allowed to go off so as to find his real self and calling and identity. His humanity was entirely oriented to being in relationship with his heavenly Father.

Jesus is the incarnate Son of God united to the Father by the Spirit. Jesus is entirely caught up in this being-in-communion. So much so, that we could say that his whole ministry towards others was to take them to the Father and send them the Spirit so that they would be included in that very fellowship he had with the Father in the Spirit. In Jesus we see that humanity has its being by being in communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The very shape of that communion is revealed in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul noted that when the Spirit of Jesus comes upon us, we call out in a way which echoes Jesus' own prayer, "Abba, dearest Father." Consequently, when we are baptized, we are baptized in the one name: Father, Son, and Spirit for that marks our new identity as those united to Jesus Christ. Salvation itself is sharing in the Son's own communion with the Father in the Spirit.

### **The Humanism of God**

Such a revelation calls into question every attempt to ascertain the true nature and destiny of humanity apart from its essential connection to the God. For there is no

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<sup>13</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 140–198, 209 for an exposition of these simply profound prepositions.

humanity apart from or outside of that reality and relationship established in the Incarnate One. Humanity is essentially shaped, determined by the election of humanity to be the humanity of God through the gracious hypostatic union of God and man in Jesus Christ. Autonomous humanity is a fiction, a lie, a deception. There exists now, through the new and true Adam, no other humanity than God's own humanity. That's what Barth called the humanism of God!<sup>15</sup>

A determination that reaches to such ontological depths and eschatological horizons poses no threat to a personal independence or differentiation. Being the Son of the Father was no threat to the personal identity and life of the Son. Rather that relation establishes and secures the proper distinction between Father and Son. This relational reality carries with it its own logic — the logic of God's own covenant love. Human being is essentially a being-in-relationship, a being-in-loving. Relationship with God is essential to human being, not ancillary or optional. God and humanity are not ontological opposites incapable of communion. Rather, as C. S. Lewis says, humanity was made to "run on God" in a way analogous to a car and gasoline.

Ontologically those educated in the tradition of western philosophy have a difficult time grasping at the deepest level of being the nature of this union in a way that does not obliterate the personal difference. To locate this problem philosophically we could say that within an Aristotelian substantial ontology (reinforced by Newtonian physics, Cartesian metaphysics, and modern Deism, naturalism and solipsism) relations can only be regarded as accidental, optional, or non-essential to human being.<sup>16</sup> In this framework, the ontological significance of relations necessarily reduce in either of two directions. Either the two essentially differentiated things cannot have real union and remain essentially separate; the relation between them remaining accidental and extrinsic. Or, upon union, the

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<sup>15</sup> See Karl Barth, "The New Humanism and the Humanism of God," *Theology Today* 8 (1951): 157–166, translated by Friedrich L. Herzog.

<sup>16</sup> See especially the many publications of Thomas F. Torrance on this theme including: *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*; *Divine and Contingent Order*; *The Christian Frame of Mind*; *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*; and the essays "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," and "The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective."

differences become obliterated by the essential union. Given A and B in relation, either A is swallowed up by B, B is consumed by A, or AB really becomes one altogether new thing that is properly identified as C. Individuated substances, especially mechanically construed, are what they are by being indivisibly autonomous, that is outside of all relationship. A theological anthropology radically calls into question such an atomistic anthropology.

Considered in a more psychological way we often perceive only two options within relations: either fleeing or fusing. We feel we either must have personal autonomy and remain essentially untouched by another and so stay in self-control (and maintain control over others) or we must lose ourselves and become submerged in the other.<sup>17</sup> Of course, neither of these options seems entirely satisfactory, so that much of fallen human life can be seen as a wild and even destructive oscillation between these two alternatives.

The self-revelation of God and humanity in communion shows a different way forward, the way of covenantal love of union and communion. This is the theo-logic of *agape*. We are who we are essentially by first being in relation with God. The quality of our life is foundationally and eternally conditioned by the shape of our participation in that relation. And right relation is no threat to our true individuality, for we are created to be and become in and through covenantal relationship.

Nothing is more crucial than to grasp and re-grasp the essential and particular relational shape of humanity given to it in Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Bad habits of the Western mind (the Eastern mind has its own problems, but let's deal with the log in our own eyes first) must be overcome if we are to work out a theological anthropology. It is a relentlessly uphill battle, for our default position is that relationships, yes, even with God, are optional, non-essential rather than constitutive of our being. *Metanoia* (repentance of mind) is required to affirm joyfully that being itself is a constantly given gift that we cannot give ourselves. We are not Energizer bunnies with our own built-in being-providing batteries. God alone

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<sup>17</sup> Some of this thinking is reflected in the terminology of "engagement" and "enmeshment" in systems theory.

<sup>18</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 4, for this theme.

is self-existing. All else exists by virtue of the gift of being — freely given by God for the sake of communion with God and then with others.

### **Trinitarian Shape**

The relational shape of creation, especially in its form of humanity as revealed in the Son of God incarnate, is grounded ultimately in the very triune being of God.<sup>19</sup> For in Jesus Christ we find that the very being of God is not a monad, an unvariegated mass of divine substance, but a unity, namely a unity of Father, Son, and Spirit. The oneness of God is a communion, not undifferentiated and monolithic stuff. Relationship of holy love is essential, internal, and eternal to the triune God. There is ontological room for loving in the inner life of the Trinity long before there is a creation. There is holy space for a real exchange of glory, life and covenant love in the triune life. The Father eternally gives out of his person the Son's sonship and the Son gives back out of his person the Father's fatherhood all in and through the Spirit who both gives and receives from the Father through the Son. God is in this way a living and loving God from all eternity, one in being (*ousia*) — three in person (*hypostasis*).

Commensurate with who this God is, it should be no surprise (in hindsight!) that creation was created for union and communion which reflects the very triune character of God. It should make perfect sense, then, that the whole of human responsibility can be captured in the two dimensions of love commanded towards God and neighbor. What else would a triune God like this essentially command? What else would essentially glorify such a God? What else would image and bear witness to this triune God?

### **A Communion with Others**

Our Christology already indicated that Jesus Christ was essentially the One from God who was from, with and for God *and* humanity. Jesus Christ is who he is also in relationship to others. In Christ, God extended himself to others in self-giving love. So, as we live out our communion with the triune God we too, in imitation of God's own free and loving acts of creation, Incarnation and redemption, should extend

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<sup>19</sup> This concern can be found throughout the opening chapters of Anderson, *On Being Human*, 36, 49, 76, 85, 114, 118, 121, 175, and 182.

our communion out to include others. Humanity has its being by being in relationship with God and with others.

It is no wonder, and yet a profound mystery, that the church itself, then, must first of all be regarded as a communion of persons. The early church grasped its trinitarian nature when it regarded itself as being an icon of the Trinity. The divine pattern of love was to be imaged among us as a witness to its divine constitution.<sup>20</sup> Humanity was created for union and communion in a holy love through sharing in the very triune life: partial and imperfectly now, but entirely and eternally in its consummation. For salvation itself in Jesus Christ is nothing other than sharing by grace in his perfect union and communion with the Father and the Spirit. By sharing in the Son's very own sonship we thereby really become the children of God. In the words of Scottish preacher and novelist George MacDonald, God in Jesus Christ "brothers us."<sup>21</sup> When we extend communion to others as the people of God, it reflects the very communion of the triune God.

### **Human and Creaturely**

So on the one hand we should guard against reducing the divine to the human, and on the other hand reducing humanity to the creaturely dimension.<sup>22</sup> So much theological discussion about the nature of humanity created in the image of God has made foundational the difference between humans and other creatures. The capacity for reasoning and self-awareness have most often been identified as the distinguishing marks of the human being.<sup>23</sup> While a theological anthropology will certainly distinguish between animals, even the higher ones, and humans, has this comparison really identified the *humanum*, that which truly distinguishes the human creature from all others? Anderson, following the lead of Karl Barth, thinks not. For two negative reasons and one positive reason.

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<sup>20</sup> See Timothy Ware [Bishop Kallistos], *The Orthodox Church*, rev. ed., (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 239.

<sup>21</sup> See George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons, Series 2*, "Abba Father", 129.

<sup>22</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup> See Karl Barth's important discussion in *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, "The Phenomena of the Human," 71-132.

First, concentration on the creaturely differences focus on capacities and potentialities. However, these attributes do not seem to identify unambiguously absolute differences but quantitative differences along a continuum. Certain animals do seem to have at least some limited capacity for reasoning, communicating, forming societies, and having a certain self-awareness. There is a growing conviction within the biological and behavioral sciences that these differences are a matter of development; creatures more highly evolved have more developed capacity than those less evolved. Some explain that human capacities operate at higher levels because, as the parts of human physiology have reached the highest levels of development, the whole that emerges is greater than the parts. Personhood is then construed as the result of higher levels of physiological development. Such an approach does not eliminate difference altogether, but it does eliminate a difference of kind while emphasizing continuity. Some claim to avoid a reductionism by following this route, but I do not believe that it can resist collapse. Why not?

Because, second, the most important question that arises is not whether human capacities are the result of a unique history of physiological development, although that is where much of the present debate is tending to go. The real question is whether these capacities, no matter how developed, can be regarded as that which makes persons truly persons, whether they constitute the *imago Dei*. For Anderson like Barth, the response is decidedly no. The biblical account clearly acknowledges a continuity between the animal and human creatures. They are both taken from the ground. Apparently there is no need to deny this connection. But more importantly the explication of the *imago Dei*, both in the biblical narrative of Genesis and more particularly in the New Testament, does not build upon either the connection or distinction from the animals. There the *imago* emphasizes difference, and that difference is constituted by the human creature's unique and personal relationship with God. The in-breathing of God into the nostrils of humanity is what makes this difference in Genesis. God shares something of his very life-giving Spirit with humanity. The primary problem with an intra-creaturely analysis for identifying the *imago* is that it requires no essential reference to relationship with God. The *imago* can exist by itself as the private possession of an individual. The result is an anthropocentrism which then collapses further into a developmentally understood

but general creatureliness. God in the end becomes irrelevant, especially in any personal and relational way.

### **Image of The Image**

Admittedly the Old Testament accounts are not exhaustive in this connection. But what we find in the New Testament is that Jesus Christ himself is identified as the true image of God and that we are being renewed according to that image. Looking back to Genesis, then, the Hebrew is best rendered as human beings being created “according to the image of God” not “as” or “to be” the image of God. That is, humanity is created according to the Son of God, the Image of the Father, who became incarnate. We were created to be Christ-like. This, then, is the positive reason that humanity cannot be reduced to its creaturely dimensions.

Can this notion be filled out anymore? Anderson, again advancing along the same pathway as Barth, says yes. We were created to be addressed by the Word of God and to respond to that Word.<sup>24</sup> Humanity stands in relation to the Word which determines its origin *and* destiny. Being created according to the image points to the purpose God established that there should be creaturely beings who would become the children of God by sharing in the Son of God’s own Sonship. We have been designed to live in a particular relationship of union and communion through the Son with the Father in the Spirit. The Godward aspect of the *imago Dei* is essential in this framework. It is also essentially personal and relational.

What then of human creaturely capacities? Certainly, whatever capacities we have and however developed, they are certainly caught up and participate in the realization of that purpose and destiny to become those Christ-like children of God who partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We are not the children of God without these creaturely capacities but with them. But what constitutes our humanity is not a human possession or possibility at all. Rather, the purpose, act, and decision of God extended towards his human creatures graciously establishes their humanity. The *imago Dei* is a divinely given designation and gift from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Humanity is what it is by virtue of this connection, this dynamic relationship.

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<sup>24</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 3.

### **The *Telos* of Humanity**

This sets a Christian notion of persons and purpose apart from most Western habits of mind. For Aristotle the *telos* of things, its ultimate destiny or purpose, was intrinsic to that thing. Each distinct thing had its own *entelechy* (in-built *telos*) that would come to be realized or actualized in each particular thing. The great oak is in the acorn. Although not always apparent, the acorn contains within it the seeds of its own perfection. In the Christian frame, the perfection of the creature lies *outside* of and external to the creature. Humanity fulfills its designation to become only on the basis of the gift and act of God. Thus, human beings become what they could never become on their own, namely the eternal children of God through Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. Indeed, we become sharers in the divine eternal life. This is made possible only by the act and decision of God to create and redeem people through the incarnate Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Such a destiny occurs through the history of a relationship of God with humanity in Jesus Christ. Our relation to God mediated to us in Jesus Christ is what makes us human.

So, we return again to our starting point — humanity is what it is and will be what it will be in and through relationship to God. We cannot grasp the *humanum* of humanity apart from this history of relationship no matter what creaturely capacities we may exhibit. How should we understand those capacities? They are best regarded as aspects of our creatureliness. They are the creaturely channels through which we may manifest our true humanity in our creaturely sphere.

Barth emphasized that the human subject, the who of humanity, could not be identified with human capacities. Barth regarded capacities and potentialities as merely “the symptoms” of humanity not its essence.<sup>25</sup> The human subject could not be reduced to those capacities but identifies the one who uses those potentialities — the agent. That creaturely capacities could be used for good or evil was decisive for Barth. With our tongues we may bless or curse God and fellow humans. The capacities are neutral in this connection. However, the biblical picture does not depict humanity apart from a divine purpose, standing neutrally before a disinterested God who waits to see just how they use their various capacities. God

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<sup>25</sup> See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 198.

did not wait to be addressed by a decisive word from humanity, but addressed them with a particular Word and destiny which willed the right and good use of those capacities for right relationship with God and neighbor. Creation according to the Image placed humanity under a certain blessing and obligation and destiny. And that *telos* distinguishes humanity from other creatures.

## **Human Being and Becoming**

Human being is the gift of participating in a history of relationship with God through Christ which results in its becoming far more than what it ever could become apart from that dynamic of a personal union and communion. It follows then that a merely physical or biological analysis of human beings could never begin to approach the essence of humanity which tells us how we ought to use our creaturely capacities. This limitation is especially binding if such a “scientific” investigation was committed from the start to a bottom-up explanation. Such approaches by definition must exclude reference to (even if not metaphysically deny) anything not empirically and (at least in principle) universally verifiable. The only purpose discoverable via this naturalistic route would be one that must inhere in the creature itself and be a potential possessed by all in general. Its *telos* could never refer to more than a self-delimited self-actualization. It could only mark out an autonomous, that is, self-given and self-established purpose.

Such a “discovery” from the position of a *theological* anthropology could only serve to point towards the fallenness of humanity, its being curved back in upon itself. We would have to regard any self-designated purpose its anti-*telos*, for it could only affirm what humanity had become post-fall: namely, a humanity considered autonomously, apart from God and its origin and destiny. Such a non-theological and anthropocentric project would lead at best to the discovery of a creature autonomously possessing and using its neutral capacities. Such descriptions certainly could be of a certain use to those committed to a theological

anthropology, but they could never supply the foundation for a theological anthropology.<sup>26</sup>

We could conjecture that the social sciences might fare better than the physical sciences in approaching the true nature of humanity. But again this proves not to be the case. To the degree that psychology, social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology are not speculative (and therefore not a species of philosophy) these disciplines, too, can only illuminate the creaturely dimensions of human existence. The results of such investigations, Anderson points out, can only lead to a deterministic or a perfectionistic view of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

Let's briefly trace out that necessarily reductionistic line of argument. The social sciences have as their proper field of investigation the history of humanity from the moment which has just passed to as far back as we have information about the human creature in its self-understanding and action as individuals or as groups, societies, aggregates. Within that history they take into account the living dynamics of relationship and a broad range of human capacities not pertinent to the physical sciences. Nevertheless, such disciplines do severely restrict our grasp of the origin and destiny, the purpose and place of humanity. Like the physical sciences, this is especially so if from the beginning reference to the domain of divine agency and intentionality is excluded from serious consideration. No advantage is gained even if certain human practices, such as religion in general and Christianity in particular that make such references to the metaphysical, are studied. Although some kind of *telos* might be discerned within human relationships, nevertheless, it would only stand for a corporate form of anthropocentrism. Humanity begins and ends alone with itself apart from God, unable to become anything more than what its own ambivalent capacities allow.

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Ray Anderson's work demonstrates this very asymmetrical integration of theology and other disciplines. A marvelous model of such integration with sociology is the book Anderson co-authored with Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). For a testimony to the fruitfulness of a truly theological anthropology for other disciplines and for ministry, see the essays in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, ed. Christian D. Kettler and Todd H. Speidell (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *On Being Human*, 35.

### **Anthropology and Eschatology**

When we utilize the social sciences as if they were autonomous disciplines, they necessarily suffer another severe restriction, namely the exclusion of the future from its domain of investigation. The social sciences certainly can project out of the past into the future, but the past will always have a determinative say in the possibilities contemplated of the future. The only viable “prophetic” voice heard in this sphere is the bell-shaped curve.<sup>28</sup> The social sciences can provide no eschatology, especially one that reaches beyond the extinction of creaturely potentials at the death of individuals, societies, or, indeed, the death of all humanity. Explorations limited to the creaturely sphere at best offer an extension of the past projected into the future.

Now what is clear in Anderson’s view is that a theological anthropology is *essentially* conditioned eschatologically.<sup>29</sup> Humanity is essentially what it will be according to the possibility created by Jesus Christ who gives humanity a future that it could never give itself. We cannot grasp true humanity by looking back to its past, to its fallen past or even to its ultimate origin. Within a theological anthropology, the essence of humanity is revealed in the destiny secured for it by its Lord and Savior, the one who has come and will come again. We cannot ascertain the nature of humanity apart from the truth and reality of this hope of an eternal union and communion with the triune God. This hope breaks apart the determinism inherent in every scientific investigation which necessarily is restricted to the creaturely past.

While we cannot subject this hope to evaluation according to accepted natural scientific/empirical criteria, it is nevertheless based on an object located within the creaturely sphere. That object is the subject Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For there in time and space we came in contact with the proclamation, determination and vision of the future of humanity. How is this so? A clarifying point must be made here. So often, even in Christian theological circles, we mistakenly

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul is especially illuminating in this connection. See his *Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>29</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 11, especially 175–80.

identify Jesus' creatureliness with his humanity.<sup>30</sup> We mistakenly begin with our own pre-understanding of our humanity and then compare Jesus to ourselves to see if he, too, is human just like we are. This is a colossal error. We do not see the essence of Jesus when we see how he, like us, has an earthly body, eats, sleeps, wears clothing, enjoys bread and wine and gets dirty, tired, hungry, and angry like we do. These things do indicate Jesus' assumption of our creatureliness. While this assumption certainly ought not to be denied or neglected, it cannot be regarded as the deepest truth about his humanity or ours. James B. Torrance often asked his students where and when we truly see the humanity of Jesus. Is it at the wedding at Cana? Asleep in the boat? Turning over tables in the temple? Struggling with temptation in the wilderness or in the Garden? No. We see our essential humanity held out for us in promise in the ascension of Jesus Christ. True humanity is exalted humanity, our humanity raised up to be with our Lord in the very presence of the Father.<sup>31</sup> While we will still very much be creatures, we will not be left in our fallen state, and apparently much of what we assume is intrinsic to our limited existence will fall away. We will have immortal and incorruptible bodies which will apparently allow us to interact with time and space in new ways. We will see that it is not and never was human to sin but rather that a Christ-like holiness is natural, not alien, to humanity. We will find that humanity can, by grace, very well exist in the holy presence of God. Humanity and divinity were destined to be together — in Jesus Christ. Indeed humanity, as true exalted humanity, can share in the divine eternal life when it is mediated to us through the God-man Jesus Christ in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. A theological anthropology is essentially eschatological for in Christ we see what we will become; namely, like him through union with him in his resurrection and ascension. True transfigured humanity has only appeared on the earth once, but there we saw the promise of our destiny revealed to us.

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<sup>30</sup> Apparently, the Apostle Paul at one time made a similar error. He says in 2 Cor. 5:16 "even though we once regarded Christ from a [merely] human point of view, we regard him thus no longer."

<sup>31</sup> See James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

The social sciences autonomously can never proffer such a hopeful vision of humanity.<sup>32</sup> Solely on the basis of their own resources they can only offer us a deterministic future eternally tied to the past or alternatively condemn us to a perfectionism which, despite that past, denies the past. On their own they can only set forth the sheer possibility of an imaginary future which might possibly be realized — if only humanity strives continually and heroically to set itself free from its past, indeed, from itself. Humanity, then, is condemned to perfect itself by itself to become something (super-creaturely? quasi-divine?) *other* than itself. A theological anthropology can never allow itself to be reduced to such deterministic or idealistic slavery. To do so would be to give up the good news of the true hope of humanity promised and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By grace we may indeed compare our humanity to the ascended and exalted humanity of Jesus Christ, which will include our redeemed creatureliness.

### **Election and Humanization**

A christological and therefore incarnational and trinitarian theological anthropology will certainly be founded upon several other distinctives if it is to be true to the humanity in right relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ. The eschatological nature of humanity makes it clear that human being is essentially a becoming, a becoming whose trajectory was established in Jesus Christ. We now must add that such becoming involves a personalization of human agency.<sup>33</sup>

John Macmurray has argued that Enlightenment rationalism, materialism, and Deism not only made the agency of God irrelevant but also destroyed in the process the significance of human agency.<sup>34</sup> Such an impending loss was sensed by the Christian, Kierkegaard, and the atheistic existentialists who, even if not consistently, followed him in this discernment. Ironically, in the attempt to secure

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<sup>32</sup> The point being, of course, that any human science need not and should not function alone any more than we can fully grasp the function of a machine, much less a person, except in connection with its purpose.

<sup>33</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 5.

<sup>34</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953). The Gifford Lectures, vol. 1, 1953–54. Reprinted by Humanities Press International, New Jersey and London, 1991.

autonomy from divine purpose, humanity lost the vitality of its own agency. For the very reductionistic methods of scientific explanation spawned by the philosophical commitments of the Enlightenment (either in its more rationalistic or positivistic mode or in its romanticist expressions) which seemed to grant humanity its autonomy actually enslaved him in a mechanistic and solipsistic world. In that world, despite the inevitability of death itself, there were those "existentialists" who proclaimed that human beings must somehow grant themselves their own fleeting significance. The need for divine activity within the universe had been eliminated. Divine purpose was relocated immanently within the structures of the universe discoverable by empirical investigation and transmuted into mechanistic natural laws. Consequently, modern and postmodern thought both attempted to be entirely satisfied with explanations, even explanations of humanity, which made no reference to an ultimate purpose given and sustained by God or enacted by persons. Human purposeful agency disappeared along with divine agency.

Persons were thereby not only cut off from God, but also cut off in any positive sense from each other (Sartre: "Others are hell"! ). It should be apparent that a social, political, or for that matter even a personal, ethic is impossible within that framework. Despite Kant's heroic attempt to put forth an ethic of duty which would allow for human autonomy, such a project has collapsed under its own weight. Ironically all that remains of his pragmatic ethic in our so-called postmodern mind is a purely externally applied heteronomous legal power over individuals constructed and arbitrarily enforced by others, most often by the most powerful cultural elites. We in the West often have bemoaned the publicized inhumanity of Mao, Ho Chi Min, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and more recently Xi Jinping, and rightly so. But given the trajectory of the West in its reaction to throw off Jesus Christ, is it any wonder that the result has been the moral anarchy evidenced in Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Ceausescu, Milosevic, not to mention the seemingly perpetual spawning of eugenics in the US, Canada and the UK and western Europe? And more recently, should we not be concerned, for example, about the technocracy and

transhumanist movements and the sex-trafficking and organ-trade “businesses” of our day? These are the “wonders” of a post-Christian and secularized world.<sup>35</sup>

### **The True Self and Freedom**

A theological anthropology should never surrender the human self as being determined and set free under the purposes of God for union and communion with God through reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ. Human selfhood can never be identified with a creaturely autonomy that has no essential relation to God as God and to others as created and regenerated according to the image of Jesus Christ. Selfhood is constituted by Jesus Christ through the gift of a truly human agency which freely chooses to conform itself to its purposeful election to belong to the people of God. As the purposely chosen people of God, such persons live in the hope of their becoming who God intends them to be in and through their union and communion with God. We are all created to *become* who we are destined to be in Jesus Christ by participating in the covenant reality made actual and real by Jesus Christ. The election of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit can never be regarded as an alien and externally applied legal obligation or status, but rather a becoming in hope which calls forth a faithful, joyful, and free participation in that determination, that actuality, that reality of the future together as the adopted-by-grace children of God. The freedom and sovereign purpose of God does not threaten or eliminate the free and thus personal agency of humanity but rather secures and assures it.

Indeed, this freedom is unidirectional; it runs only from death to life, from abandonment to belonging, from darkness to light, from injustice to righteousness, from hell to heaven. Furthermore, there is no other alternative, for human autonomy is a lie and depersonalizing and dehumanizing evil has no future. Our triune God has determined it to be so. The only future for humanity is the future held out for us in Jesus Christ. He humanizes humanity by bringing it (and all its creaturely capacities) into perfect harmony with the divine purpose and design to be holy as God is holy. Holiness is not a threat to humanity; it is only a threat to inhumanity. Personal relationship with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit is no threat

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, we could include here all of what Pope John Paul II consigned under his designation the “culture of death” in his 1995 encyclical, “*Evangelium Vitae*” (“The Gospel of Life”).

to human freedom and selfhood, but rather is its only hope for becoming truly human by being essentially shaped by the communion designed and deployed in Jesus Christ, the true Adam. In him we see true personhood, and in him we, too, will become fully human persons. As for now we are merely on our way. But we see where we are being taken in the crucified, risen, ascended Jesus Christ of holy scripture.

### **Participation in Covenantal Freedom**

The relationship of divine and human agency has always posed a philosophical dilemma. But that mystery can never be adequately resolved through speculative reflection. Rather, we can see the perfect harmonization of divine and human purpose and will realized in time and space in Jesus Christ himself. That is where we can become convinced that neither divine nor human willing need cancel each other out or be delicately balanced against competing needs. Divine freedom and human freedom were perfectly actualized under creaturely conditions in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and ascended. What term shall we use to speak of this interaction of human and divine agency?

In this connection we would do well to recover the biblical and theological notion of participation (Gk. *koinonia*). In this christologically-illuminated framework, the purpose, agency, and act of God establishes the arena of actuality and reality in which humans participate and thereby have a share in their own becoming by the grace of God. Our sovereign election in Jesus Christ makes room for our unidirectional acts of freedom. We are made free for one thing and one thing only, free to choose, affirm and embrace our election and therefore our destiny in Jesus Christ. This is the sense in which Ray Anderson wants to reorder our thinking so that it now moves from actuality to possibility.<sup>36</sup> Because humanity has been put on a whole new foundation of reconciliation with God, that actuality provides the possibility of life in union and communion with God.

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<sup>36</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, the chapters in Part 3, which carries this very title. This thought very much follows that of Thomas F. and James B. Torrance. See Thomas F. Torrance's two volume work, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* and *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*.

To deny this truth and reality, that Jesus is the Lord of humanity, is to attempt to live in unreality. Undoubtedly such misuse of our divinely given freedom will have consequences for the quality of our interaction with the God of our humanity. However, one of those consequences will not be the undoing of what God has done in our place and on our behalf. Such denial has no power to establish an alternative and counter reality in which we may live where Jesus is not Lord and Savior, the new Adam. A theological anthropology can never concede a cosmic dualism. Eternal death is not an equal and opposite form of eternal life. The grace of God upholds human agency that we might make use of our agency to affirm and participate in the truth and reality of our election to become the children of God in Jesus Christ. Union with Christ means participation in the life he gives us. As God acts on our behalf we are granted human "room" for us to participate. True freedom leads in one direction, to share in (participate in) the freedom of Christ-likeness. The claim that human freedom requires the arbitrary selection of moral opposites ("free" to choose good or evil!) is a lie that comes straight from the serpent in the Garden. It must be banished from the Christian frame of mind.

### **Freedom in Fellowship**

Those who in the power of the Spirit of Christ affirm their election will, in and through participation in their becoming, live in relation with others on the basis of the same hope for others that they have for themselves. The actuality of our reconciliation to God in Christ has at the same time founded a reality to be horizontally extended among human creatures. On that plane we also essentially live in relations, relations of freedom for fellowship, to borrow Karl Barth's categories. Humanity exists, as Barth traces it out horizontally, in three spheres of relationship: as children of parents, as male and female, and as neighbors near and far.<sup>37</sup> In right relationship we will treat persons according to God's humanizing purposes for them. Barth provides a wonderful fourfold identification of the humanizing qualities of such relationships: seeing eye to eye, mutually speaking and hearing one another, serving one another, and doing all this gladly and in

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<sup>37</sup> See these sections under the heading, "Freedom for Fellowship," in *Church Dogmatics*, III/4.

freedom.<sup>38</sup> We are called to be human by responding in these ways to the humanity of those others whom we will necessarily encounter in these relationships essential to human existence.

Of course, these very relationships of parents and children, men and women, and among the various ethnic/cultural/"racial" groups (neighbors) are those we find so troubling. The good news is that the dividing wall of hostility within these very relationships has in Christ Jesus already been broken down among God's human creatures so that there is one new humanity in him (Ephesians 2:15).<sup>39</sup> In the framework of a theological anthropology, reconciliation among persons is founded upon the reconciling work of God. The actuality of God creates the possibility among humans. If we were to investigate humanity autonomously, solely with the tools of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, political science and philosophy, would we conclude that all humanity has in actuality, in principle, been reconciled? No. But when Jesus Christ put all humanity on a whole new foundation of relationship with God, all inter-human relations were also put on a whole new foundation. That gracious work provides the basis for a transformed sociology and social ethic.

We were created to be in covenant love relationship with God and in turn with humanity by the same Spirit of love that from all eternity unites the Father and Son. Human existence is essentially a being-in-relationship with God and with others. The essence of our being-in-relation along these two axes is fully revealed in Jesus Christ: conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of woman. It is revealed in his perfect love for God and perfect love for humanity resulting in his perfect self-giving which reconciled humanity to God and gave them a share in his perfected

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<sup>38</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 249 and following.

<sup>39</sup> The verb tenses used and also the declaration that the new humanity exists "in Christ" (not "by means" of Christ nor as a potential goal) all indicate a completed actuality accomplished by Christ, to be lived out by those united to him as members of the body of Christ.

and ascended humanity.<sup>40</sup> On that basis, we can also then see more deeply into the creaturely structure of our being. We have our being by being children of parents. For without ancestors and parents we would not be. We have our being by being male and female united and differentiated in a polar human nature. We have our being by being neighbors to those near us and like us and to those distant and less culturally, socially, economically like us. To be united to Christ is to have brothers and sisters of every ethnos, tongue, and tribe. It's a Pentecost reality! To belong to Christ is to belong to the Body of Christ. We are members of that great congregation.

### **The All-Inclusive Humanity of Jesus Christ**

Here we must stop to point out that election for participation in covenant love does not mean (even though some might argue that it may logically imply) rejection. But rather, it means just the opposite. The election of God in the new Adam has universal intention. Those who personally and presently recognize their election participate in it by extending an invitation into election to include others. In the words of J. B. Torrance, Jesus' humanity is an all-inclusive humanity. Christians announce the news that exclusively in Jesus Christ can all others be included. He alone is the new Adam. He is the One for the many. That is the inclusively exclusive claim of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Seeing Humanity in the Dark**

In fact, human agency, human freedom, human becoming in Christ have everything to do with becoming more and more a channel of God's own gracious election and covenantal love towards all, even one's enemies. Jesus Christ redeems our humanity and leads us more and more to recognize, hope in, and act towards others on the basis of their true humanity held out for them in him. I come to see

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<sup>40</sup> For an explication of Karl Barth's theological understanding of these intertwining relationships, see Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), republished in two volumes by Wipf & Stock, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> See *Worship, Community*, 40–42; and James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981) 137, 140.

that Jesus is their Brother as well as mine. To be fully human is to see in the most distorted situation the humanity of the other and to participate with God in having their humanity restored. That is, we are to love our “opposites” with God’s own love, whether they be parents or children (born or unborn), members of the other sex<sup>42</sup>, or foreigners. For the well-being of our **own** humanity depends upon it.

Of course, there is no other starting place along this pathway than Jesus himself. We only begin to be humanized when we see his humanity in right relation to God under the distorting conditions of fallen human existence even further contorted under the weight of the judgment of the cross. The first place where we begin to fulfill the double command to love God and man, where indeed we may perfectly love both simultaneously, is when we love Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected and ascended — and love him for who he is, true God and true humanity unconfusedly united in covenant love for us and our salvation.

## **The Test of True Humanity**

To be human is to recognize the humanity of the other, especially when it is hidden within a broken creaturely existence. The debates over abortion and euthanasia often assume that it is only the status of others that is in question. Is the fetus yet human? Is someone with Alzheimer’s disease still human? But the real question is not whether they are human, but whether we are! Our own being and becoming human will be manifest only as we recognize their humanity and love them in a way that affirms and upholds their humanity, that is, pursues God’s intentions for them to share in Christ’s own union and communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Humanity alive to God desires to see others included in the blessing of the living God who brings life out of death no matter how distorted or undeveloped a condition in which we find them. This recognition of true humanity is intrinsic to Christian faith. The Christian is one who has been given the gift of discerning the true humanity of God in the womb of the unmarried teenager Mary as well as in the

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson devotes an entire chapter to the matter of human sexuality. He contends that in theological perspective human sexuality does not refer to “gender roles.” Rather sexuality is a modality of personal being that is polar. It is orientation toward a goal. It manifests a complementarity of personal being and serves as a basis for love and marriage. See chapter eight of *On Being Human*.

suffering and death of the fruit of her womb on the cross. Those who have thus begun the journey with Jesus towards humanization will also be those willing to bear the burden of hope for the as yet unborn and extending comfort to those for whom the potentialities of life are all but extinguished.

Two clarifying matters may be helpful here. In the frame of a theological anthropology the aim of love for others cannot be reduced either to the mere maximization of the actualization of creaturely capacities or to the mere avoidance of pain and maximization of pleasure. Humanity is surely expressed through the medium of creaturely potentiality and powers. But one's humanity itself is a gift which can be upheld by God even under the most severely constricted and distorted conditions where that humanity hardly, if at all, shines through. Essentially, then, love sees far beyond the barriers which prevent the realization of human potential to affirm in hope God's own love and electing purposes. Of course, wherever possible, the people of God welcome and promote the joyful expression of our true humanity and will not hinder or prevent such expression. Such manifestation of the glory of humanity created according to image of Jesus Christ bears witness to the goodness of God's humanity. But neither will it forget the gift of humanity in the purposes and intentions of God when that humanity is hidden or distorted. Our own humanization is at stake when we do or do not love with Christ's love the unborn, the neighbor, or the enemy. Jesus teaches us to recognize humanity, first in him, and then to participate with him in the humanization of others in worshipful surrender to him, the One True Human being.

### **Humanity and Suffering**

We must also say that suffering in and of itself is not destructive of humanity, even though it hides its manifestation and puts it under tremendous burden and constraint. Suffering also may indeed be a channel for exploitation by temptation of the Evil One. But a theological anthropology can never concede that suffering itself can separate us from the love of God. This in no way condones our making anyone suffer. Love alleviates suffering to the extent it can but only in ways that continually acknowledge the abiding humanity of the sufferer who belongs to the triune God alone. It is indeed possible to inhumanely relieve or avoid suffering. Withholding the truth, over-medicating, providing inadequate palliative care, indulging, or making

the person feel they are a burden can all be dehumanizing. Withholding medical care solely on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis and actively promoting the premature death of someone will often if not always be dehumanizing. The medical experimentation with persons who bear the image of their Creator and Redeemer, most particularly without their fully informed consent and even when purported to be for the greater potential greater good of others, is especially pernicious, indeed, evil. There are limits as to how we may alleviate suffering, for there are things worse than suffering or even death — namely the repudiation of our own humanity or that of others. The rejection of the humanity of the others will have a dehumanizing effect on us. If unchecked by repentance such disregard will inevitably lead to the repudiation of the true humanity (in perfect relation with divinity) of Jesus Christ. In fact, the insistence and self-justifying denial of the humanity of others may indeed be manifestations of rebellion against the grace of God set forth in Jesus Christ. We are warned in the New Testament that refusal to receive God's own forgiveness by humble repentance will lead to the second and eternal death that lie beyond our earthly demise.<sup>43</sup>

This is why, it seems to me, that Mother Theresa always sent the novices of her order to minister to the dying who had no hope of recovery in this life. To recognize the true humanity of persons in this condition calls first for the recognition of the humanity of the Crucified One. Those who love Jesus Christ crucified are those who are learning to love others who seem less than human. They can do so because of their hope for a transformed humanity founded upon the One raised and ascended for us on behalf of all.

### **Humanity Under the Gracious Judgment and Exaltation of God**

The final distinctive of a theological anthropology is that it will always remember that humanity lives by the grace of God. That is, humanity exists within an essentially fallen condition yet with hope for redemption only because God's future has already broken into that desperate situation. This in-breaking signals a consummation yet to come.<sup>44</sup> In Jesus Christ crucified we not only see our humanity

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<sup>43</sup> These are warnings, not predictions. But I am recalling passages such as these: Mk. 3:29; Matt. 18:22-35; 25:31-46; Heb. 3:10-13 and 4:5-7; Rev. 20:14-15.

<sup>44</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 7.

in union and communion with God but also fallen and under judgment. What might seem a normal state for humanity is revealed to be abnormal, broken and twisted to its very root. In the cross of Christ, the depth of our need, guilt and shame is exposed — not in order to condemn us but to rescue us from ourselves.

In the cross of Jesus, we see that humanity does not just need to be freed from its creaturely limits of finite strength and knowledge or merely be given correct or higher ideals. We see that humanity cannot rescue itself by some incremental self-advancement from death and the evil that promotes it. In the death of Jesus, death seems to have the last word. But deeper than that, the manner of death at the hands of evil men reveals that all humanity is enslaved to malevolent corrupting powers greater than itself. His death exposes an evil conspiratorial power (Satan and his angels) which seemed to overcome good — the morally and spiritually perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. Apart from the gracious deliverance of God through death his humanity and so ours has no hope and no future. In Christ we see that humanity is so threatened and polluted by evil that it must be done away with, suffer a terrible judgment or sorting out, and then be re-made from the inside out. That is the only way for it to reach its God-given destiny. A theological anthropology, then, will resist reduction of the hope of humanity to a moralism or idealism of human self-improvement just as much as it rejects the hopelessness of a fatalism and determinism of human abandonment by God or autonomy from God, the Author of Life.

No autonomously human investigation can discover humanity under grace, although it may identify among other complicating and confounding factors or symptoms of this truth. Grace alone revealed in the bodily crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus shows us the true nature of our need and of God's adequacy. Humanity, to be free of its subservience to evil corruption that inevitably leads to death, needs to be judged, condemned to death, and then made alive again. But how can this be? It is possible because in Jesus Christ our fallen, rebellious, and broken humanity was actually judged. Dying in him now changes the very nature and meaning of death because in him we are also raised again to new life as renewed creatures set free from the power of evil and its devastating consequences of sinning and being sinned against — from corrupting and corrupted

humanity. On the cross of Christ we see the true condition of humanity in its alienation from God. But only in the resurrection and ascension of Christ do we see the radical transformation of humanity so that it may reach its destiny as the living people of God. In the end a theological anthropology can be nothing less than a theology of grace. As Karl Barth has said, we are prohibited [by the gospel] to take sin more seriously than grace, or even as seriously as grace.<sup>45</sup>

On that final note we bring to a close our reflections on a truly theological anthropology. Hopefully these few comments will serve as a helpful reminder of certain distinctives which must be preserved at this moment in the life of the church as it faces enormous reductionistic pressures which threaten not only the loss of God and God's grace in Jesus Christ, but also the loss of our humanity, our ability to recognize the truly human in ourselves, in our neighbors, and in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>45</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/ 2, 41.