

*COMMUNIO DEI: PARTICULARITY IN THE UNIVERSAL  
HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST*

Drew Thomas Everhart

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



2023

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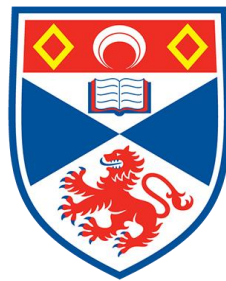
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*Communio Dei*: Particularity in the Universal Humanity of  
Jesus Christ

Drew Thomas Everhart



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
at the University of St Andrews

November 2022

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**Abstract:** This thesis explores the role of particularity, especially racial and gendered particularity, in human nature through an exploration of Christological anthropology. If all humanity is revealed and redeemed in Christ's particular humanity, what does it mean that Christ became human in particular ways, such as his maleness and Palestinian-Jewishness? Specifically, what does Christ's assumption of a particular humanity mean for our own particularity as human beings made in his Image. Many feminist Christologies argue that this makes Christ unqualified to save women, while theologies of race often emphasize the solidarity of Christ with black and brown bodies. Particularity appears to play a significant role in our being human, but it also appears to make salvific union with Christ impossible for some. Instead, this thesis argues that human nature ought to be conceived of in onto-relational terms, so that human beings are constituted by their relations to other persons within the created order. Human nature is not defined by a set of properties held in common by all, but by a shared *telos* for communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. In such a communion, called the *communio Dei*, human persons share second-personally that which is particular to themselves with others in a human reflection of divine *perichoresis*. Human nature is thus created to be an essentially diverse community united not by a common set of features or faculties, but by a shared *telos* to be a community comprised of every tribe, tongue, and nation united in worship of YHWH. Christ embodies this in how he transforms the relationship between particularities, such as race and gender, so that alienated peoples may have loving, self-giving communion with one another in the Spirit-wrought community, the body of Christ.

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Introduction  
A Problem in Three Parts

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### §0.1 Particularity: A Problem in Three Parts

In the fourth chapter of her book, *To Save the World*, Rosemary Radford Ruether poses the question, “can a male saviour save women?”<sup>1</sup> For some, this question might appear to be misguided. Christ is the saviour of all humankind, what should his maleness have to do with it? And yet Ruether is not the first—nor the last—theologian to note the role that maleness has historically played in soteriology, atonement, and theological anthropology in elevating the status of men over women.

Augustine is the usual whipping boy for such claims due to statements like the following from his Genesis commentary: “woman was given to man, woman who was of small intelligence and who perhaps still lives more in accordance with the promptings of the inferior flesh than by the superior reason...that through her the man became guilty of transgression.”<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, he proposes that while men bear the image of God by themselves, women bear the image of God in union with men, pointing to Pauline Christological metaphors and Christ as the visible image of God.<sup>3</sup> Feminist theologians like Ruether criticize this view as misogynistic, arguing that it diminishes women’s value in the eyes of God by attempting to make women’s soteriology dependent on that of men. Other early Christian thinkers have similarly been understood to place men in ontological hierarchy over women on the basis of their more direct connection to the image of God. Elizabeth Clarke, for instance, criticizes: “the Fathers usually focused on verses that provided a rationale for restricting, not freeing, women. Thus, the fact that in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul calls man the image of God, but does not so designate women (to the neglect of Genesis 1:26), was taken by the Fathers to mean that women lacked some essential quality males shared with the Godhead.”<sup>4</sup> Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11 have a Christological orientation, drawing an analogy between Christ’s relationship to men as the model for men’s relationship to women. Thomas Aquinas, too, has been accused of misogyny in his view of the *imago Dei* in comments like: “regarding the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the acting force in the male seed tends to produce a perfect likeness in the male sex; while the production of a

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<sup>1</sup> Ruether, *To Save the World*, 45.

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber*, IX.5. He also argues here that woman, even before the Fall, is essentially subservient to man by nature according to the will of God.

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.7.10. “*Cum autem ad adiutorium distribuitur, quod ad eam ipsam solam attinet, non est imago Dei ; quod autem ad virum solum attinet, imago Dei est, tarn plena atque integra, quam in unum coniuncta muliere.*”

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *Women in the Early Church*, 15-16.

female comes from a defect in the acting force or from some material defect...[for this reason] woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason rules.”<sup>5</sup> This also reflects on Aquinas’ Christology, where he argues that it was more fitting for Christ to be born male because male is the nobler sex.<sup>6</sup> Feminist theology raises the criticism against these thinkers that, on their views, women are somehow “lesser than” or “reliant on” men for their value and dignity as made in the image of God. As Mary Daly describes these views, “women have a duality of status, and the derivative aspect of this status...divides [women] against each other and encourages identification with patriarchal institutions which serve the interests of men at the expense of women...naming [these identifications] ‘natural’ and bestowing its supernatural blessings upon them.”<sup>7</sup> These views, according to Daly, are not just misguided in their view of women, they essentialize male dominance and supremacy over women as divinely ordained.

I do not raise these criticisms to construct my own critique of thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas; enough ink has been spilled both defending and criticizing their views of women and such work is beyond the scope of this thesis. Whether or not these thinkers were misogynists is not the point. Rather, I raise these issues because views of women as having a naturally subservient nature to that of men or as imaging God in an inferior, male-reliant way have persisted in the history of theology and remain influential today.<sup>8</sup> The ascription of “maleness” to God (or some transcendent feature of God that is reflected exclusively in human maleness) becomes the basis for exclusive and restrictive soteriologies which understand women’s imaging of God in prescriptively masculine terms. Daly thus writes, “if God is male, then male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination.”<sup>9</sup> So long as God is essentially masculine in our theological imaginations, we will always prioritize (if not essentialize) maleness in conceiving of human nature.

Ruether’s question thus presents a problem for Christian theology. If God’s revelatory, salvific, and transformative action is brought about by a male saviour, are women excluded from being full recipients of this activity? Does it entail that women must enter into a kind of union

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<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *ST I.q92.a1.ad1-2*. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Latin are my own.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *ST IIIa.q31.a4.ad1*.

<sup>7</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Piper and Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*; DeMoss, *Lies Women Believe*.

<sup>9</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 19.

with men so that men can mediate the salvation of Christ to them? Or perhaps the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas was right, and women must become men in order to enter the kingdom of heaven?

There are good reasons for thinking otherwise. Such conceptions of Christ's saving work run contrary to biblical witness about the exclusivity of Christ's work as the only salvation of humanity and women's inclusion in the *imago Dei*. This has been argued rather effectively by thinkers like Christa McKirland, who takes to task the bifurcated accounts of male and female salvation in which male fulfillment of the *imago Dei* is found in participation in Christ while female fulfillment of the *imago Dei* is found in participation in the Church.<sup>10</sup> Christ is the saviour of all humanity; this must include both male and female. For our purposes, then, this thesis presumes that the answer to Ruether's question is an emphatic, "yes." More reasons for this will be given in §I of this thesis.

I will therefore not argue here that a male saviour can save women; it is an *essential* assumption about Christ's saving work that this work is for all humanity. I raise Ruether's question to indicate an important issue underlying the question and responses to it. Christ being male appears to undermine his ability to save women because of the underlying logic of the incarnation: Christ is qualified to save us because he was made like us in every way. But there are many ways that Christ is not like us. Gender is not the only issue to take up here. Jesus is also, for instance, a Palestinian Jew, and clearly many Christians are *not* Palestinian Jews. Willie James Jennings' *The Christian Imagination* traces how the western theological imagination has consistently identified Jesus with racial whiteness while excluding black and brown bodies, despite Jesus being a person of colour from the middle east.<sup>11</sup> Jennings' example highlights two issues raised by Ruether's question: not only does Jesus have ethnic and cultural particularities which he does not share with us, but our theological imagination about him (both his being male *and* his being identified however inaccurately with those of western European descent) has had a significant influence on theological anthropology.

These features of Christ's humanity are particular to him. Like other humans, there are features of his human existence that are not universally shared by all humans called "particularities." Some particularities might be entirely unique to an individual, such as Christ's

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<sup>10</sup> McKirland, "Image of God and Divine Presence."

<sup>11</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*.

uniqueness as the only human being born of a virgin, while others might be shared with some (but not all) other human beings, such as his Jewishness. But all particularities function to define and distinguish us from others despite our shared humanity. They are usually based around embodied traits, but also involve socially-defined and cultural features that get lived out in embodied ways. Part of the problem posed by particularity comes from the vagueness of its definition. At the same time, there are intuitive and commonplace ways that we point to these features and the role that they play in our lives. We identify one another and relate to one another in ways that rely on these differences.

What should be recognized from both Jennings' and Ruether's work is that Christ's humanity, in all its particularity, holds some sort of primacy in how we think about humanity generally. And certainly, we would want to say that there is something about Christ becoming human that should inform our understanding of humanity generally; he is the Second Adam (1 Cor 15:45-47), the Image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and the first born of all creation (Col 1:15). As Marilyn McCord Adams writes, "conclusions about Christ's human nature are *systematically driven* and vary principally with a theologian's estimates of the purposes and proprieties of the Incarnation on the one hand and of the multiple and contrasting job-descriptions for Christ's saving work on the other."<sup>12</sup> Who we think Christ is and what he is doing in his salvific work drastically influences how we think about his human nature and, by extension, our own. This Christological understanding of human nature is called Christological anthropology. If we are to embrace such an anthropology, then being able to answer Ruether's question in the affirmative is of paramount importance. This is because if Christ is to be the foundation of our understanding of human nature generally, we must be able to affirm that Christ transforms and heals all human persons including those who are different from Christ in particular ways like gender. Therefore, *how* we explain Christ's saving both women and men, rather than the affirmation of the universality of Christ's salvific work, is what requires more exploration. The explanation offered is important not simply for understanding how a male saviour can save women, but for how a saviour who is particular in many ways can save human beings who are different from him. I am thus calling the problem raised by Ruether's question, the particularity problem.

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<sup>12</sup> Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 9-10.



Some answers have already been offered, both in feminist Christologies and in responses to feminist critiques of male-driven Christologies and soteriologies. We have already mentioned several complementarian accounts that ground maleness in Christ and femaleness in either the Church as the bridegroom of Christ or in female relationship to men. As previously stated, these fail because they undermine the universality of Christ's salvific work by bifurcating the salvation of men and women. Other solutions treat particularity as accidental to human nature. Felipe Do Vale, for instance, proposes a vision of human nature that is pared down to its essential properties, arguing that Christ assumes maleness as an essential property that is not essential to all human beings.<sup>13</sup> This becomes a problem for thinking about maleness, femaleness, or any other particularity as being saved. One need not look far for examples in our culture of how maleness or whiteness, and what they mean in our culture, need to be transformed in Christ. If Christ needs to be like us to heal us, would it not be the case that he in fact needs to assume *every kind* of particularity in order to heal them as well? Do not my maleness and whiteness need to be saved in Christ's transformation of my humanity? This harkens to a commonly invoked theo-logic of the incarnation typically attributed to Gregory of Nazianzen: the unassumed is unhealed.<sup>14</sup> If Christ does not assume maleness, then maleness is not saved. This brief argument is not sufficient to dismiss arguments like Do Vale's out of hand, and the idea that all particularities must be assumed by Christ to be healed would require Christ to assume every particularity simultaneously in a way that he clearly has not. These points will be explored in §I in greater depth, but I raise these concerns to set the table for confronting the particularity problem; a problem which has not yet been adequately addressed.

From the above considerations, I take there to be three key parts to this problem. While this problem raises concerns for theological anthropology generally, it raises those concerns especially for Christological anthropology.

### *Part 1: The Scandal of Particularity*

First, the particularity problem poses a salient challenge to Christ's role as the Second Adam, in which he provides the basis for all that it means to be human. How can Christ define and determine what it is to be human *for every human person*, revealing in the incarnation the

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<sup>13</sup> Do Vale, "Can a Male Savior Save Women," 329-334.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory of Nazianzen, "To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius."

reconciled and redeemed meaning of *all* humanity, if he assumes human particularities that are not shared with everyone? Women, for instance, cannot know personally what it is like to be male, and so Christ's human experience is in some ways distinct from theirs. For every degree of separation between Christ's humanity and ours, there would appear to be a division in him "becoming like us in every way," and understanding what it is to be human. This is sometimes called the Scandal of Particularity, that God becomes incarnate in this particular way at this particular time to save humanity universally. How is it that every human being is saved if God comes only into this particular way of being human? The stakes are raised when we begin to think about Christ transforming and healing humanity. If Christ heals our humanity through healing his own, restoring human nature to a state of flourishing, how does his healing his own masculinity transform femininity without making all women into men like him? If Christ assumes a human nature in such a way that he constitutes in his own humanity a new way of being human for all, that way seems to necessarily include masculine and Palestinian-Jewish ways of being human. This casts doubt on Christ's ability to also establish a new way of being human that includes, for instance, female and Gentile embodiment of that New Humanity. Particularity appears to undermine Christological anthropology at its very foundation.

*Part 2: Which Theological Anthropology, Whose Doctrine of Humanity?*

Assuming we were to overcome the Scandal of Particularity, particularity seems to present an ethical dilemma to those wishing to construct their anthropology from Christology. Given the above considerations, Daly's concerns are well-warranted: if the one who provides the basis for understanding humanity is male, how do we include women in this understanding without making femaleness secondary or subsidiary to maleness? Or, to raise a parallel issue, how can we claim both that the full expression of humanity is Jewish and that Gentile converts to Christ should not be required to follow Jewish customs in order to join the body of Christ? We know that both claims must be included in our theological anthropology simply because Christ and the New Testament writers held them to be the case. Christ welcomed women into his presence and pointed to them as exemplifying the kingdom over and above the religious and prestigious men who derided them. Paul repudiated the Judaizers who demanded that Gentiles circumcise themselves in order to become members of the body of Christ. If Christological

anthropology is to be faithful to the same sources upon which it bases its central claims, it must be able to account for these ethical conclusions.

*Part 3: The Problem of the Particular and Universal in Christ*

Related to the first two parts of the particularity problem is a third. The first part is principally concerned with how it is that Christ's particularity can transform the particularity of those who are different from him, for instance how Christ's maleness can transform and redeem femaleness. The second part of the problem is the fear that this would somehow place those particularities which Christ assumes, such as maleness and Jewishness, in an ontological hierarchy above other particularities, such as femaleness and Gentileness. Underlying these concerns is a more metaphysical problem: how can a particular being come to stand for all particular beings of the same kind in the first place? Even if we were to take on the radical and deeply problematic view that all women must become men to enter the kingdom of heaven, that still would not help us to make sense of how *this* being can transform and heal itself in a way that also transforms and heals *that* being. Even if every single human person shared each of the particular features of Christ, so that every human being was just a perfectly-copied clone of the human Jesus, we would still have multiple beings. It would not be obvious how what we do to change one being would have any effect on the others. This part of the problem is not new, nor is it unique to the role which it plays in the particularity problem. In other contexts, it has been called the problem of the one and the many. However, raising it as a part of the particularity problem can provide for a fresh approach to this ancient problem and its many broad implications in metaphysics.

This thesis, then, confronts the problem of particularity for Christological anthropology. Beginning with the premise that Christ can indeed save women and Gentiles and all those who are different, it seeks to explain how Christ in fact does this. If we are to explain how Christ assumes particularities that differentiate him from other human persons and yet still transforms and saves them in all their particularity, we need to be able to explain what particularity is and how it functions in human nature. It is reasonably apparent that we have particularity as human creatures. This thesis thus asks in a Christologically-informed way why it is that we have particularity and for what purpose, if any, it exists.

## **§0.2 Approaching the Problem of Particularity**

To contend with the problem that particularity poses to Christological anthropology, we will need to offer an account of what particularity is and for what purpose human creatures are created with it that can make sense of both the particularity of Christ's humanity and its relation to other particularities which Christ does not have. In answer to the particularity problem, this thesis will argue principally that (1) human particularities are socially-constructed and embodied differences which constitute human diversity, (2) that human beings are created with these particularities for the purpose of forming us into a diverse community of persons that reflects the intra-Trinitarian unity-in-diversity of God given in the *imago Dei*, and (3) particularity is therefore essential to human nature because apart from our being created with particularity we could not become the promised eschatological vision of every tribe, tongue, and nation united in worship of the Triune God. To argue this, I approach the nature of particularity in the following way.

§I lays the groundwork for what humanity is, how we come to that understanding of human nature Christologically, and where particularity is found in such a model of human creatureliness. I offer a summary of the commitments of Christological anthropology and offer one version of such an anthropology. This account draws on important figures in the tradition of Christological anthropology, such as T. F. Torrance and Colin Gunton, general trends in theological anthropology, and critiques of these trends from theologies of race and feminist/womanist theologies. These resources allow me to argue for a particular purpose that defines human nature: humanity is created for communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. Within the proposed account, I highlight the role of particularity in Christ's humanity and humanity more generally, emphasizing the problem facing Christological anthropology. After raising and rejecting the possible ways already on offer of dealing with this problem, I chart a way forward through a reassessment of the ontological categories of human nature.

To reassess these categories, §II points to the nature of the atonement as the mechanism by which Christ reconstitutes what it means to be human in his creative incarnational activity as the Second Person of the Trinity. This part of the thesis asks how it is that the many come to be what they are in Christ. Through exegetical analysis, I compare the metaphysics implied in the Hebrew Bible's witness to the nature of atonement and Christ's fulfillment of this nature in the

New Testament with prevalent contemporary options. These metaphysical options are found somewhat wanting, and so I opt for a reconfiguration of the metaphysics of humanity, specifically metaphysical answers to problem of the one and the many. To be a distinguishable self is to be constituted (at least partially) by relation to others. This problematizes the assumed competitiveness of the one and the many, redefining what it means to be particular and universal in relational terms.

§III proposes a relational metaphysic of human nature, capturing the ontological oneness of humanity in Jesus Christ. Drawing on the resources of social ontology and social-cognitive sciences, I offer an extension of theological accounts that draw on joint attention and second-personal knowledge to explain our ontological dependence on Christ. This solution proposes that essential to our being human in Christ is to be in community with persons both divine and human in the created order. Because this is a corporate relation, we ought to think of particularity as arising from socialized realities lived out in embodied ways. Particularity is only meaningful in the kinds of community for which we are created as human creatures.

If particularity concerns both our socialization in communities and our being embodied, then why is it that humanity even has these socialized and embodied differences? §IV seeks to ground the role of particularity in human nature in the purpose for which we are created with such differences by analysing the socio-embodied ways that Christ lives out his own particularity. Here I argue that particularity is our embodied features of difference around which we socially construct as fundamentally relational beings. Our being different in socio-embodied ways makes the kind of communion for which we are created possible because our relationships with those who are different from us can change us. While the ways in which we can socially construct around embodied features is virtually limitless, including ways that social construction can influence and change embodiment, we cannot reduce any given particularity or its meaning to pure social construction nor to mere physical feature. Both aspects are essential to the role that particularity plays in Christ's humanity, and therefore our own.

If §IV can be said to argue for the potential limitlessness of particularity and its meaning in human existence, §V is my way of grounding that limitless potential in the purposefulness of the human creature. In other words, if human nature is such that humanity is capable of becoming anything, what is humanity supposed to become? Particularity, I argue, is essential to human nature precisely because we are created to have communion with those who are different

from us; we are created to encounter the other *in Christ*. Difference, as an essential feature of the *communio Dei* for which we are created, defines how we ought to socially construct around our embodiment. Taking an extreme example of radical reconstructions of embodiment, I argue that, while nature is ultimately malleable, it is malleable for the express purpose of participating in Christ's building of a community that reflects the intra-Trinitarian nature of God. Human beings are created with particularity so that we may have communion with those who are different from us, fulfilling our creative destiny as image-bearers.

### **§0.3 Why Particularity Matters**

The role of particularity in human existence is underappreciated in theology generally and theological anthropology specifically. The problem that particularity poses to theological anthropology demonstrates just how ignored its implications are and how needed a project on particularity is. Particularity matters chiefly because it shapes and influences so much of how we experience human existence. But this also means that, insofar as this influence is left out of our theology, the consideration of particularity is vitally important for correcting certain blind spots on our theologizing about the nature of the human creature. To this end, there are three important methodological and motivational considerations that will underwrite this thesis and its approach to human nature with respect to particularity.

First, the notable absence of particularity in most systematic doctrines of humanity is matched by an exclusion of certain kinds of accounts of the *imago Dei*. Feminist theologies, LatinX theologies of liberation, and black theology are often categorized as being only contextual and thus have not been sufficiently considered for their systematic contributions.<sup>15</sup> Eva Parker's research into theological education has revealed how "BAME students often experience feelings of 'isolation,' 'marginalisation,' 'unbelonging' and 'prejudice' – in part as a result of lack of representation in the curriculum."<sup>16</sup> Parker continues, "those with the powers in theological education have too often neglected the theological truths from the majority world;

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<sup>15</sup> One survey of theological curriculum showed that schools within the ATS "have a long history of universalizing their message and mission based on the narrow particularity of Euro-western experience and thought traditions." The report on this data observed a *structural* assumption that meeting the pedagogical needs of white students of western European descent would meet the pedagogical needs of all students. Thus, when systematic theology curriculum is built, the usual suspects are included in course readings where so-called contextual theologies are not. See, "Diversity in Theological Education," 34-35.

<sup>16</sup> "Decolonising the Curriculum Resources."

they have pigeon-holed certain theologies as ‘contextual’ and created a hierarchy of knowledge(s), and in so doing they have failed to acknowledge that all theology is contextual.”<sup>17</sup> So-called contextual theologies from the majority world are often systematic in character, but are still in this way treated as something outside of the systematic theology sub-discipline. Such theologies are called contextual because they speak from a specific context, about a specific context, and to that specific context.

Because of this, theologies written from majority world perspectives are seldom considered with much weight in broader doctrinal discussions. While there is some truth to the contextuality of these theologies (i.e. feminist theologians write from the female perspective and theologians like James Cone write for the purpose of black liberation), any historian worth their salt could tell you that the theologians who tend to play a central role in doctrinal theology (such as theological anthropology) are no less contextual. Luther’s doctrine of justification developed in the way it did because of the problems he perceived in 15<sup>th</sup>-century ecclesial practices. Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God came about in response to various historical movements in liberal Christianity in Germany. This doesn’t negate the significance of their work for theologies developed in other contexts, and indeed we never seem to treat Barth or Luther as if their theology is *only* beneficial for their original context. It is only, it seems, non-white and non-male theologies that get relegated to this “far-off country” of contextual theology.

A good example of this was recently shared by a colleague. After teaching on Cone’s work for a class about atonement, a student asked this colleague why James Cone was relevant to atonement doctrine. Cone was, to this student, just a contextual theologian and not a serious interlocutor in systematic theologies of the atonement. Calvin, the student argued, was much more relevant because he was a *systematic* theologian, doing theology which was somehow universally applicable in a way that contextual theology isn’t. Because theologies from marginalized voices are often treated as “merely contextual,” they are rarely treated as seriously or as frequently as the voices of white and male theologians despite those theologians also speaking from and to particular contexts. As Esau McCaulley puts it, “everybody has been reading the Bible from their own locations, but [black theologians and biblical scholars] are just honest about it.”<sup>18</sup> Those who have historically dominated the spaces of systematic theology are

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<sup>17</sup> Parker, *Trust in Theological Education*, 89.

<sup>18</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 20.

not less contextual, though they are perhaps less forthright about (or less aware of) their contextuality and its influence on their theology.

The goal is not to move beyond our own contexts in doing theology. Rather, the goal is to approach theology as an inherently contextualized task and recognize how different contexts may contribute new ideas or nuances to our understanding of God, ourselves, and the universe. It is the lack of this recognition and the aversion to the contextual perspectives of others that has led to the dominance of maleness and whiteness in theological anthropology. Thinkers like Jennings therefore identify clear ways in which the white-dominated spaces of theological anthropology continue to describe a humanity “designed *for* white middle-class Christians,” built (either consciously or unconsciously) to essentialize their power and cultural values.<sup>19</sup> Because theological anthropologies predominantly written by white men have (1) ignored marginalized theological voices and (2) disregarded the role that their own white and male particularity plays in their theologizing, maleness and whiteness have become entrenched in our theological anthropologies. It is thus vital to the success of this project and to the future of theological anthropology that one incorporates these marginalized voices in constructing a theological anthropology that could make sense of particularities like race and gender. This is vitally important because these voices regularly consider such particularities in their theological reflections and they have seldom been consulted in broader discussion about human nature. However, they are not merely contextual voices. I endeavour in this thesis to treat them as true theological interlocuters whose contextual perspectives can tell us about who God is from unique and underappreciated vantage points, offering helpful correctives to the prevailing white and masculine contextual perspectives regularly offered as systematic theologies. This thesis is a systematic theology, but one which takes these interlocuters seriously.

Second, while these marginalized voices have touched on theological anthropology, many only do so in tangential ways. For instance, neither of Jennings influential volumes are about the doctrine of humanity *per se*, but about the theological imagination that has given birth to our modern conception of race and how it effects human living and existing in institutions such as higher education. Cone is concerned throughout his body of work with Christ’s liberation of black persons from white oppression. Copeland strives for an account of liberation and union with Christ which accounts for the various intersections of racial, gendered, and sexual

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<sup>19</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 12.



particularity. While this has drastic and important implications for how we think about human nature, changing how we do theological anthropology is not a central concern of these works. Yet throughout their work, there stands steady streams of thought pertaining to the human person and the need to, as Jennings puts it, “struggle for peoplehood.”<sup>20</sup> Theological understandings of human nature stand in the background of these works, even if they go unstated. Drawing on these sources may be somewhat indirect, but in a way no less systematic than, say, a PhD thesis on the theological anthropology of Rowan Williams in *Christ the Heart of Creation* or Augustine’s just war theory. I am not doing anything new, but repeating an old trick with new interlocutors.

The feminist and womanist thinkers engaged in this thesis have been more direct in rethinking the categories of theological anthropology and Christology. This is, in fact, the first place that many feminist theologians turn in critique and reformulation. But the heart of this critique is not an attempt to remove Christ from the centre of the Christian life. Rather, as Shawn M. Copeland puts it, “Jesus of Nazareth in all his marked particularity of race, gender, sex, culture, and religion, teaches us the universal meaning of being human in the world.”<sup>21</sup> Feminist Christology, at least on the whole, hopes for a recentring of Christ for all peoples. These Christologies *assume* implications for a broader account of human nature, but few turn their attention to such an account with a mind for the function and purpose of particularity more broadly. The broader nature of particularity is uniquely raised in McKirland’s work, but only as an important background consideration for her reformulation of Christological and anthropological categories. Theological anthropological assumptions lay beneath the surface of these works and certain kinds of particularity (usually gendered particularity) are operative in the formulation of these assumptions. But a robust account of the human creature could (and indeed should) be made to account for these *and other* human particularities. Certainly, there have been important accounts, such as Copeland’s, which address the intersection of gender and race, but none present an understanding of the nature of particularity more generally through the already operative examples of gender and race. So while this thesis does not purport to offer an account of race or gender *per se*, it does aim to offer an account of particularity and its role in human nature that can sponsor the Christological accounts of race and gender offered by feminist, liberationist, and post-colonial thinkers.

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<sup>20</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, II.3.

From this, I endeavour not just to construct another theological anthropology, but one which could authentically support the anthropologies implicit in thinkers like Jennings and Copeland and explicit in the work of McKirland. This grounds the third motivational and methodological feature of this thesis. The particularities of race and gender present the most salient practical and pastoral questions facing the Church today. But the way they do so as lenses for experiencing personhood are inseparable. I could offer my own arguments for why I think this is, and in fact some reasons will be given in §III, but scholars working at the intersection of race and gender are already making this connection. For instance, Juliany Gonzalez Nieves argues convincingly that the history of both theological feminism and theological complementarianism are beholden to racialized categories that largely afford and regard only white, middle-class women.<sup>22</sup> There is an important respect in which race cannot be fully understood without the lens of gender and gender cannot be understood without the lens of race. How women of colour are treated in society greatly extends what we can know about the nature of racialization in western culture, and the study of race as limited only to its effect on male individuals greatly diminishes our understanding thereof. Likewise, as Gonzalez Nieves demonstrates, the struggle of women for equality in male-dominated societies is built on racialized structures that make it impossible to understand fully apart from a racial lens. Thus, one cannot construct an account of particularity through only one lens; both must play a role.

There are of course other lenses that might play significant roles in a general account of particularity, such as neuro-diversity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. Because there is not space to do justice to all these complex issues, I will have to limit the scope of inquiry to race and gender as means of constructing an account of particularity. It is my hope that this thesis can provide the building blocks to approach these other topics in future work and in the work of wiser minds.

Who we are and what we are in relation to others is significant to how we relate to God. The aim of the thesis is not to elevate some ways of knowing God over others in an absolute sense, nor to entirely eradicate excellent work in theology done by privileged voices, but to draw attention in the world of systematic theology to underutilized perspectives of God and the human creature. Indeed, I engage many white and male theologians throughout the thesis. But their particularity seems to be already included in the many theological anthropologies on offer. Their

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<sup>22</sup> See, Gonzalez-Nieves, “When We Were Not Women.”

position in the conversation is privileged and thus already assumed. What is important about this work is that it hopes to bring in *as equals* those voices which have not been thus far privileged and to account for their perspective as the oppressed and marginalized. If the meek and powerless are closest to the heart of God, as the New Testament teaches, then theology would do well to listen to these voices. This thesis aims, then, not to represent these groups and their theological perspectives (something which I cannot do as a white man), but to learn from these perspectives and be intentionally shaped by them in critical dialogue about the nature of humanity. This project can be compared, in this sense, to Ian McFarland's *Difference and Identity*.<sup>23</sup> McFarland's monograph similarly attempts to account for the vast diversity of human particularity in constructing a theological anthropology. Despite McFarland's stated intention to better account for marginalized perspectives, however, Stephen Ray critiques McFarland's work for being noticeably devoid of minority voices save for a small number of specific sections. He writes, "both the sources and theoretical frameworks which McFarland uses to flesh out his theological anthropology emerge from and primarily serve the interest of those whose personhood is not usually called into question,"<sup>24</sup> McFarland himself admits that, "this fact constitutes a serious... weakness in the argument as a whole."<sup>25</sup> McFarland's proposal will be treated more positively in §I, but it here presents an example of both the kind of project this thesis hopes to be as well as a timely warning of how one ought best to approach such a project. One cannot simply consider particularity theologically without considering the ways that it has affected the discipline more broadly. As the conclusion of this thesis argues, diversity is essential to the theological task, and we know God more fully when we know him together across borders of difference. This argument can only be made when we are conscious of the role particularity plays in human existence and in our knowing and relating to God.

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<sup>23</sup> McFarland, *Difference and Identity*.

<sup>24</sup> Ray, "Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology, Ian A. McFarland," 179.

<sup>25</sup> McFarland, "Response to Stephen G. Ray, Jr.," 182.

# I

## The Humanity of Jesus Christ

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*[God's] philosophy is nothing more nor less than one continued attempt to evade this very obvious truth. He aims at a contradiction. Things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another. This impossibility He calls Love.<sup>1</sup>*

- C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 70-71.

Theologians have long sought to understand what it means to be human. While this thesis aims primarily at developing an account of human particularity, it does so with hopes of better accounting for the nature of humanity as a vastly diverse species. Thus, it seeks to define humanity in such a way that can make sense of our particularity, answering both what particularity is and for what purpose (if any) humanity is created with such particularities. But to do this, so that we might confront the particularity problem head on, we must locate particularity and its role in human nature. The particularity problem, to summarize the introduction to this thesis, is the problem that our having distinctive features seems to pose to the universality of Christ's salvific work. If Christ has particular features that are not common to every human being, and if indeed all human beings are similarly particular, the idea that Christ can save and transform our humanity because he is like us in every way appears to come apart. How can a male saviour save women? How can a Palestinian-Jew save Gentiles? Being able to answer these questions in the affirmative (and being able to defend that affirmation despite its challenges), is essential to fully understanding the nature of humanity.

This is especially, though not exclusively, a problem for Christological anthropology, which emphasizes Christ's becoming human as the primary lens through which we ought to understand human nature. Marc Cortez describes Christological anthropology in the following way: "in its most basic form, the most fundamental intuition of a christological anthropology is that beliefs about the human person (anthropology) must be warranted in some way by beliefs about Jesus (christological)."<sup>2</sup> This approach to theological anthropology intuits that, since Christ is both God and human, he reveals perfectly what it is to image God in a human way. Moreover, he lives a *sinless* human life. He thus exemplifies what humanity is *supposed* to be like. As T. F. Torrance puts it, in the incarnation "atoning reconciliation has achieved its end in the new creation in which God and man are brought into such communion with one another that the relations of man with God in being and knowing are healed and fully established."<sup>3</sup> What Torrance means by this kind of communion is something very similar to Eleanor Stump's account of union with God: in this union persons are mutually close and second-personally share

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<sup>2</sup> Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 233.

attention to one another, desiring one another's good and desiring to be with one another.<sup>4</sup> While there is much more that can (and will) be said about the nature of this union and communion, this is a sufficient definition to begin thinking about what it is that happens to humanity in the union between God and humanity established in Christ. This transforming act of union between God and humanity in Christ's own person reveals not only what humanity is intended to become, but what humanity was essentially created to be: a species in close, personal relation with God.

The particularity problem is especially a problem for Christological anthropology because of Christ's particularity. Christ has a distinct body from everyone else, is male, is a first-century Palestinian-Jew, and is a Nazarene from Galilee. Each of these particularities are examples of how Christ is not "like each of us in every way," thus casting doubt on whether he can save us in our entirety as beings who each have our own unique set of particularities. If the particularity problem is not confronted at the Christological level, the foundational assumptions of Christological anthropology are dead on arrival. Christ's humanity cannot, it seems, be universal if it is in fact unlike many of ours in several ways.

To confront this problem, this part of the thesis begins by establishing reasons for thinking that Christological anthropology is true. Limits of space prohibit a full argument on behalf of Christological anthropology, but the reasons given will be sufficient to proceed on that basis. In arguing for a Christological anthropology, I develop my own account in conversation with both Christological anthropologists and other widely-accepted approaches to theological anthropology. The aim is to account for enough theological data about the human creature to identify (1) how particularity functions in a Christologically-determined view of human nature and (2) precisely what problems need to be addressed in Christological anthropology to account for that function. Once the role of particularity and the problems it poses have been identified in greater detail in our model, I lay out some of the potential answers to the particularity problem already on offer. These answers are usually aimed at a specific particularity, typically race or gender, and are helpful for clarifying the stakes at hand in establishing what particularity is more generally and how it ought to function. After assessing these answers and demonstrating the costs that come with them, I conclude that the metaphysical categories with which we approach the problem of particularity require some revision. This revision will begin in §II.

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<sup>4</sup> Stump, *Atonement*, 143.

## §1

**What Are Human Beings?**

Scripture and theology are rife with data about the human creature. Much of this data, however, has been interpreted primarily through the perspectives of old white men (the male, pale, and stale) without critical assessment of how those lenses effect the data and its organization. This data cannot, therefore, be drawn upon uncritically. Jennings notes the blindness of these accounts to their own representation of “an inverted, distorted vision of creation that reduced theological anthropology to commodified bodies. In this inversion, whiteness replaced the earth as the signifier of identities.”<sup>5</sup> Theology has historically been dominated by these lenses, and our uncritical attitude towards the theological anthropologies that they produce has left their distortions unimpeded in our theological imagination. Because of this, racial imagination cannot be so easily picked apart from the ways that theologians have historically constructed views of the human creature. The same, presumably, goes for any privileged particularity and its influence on theological imagination. I raise this concern not to dismiss these previous views out of hand, but to set the stage for reframing and reconsidering them. I thus lay out much of what these views have to offer as means of presenting the available theological data in an open-handed way. This will give us something to critique and reframe from a Christological and exegetical perspective with a mind for the role of particularity. Moreover, laying out the available data offers the added benefit of providing reasons for proceeding on such a Christological basis.

***§1.1 Trajectories in Theological Anthropology***

Theological anthropology is not the only way to study the human creature. Biologists, sociologists, and psychologists all study humanity in various respects. What sets theological anthropology apart is its unique concern with questions of meaning and purposefulness grounded in our creation by God.<sup>6</sup> Theological anthropology, then, is concerned with questions about the relationship of the human creature to the creator, how this relationship informs human purpose, and how that purpose ought to define human life. This can, and often does, include questions about our biological features and psychological capacities, but this is typically done in a way that

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<sup>5</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 2-3.

emphasizes the role that these features and capacities play in the broader purpose for which humanity was created.

Theological anthropology has been guided by several key intuitions about the *theological* nature of the human creature. For one, human creatures seem to be unique among other created things.<sup>7</sup> No other creature is given its own day of creation nor said to be created in God's image. While the content of this uniqueness is debated, there seems to be a consistent intuition that human animals are *theologically* distinct from the rest of creation.

Despite this uniqueness, however, the human creature is still a creature and part of the created order. Theological anthropology, at its best, resists the temptation to extrapolate from our uniqueness to some ontological status above the rest of creation, as if we ourselves were creators and not humble creatures. Karl Barth points to "the infinite qualitative distinction" between God and creation as a means of qualifying the relationship between humanity and the divine.<sup>8</sup> Human beings, like everything else in creation, depend absolutely on the Creator. In whatever respect we think human beings are distinct from the rest of the created order, we ought to maintain also our creaturely humility in common with the created order.

Finally, the humility of our creatureliness points to our meaning and purpose being found in our creaturely relationship to the divine. As Cortez puts it, "the human person is always-already defined and determined by his relationship to God."<sup>9</sup> Who and what we are in relation to God, our uniqueness, and our commonality with the rest of the created order all play some role in defining and determining the theological meaning of human nature.

There are many competing theological anthropologies on offer, each claiming to best explain what humanity means and what purpose our species serves in God's creative ordering of the *cosmos*. Rather than taxonomizing the numerous accounts, I will instead note three significant trajectories in theological anthropology. What is meant by "trajectory" here is a concept or aspect of theological anthropology that is found consistently throughout the history of the sub-discipline and which may inform or guide one's approach to the topic. These trajectories are not mutually exclusive, but instead mark different emphases and lenses through which the theological topic of being human has commonly been approached. Neither are these trajectories

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<sup>7</sup> Berkouwer, *Man*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 533.

<sup>9</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 5.



full-fledged accounts of the human creature; the same trajectory can be used in competing ways between two different accounts. Because these trajectories do not entail a specific view of theological anthropology on their own, they are helpful for mapping the accounts on offer and, for our purposes, the proposed role of Christology in theological anthropology.

### §1.1a *The Image of God*

Perhaps the most common trajectory found in the theological study of the human creature is our status as creatures who are made in the image of God. In several places throughout the Christian scriptures, humanity is referred to as created in the image of God or God's likeness (Gen 1:26-27; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). This is taken to mean that humanity is created to reflect some aspect or feature of God's nature in a creaturely way. Originating in the Hebrew Bible, the phrase used (צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים) is derived from the Ancient Near Eastern context of Israel. It was common at the time for rulers, often considered to be divine beings themselves, to build statues of themselves called images. The images would be set up at the borders of the ruler's lands to the end that all entering might know the character, wealth, and strength of that ruler or perhaps to signify that ruler's dominion over that land.<sup>10</sup> Such images would use materials, form, and artistic imagery to reflect these characteristics. The use of gold and adornments might signify a ruler's wealth, while the use of bronze or the depiction of the ruler bearing a weapon might symbolize their military prowess. The content of human imagedness, by contrast, is far less clear and remains an on-going debate. There is not universal agreement regarding which features of humanity reflect divinity nor to what those features refer. Colin Gunton notes variety in accounts of human imagedness: "the tradition tended to see our imagedness to consist in the possession of certain faculties," where in more recent approaches, "the stress is on the ontology of personhood," and still others emphasize the *telos* of humanity "to be called to realise a certain destiny."<sup>11</sup> Despite this variety, what is generally agreed upon is that humanity's creation in the image of God means that we are defined by our reflection of God's nature. This trajectory makes sense of the above intuitions about theological anthropology in two key ways. First, the creation of humanity in the image of God is taken to be the relationship between God and humanity that defines our meaning and purpose. Second, this relationship is unique to humanity, as no other

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<sup>10</sup> Bray, "Image of God," 267.

<sup>11</sup> Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology, and Anthropology," 61.

creature is said to image God in the same way or be created in God's image. As Sameer Yadav puts it, "God creates humanity for the intended purpose of *imaging* God...divine image-bearing [is] a distinctively divine form of loving relationship that forms the paradigm of conscious reciprocal interactive relationship between God and humans."<sup>12</sup> Whatever the content of the image in humanity is, it uniquely defines human nature in relationship to the divine nature.

Debates about the content of the image revolve around whether it consists in a particular faculty, such as rationality, a particular function, like rulership over creation, our status as persons, or a specific purpose we have like worshipping God. While there is not space in this thesis to resolve the debate on the grounds of imaging, it should be reiterated that "image" has been one of the primary theological ways that non-white and non-male persons have been historically excluded from the full affirmation of human dignity and flourishing, to say nothing of the exclusion of non-neurotypical persons.<sup>13</sup> McCaulley notes how biblical interpretation of the image of God and theological anthropology have been used historically to "concoct a theory of the subhumanity of Africans to justify their mistreatment."<sup>14</sup> The ascription of some observed faculty or feature as being the image of God in humanity always bears the danger of excluding some who don't possess that faculty or feature (or possess it to a lesser extent) from the image in our thinking about humanity, leading to a denial of dignity and value in such persons.<sup>15</sup> If this trajectory is to be of help, it must find a way to avoid this concern and authentically include the vast diversity found in human particularity.

### *§1.1b The Essence of the Human Creature*

Another trajectory commonly found in the Christian doctrine of humanity focuses on the metaphysics of human nature. Theologians, especially those interested in metaphysics, often seek to understand the ontology of the human creature. What is it, this trajectory asks, that makes a particular being "human" as opposed to something else? This is usually done by identifying those properties which are essential to human nature, that is, those properties which all humans have and apart from which a being fails to be identified as human.<sup>16</sup> The property or set of

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<sup>12</sup> Yadav, "The Hidden Love of God and the Imaging Defense," 73.

<sup>13</sup> Swinton, "The Importance of Being a Creature," 522-523.

<sup>14</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 19. See also, Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 192-193; Clarke, *Women in the Early Church*, 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> See, Leidenhag, "Autism, Doxology, and the Nature of Christian Worship."

<sup>16</sup> See, Ishii, Atkins, and Atkins, "Essential vs. Accidental Properties."

properties identified with human nature varies greatly depending on the commitments of the account in question. Some have argued that rationality is the essential property of human nature, while others have argued that it is our consciousness of God, others, or even ourselves. Still others argue that it is our having bodies and souls that makes us decisively and uniquely human. Another approach has been to argue that the essential properties of human nature include a specific *telos* or function, such as the function of humanity as stewards over creation. What is noteworthy for our purposes is less about which property or properties have been proffered as essential to human nature, but rather that the property or properties identified as essential to human nature are typically associated with the *imago Dei*; what is essential to being human is described in terms of what it does or does not reflect about the divine nature. If a particular theological anthropology emphasizes the property of rationality as the essential property of the human creature, it would hold that human beings are essentially rational because they reflect the perfect rationality of God. Those properties of human nature which are distinct from the properties of divine nature, such as having physical bodies, are likewise described in comparison to the divine nature as a means of clarifying this unique relationship (e.g. divine beings do not have bodies, human beings do). In a similar fashion, some properties are used comparatively and contrastively with other creatures to note our similarity with and distinction from other kinds of created things.

This trajectory and its focus on the metaphysics of human nature has had far reaching and telling implications for theological anthropology, including considerations of what properties are essential to human nature, how a particular human being relates to the essential property or set of properties that makes one human,<sup>17</sup> whether a being can lose or gain a human nature, and pastoral concerns about who is included (or excluded) from our definitions of human nature. More will be said on this particular trajectory and how it has shaped theological understandings of particularity in human nature in §II, but for now it will be sufficient to note how these important questions about what makes us human have shaped theological anthropology.

This trajectory bears similar dangers to that of the imaging motif. Whatever we might point to as being the essential properties of humanity, we ought to recognize how this has historically centred white and male individuals as the exemplars of these properties. Jennings, for instance, observes, “white bodies, in print media, in electronic visual media, are presented as the

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<sup>17</sup> See, Arcadi, “Kryptic or Cryptic?,” 232-233.

bearers of humanity, the interpreters of human capacities and possibilities. White bodies function as the archetype of humanity, and all other bodies are drawn into an unrelenting comparison.”<sup>18</sup> It is far too often the case that a specific capacity or function is named “essential” without due consideration for how that conclusion is reached. This lack of consideration leaves us blind to how our particularity can shape both what we deem as essential to human nature and how we understand said property or properties. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, figures like Augustine have understood human beings to be essentially rational, going on to argue that because women are less rational than men, they are reliant on men for their participation in the image of God. Augustine’s privileged male perspective operating within a male dominated society shaped both what he valued as essential to humanity (rationality) and how he saw that value functioning in women (women are less rational than men). Particularity shapes our understanding of what is essential to human nature; to do theological anthropology without regard for this role played by particularity is to do a great disservice to our theologizing about the human creature.

While the dangers of this particular trajectory persist in the task of theological anthropology, this trajectory can also be useful in combatting said dangers. By laying bare what one takes to be essential to human nature and where those commitments come from, it becomes more difficult to hide what one values in human nature when those values and emphases are named in essentialist terms. If we inquire into the metaphysics of human nature with a mind for the role of particularity, we will quickly note as with the example of Augustine above, where we are blind to our own biases. I will raise further considerations about metaphysics and the subsequent implications for particularity in §II. For our purposes in §I, what should be noted is that the ontology of human nature centres on what we take to be essential to being human. There is something, nature, that grounds our being human and defines what it means to be human for all such creatures.

### *§1.1c Rulers and Royal Priests*

One motif which has recently come under fire, but still remains an influential trajectory in theological anthropologies, is the idea that humanity is set apart from other creatures in its function as rulers over the created order. This trajectory attempts to take seriously both the

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<sup>18</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 243.

uniqueness and createdness of the human creature by emphasizing the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. This view purports that humanity acts as rulers over the rest of the created order, drawing on Adam's naming of the animals and the divine command to work the ground in Genesis 1 and 2. This view often begins with the *imago Dei* trajectory, drawing on the Genesis creation accounts to argue that rulership is the primary aspect of God's nature which humanity mirrors or reflects.<sup>19</sup> While contested, many exegetes like Bill Arnold continue to argue that in Genesis 1 and 2, the statements about humanity being created in the image of God are linguistically linked with God's dominion over creation and human activity in, for instance, naming animals and tending to the Garden of Eden.<sup>20</sup> God is the lord over all his creation, and humanity participates or imitates that lordship by exercising a derivative authority over God's creation. As Jennings puts it, "God in Christ allows humans to participate in his life, and within that participation there exists a transferability to his authority to humans."<sup>21</sup> In this way, we are stewards; we do not exercise our own authority but reflect and represent God's authority on his behalf. Because human rule over creation is meant to reflect God's lordship over creation, and particularly over humanity, what one thinks human rule of creation looks like says a great deal about what one thinks divine rulership is like.<sup>22</sup> If we think God is caring and loving towards humanity, our stewardship over creation should look similar. Likewise, if we think that God rules humanity primarily for the purpose of his own worship and praise, we will likely think that humanity is meant to orient creation towards our own flourishing.

As stated, this is a contentious trajectory. The primary reason for this is that such accounts commonly elevate humanity over the rest of creation, resulting in a reduction of creation to, as David Clough puts it, the categories of "useful, pernicious, and superfluous" relative to the needs and desires of humanity.<sup>23</sup> There are two problems raised by this elevation of human status. First, humanity takes on an almost divine role over creation. If not carefully parsed in relation to divine lordship over creation, we make ourselves out to be gods or demi-gods relative to the created order. In fact, some have interpreted this move as parallel to Adam's and Eve's decision to take from the tree and become like gods themselves. Second, this view has

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<sup>19</sup> Yadav, "The Hidden Love of God and the Imaging Defense," 74.

<sup>20</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 43-48.

<sup>21</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> See as examples among Church Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, "Commentary on Genesis," 398; Gregory of Nyssa, "The Second Book Against Enoimius," II.222-224; Augustine, "Sermones," 43.3.

<sup>23</sup> Clough, *On Animals* vol. 1, 63.

given birth to harmful conceptions about the purpose of creation. Clough and others like him note how such doctrines of creation (and humanity's rule over it) have been used historically to justify the abuse of animals in food production, the textile industry, medical research, and land treatment.<sup>24</sup> It is as if the particularity of humanity among other creatures is placed into a hierarchy over other created things in a way that mirrors the centrality of the white and masculine lenses of theological anthropology noted above. When theological anthropology operates under this emphasis on human uniqueness as rulership, it falls prey to the same blindness to particularity as the previous trajectories.

One interesting development in this trajectory is to move from the language of rule to the language of priests while making similar exegetical moves.<sup>25</sup> This is done to avoid some of the problems caused by placing humanity in a hierarchal status over the rest of creation by instead characterizing the relationship between creation and humanity as one of priesthood. In this function, humanity is responsible for caring for creation's flourishing independent of human needs and orienting creation towards God in worship, reflecting Christ's High Priestly role towards humanity. While this solution does not address the problem of particularity, it does move the conversation in a direction that can maintain the unique place of the human creature in the cosmos without elevating humanity beyond its proper creatureliness. Priesthood, as an important category for understanding the role of particularity in human nature, will be further explored in §II.

### ***§1.2 Towards a Christological Approach to Human Nature***

Another approach or emphasis in theological anthropology is Christological anthropology. There are several *prima facie* reasons we might take Christology, and specifically Christ's humanity, to be the primary lens through which we understand human nature theologically. Throughout the New Testament, Christ is attested as being the one in whom we find our meaning and being as human creatures. Christ is the visible Image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and it is in being conformed to his Image that we flourish as human beings (Col 3:9-10). Further arguments draw on Christ's role as the High Priest of humanity, representing humanity to God and God to humanity as our intercessor (Heb 2:14-18). Cortez writes, "few

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<sup>24</sup> See, Clough, *On Animals* vol. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Arcadi, "*Homo Adorans*," 7; McKirland, "Image of God and Divine Presence."

theologians would deny that Jesus is central to an adequate understanding of the *imago Dei*. The New Testament declares that Jesus alone is the image of God...and all other humans only participate in the image insofar as they are restored to the likeness of Jesus.”<sup>26</sup> Participation here is understood to be a relationship wherein the participant partakes of some aspect or feature of the life of another; we participate in Christ to receive the salvific aspects of his person and work, we participate in the life of God to be children of God, and so on. Human participation in Christ is an important theme in the New Testament whereby our relationship to Christ is the mode by which Christ saves and heals humanity in his own incarnate life; he accomplishes a reconciled and redeemed human life and we partake in it as if it were our own. Crucial to participation in the New Testament, however, is that such things are not our own and we continue to depend on our participation in Christ for our New Humanity. Scripture thus seems to point to Christ as at least an important (if not the fundamental) lens for understanding human nature. To chart a way forward, I will simply outline some underlying theological reasons for this conviction.

At the heart of this trajectory is the conviction that humanity was created to reflect God’s nature in our own. Before we can leap to what it is in God’s nature that we think we reflect in the *imago Dei*, we ought to first recognize the apparent absurdity of this claim, especially as we have paired it above with the intuition that humanity is infinitely qualitatively distinct from the divine. McFarland draws our attention to this problem as the starting point for thinking about Christology. He writes, “the defining characteristics of created goodness seem to pose an impermeable barrier to genuine, mutual communion between Creator and creature. For although the Creator sustains the creature in its spatial and temporal particularity—as just *this* being, existing uniquely and unsubstitutably in a given time and place—this creative work seems unavoidably hidden.”<sup>27</sup> If what we are as human creatures is principally defined by our relationship to God and by our reflecting some key characteristic(s) of God, the supreme otherness of God seems to make humanity unknowable. On the one hand, to know God, we would need to be God, which we are not. On the other hand, for God to communicate what he is like to us in a way that we would understand, he would need to communicate in a human way. He would need to communicate not only what God is like, but exactly how we are meant to be

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<sup>26</sup> Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh*, 66.

like God in our human ways of being. Overcoming the insurmountable gulf between divinity and humanity is the first step of doing theological anthropology.

This is a problem that only Christ can solve, for only Christ is both fully divine and fully human in his single person. We thus have a God that can communicate to humanity in a human way what God is like. In the incarnation, that is in God's becoming human in Jesus Christ, "atoning reconciliation has achieved its end in the new creation in which God and man are brought into such communion with one another that the relations of man with God in being and knowing are healed and fully established."<sup>28</sup> Jesus lives out and embodies what it means to know God as a human being, precisely because he remains fully divine while being human. Christ's atoning work in becoming and being incarnate "has mediated a new covenant of universal range in which he presents us to his Father as those whom he has redeemed, sanctified, and perfected forever in himself. In other words, Jesus Christ constitutes in his own self-consecrated humanity the vicarious fulfilment of human response to God."<sup>29</sup> Christ perfectly lives out the human relationship to God that defines our meaning and purpose. Christ is not simply the best human version of the *imago Dei*, he *is* the Image itself.

If Christ *is* the Image of God, bridging this ontological barrier between the divine and human, what does the incarnation actually do to reveal the nature of humanity to us? Recalling that the essence of the human creature is usually considered in relation to the *imago Dei*, Christological anthropology is concerned with more than just Christ exemplifying a human life aligned with the divine purpose. As Gary Deddo describes it, "the ministry of Christ... involves both *revelation and reconciliation*... persons are whole and spiritual regeneration involves whole persons—mind, soul, and body."<sup>30</sup> Christ's becoming human goes beyond a revelation of what humanity is supposed to be like; Christ transforms and heals our humanity to restore it to that perfected picture of humanity which he embodies. The incarnation both reveals the content of imagedness and conforms individual human persons to that Image.

The interconnection between Christ's revelation and redemption of human nature draws us beyond the mere epistemology of human nature, our knowing of what humanity is, to its ontology, the very being of humanity. What Christ is in his humanity transforms our very being

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<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 233.

<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Deddo, "The Personal in the Onto-Relational," 150. Emphasis added.



as human creatures. Torrance connects Christ's revelation of human nature with his transformation of human ontology via an ancient distinction made about the hypostatic union. He writes, "the *anhypostasia* and *enhyposstasia* taken together tell us that the incarnation was the union of the Word of God with mankind in solidarity with all men and women; yet it was the union with one man or rather such a union with all humanity that was achieved and wrought out in and through this one man, Jesus of Bethlehem and Nazareth for all men and women."<sup>31</sup> The union of Christ's two natures does not only reveal the relationship between the divine and human, it establishes (or re-establishes) that relationship more generally. This goes beyond a mere Christological epistemology of human nature to a Christological ontology of human nature. In much the same way that the Apostle Paul describes Christ as replacing Adam as the foundation of the human race, Christ is rightly described on this view as the ontological basis for all human nature (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:20-23, 45-49). John Williamson Nevin describes it like this: "what man is to nature in this way, Christ may be said to be in some sense to man. Humanity itself is never complete, till it reaches his person...our nature reaches after a true and real union with the nature of God, as the necessary complement and consummation of its own life...The incarnation then is the proper completion of humanity."<sup>32</sup> What Christ accomplishes in his person, uniting his particular divine and human natures, effects a union of divinity and humanity more generally. For this reason, Torrance holds that "all men are upheld, whether they know it or not, in their humanity by Jesus Christ the true and proper man, upheld by the fulfilment and establishment of true humanity in him."<sup>33</sup> Said differently, what happens to Christ's human nature in his atoning work happens to every human nature.<sup>34</sup> The ontology of human nature, then, is defined by and grounded in Christ's human nature and its union with his divine nature. We will further explore this metaphysical grounding later on, but it ought to be observed at this juncture how Christology functions as the basis for understanding even the essence of the human creature.

Christ's being the visible Image of the invisible God grounds our understanding of our role (if any is to be had) as rulers or priests. Jesus Christ is the High Priest of humanity, offering up his own humanity to the Father on behalf of all humanity. So his humanity not only re-

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<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 230.

<sup>32</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 244.

<sup>33</sup> Torrance, *Time, Space, and Resurrection*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 112.

establishes the relationship of divinity to humanity, but also the relationship of humanity to divinity, exercising what Jennings calls “a profoundly creaturely belonging that performs the returning of the creature to the creator.”<sup>35</sup> Christ’s redemption of the divine-human relationship is vicarious and priestly in that what he does in his own person effects a change in the whole of humanity whom he represents. McKirland’s priestly account of the *imago Dei* centres Christ in just this way. She writes, “Jesus inaugurates a new priesthood, one open to all who participate in his life...the primary way of understanding what it means to be human is typified in the person of Jesus Christ, the one who embodies the divine presence and who gives humankind access to this presence.”<sup>36</sup> McKirland’s argument draws on Christology precisely to demonstrate that particularity (in this case gendered particularity) is not placed into a hierarchy by this function.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, a Christological account of the royal priesthood seems not to place humanity in an ontological hierarchy over creation, but instead makes humanity a partner with creation much like Christ descends to become human and partner with us.<sup>38</sup> A key function, then, of humanity as it is in Jesus Christ is the role it plays in making God present to all of creation and a participation in Christ’s reconciling of all things to himself (Col 1:20). Something about human nature is bound up in this function and the belonging that comes with it.

To summarize, there are many important reasons to approach theological anthropology Christologically. First, Christology seems to unite the aforementioned trajectories quite well. Christ *is* the *Imago Dei* and the ontological ground for human being, defining and embodying our functions and features such as royal priesthood. Moreover, he seems to fulfil these trajectories in a way that makes the incarnation essential to understanding them properly. Christological anthropology need not compete with these trajectories, but in fact can include all of them and their concerns in key ways. This is important, as Christological anthropology can sometimes come under the accusation of slipping into Christo-monist anthropology, reducing everything we can say about the human creature to Christological claims. But this is not the same as *warranting* all our *theological* claims about the human creature with Christological ones. “Christological” is a modification of “theological” and not all accounts of anthropology. What Christ specifically and uniquely reveals about humanity is what humanity *is supposed to be like*.

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<sup>35</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> McKirland, “Image of God and Divine Presence,” II ch 15.

<sup>37</sup> McKirland, “Image of God and Divine Presence,” II ch 15

<sup>38</sup> See, Everhart, “Communion and Creation.”

Thus, all other *theological* claims to knowledge of the human creature are in some way accountable to Christ's revelation of human *telos*; we may know what we are like, but we cannot know apart from Christ how those various things we know about ourselves are fulfilled eschatologically. Thus, these other trajectories can be helpful for understanding the theological meaning of the human creature when united under the guiding principle of Christology.

Second, Christology seems to have the potential to address several of the issues raised with these trajectories and how they have been used historically. Christ as the *imago Dei* decenters majority voices as archetypical representatives of human nature to which all others are compared and conformed. Jennings makes this move, comparing white-centric Christologies to adoptionism:

the adoptionist mode of thought found it easy to conceive of a human being whose life announced divine approval, divine presence, and divine election. God claimed this human being as special, unique among the creatures, and made him divine...Adoptionism in this regard is a way to make sense of divine presence, divine immanence without suggesting a genuine historic entrance of the divine into space, time, and body. Adoptionist thinking in this way does not disrupt the normal patterns of human existence but finds those patterns possibilities of holiness, transcendence, and divine approval.<sup>39</sup>

Jennings' criticism points towards the reality of the incarnation, the fullness of both God and humanity in Christ, as the basis for knowing our humanity in a way that challenges the blindspots created by particularity. Christ is not simply the best of humanity, in virtue of which he is divinized or adopted to some ontological status over the rest of humanity. Christ is divine and assumes the fullness of what it means to be human. He becomes one of us, rather than making one or some of us to be above the others. Likewise, grounding the essence of humanity in Christ allows Christ to tell us what it means to be human rather than us ascribing what we value to the nature that he assumes. Finally, as McKirland demonstrates, Christ's fulfillment of our priestly function calls us to join in his priestly work in a way that does not collapse into hierarchy. Christ joins with us and calls us to join with creation in worship of God rather than

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<sup>39</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 166.

elevating ourselves over it. This does not solve every problem, but it points towards Christ as the hope for a solution to the particularity problem. In Christ God dwells among us *as a particular being*. His mediation of the divine to humanity is accomplished in and with his particularity. Christ's mediatory ministry is incomprehensible apart from his particularity. As Torrance writes, "we should seek to understand Christ within the actual matrix of interrelations from which he sprang as Son of David and Son of Mary, that is, in terms of his intimate bond with Israel in this covenant relationship with God throughout history."<sup>40</sup> This indicates the possibility of a unified account of human nature that has particularities, promising a way forward past the particularity problem. Copeland puts it like this:

Jesus of Nazareth in all his marked particularity of race, gender, sex, culture, and religion, teaches us the universal meaning of being human in the world. In Jesus, God critiques any imperial or ecclesiastical practice of body exclusion and control, sorrows at our obstinacy, and calls us all unceasingly to new practices of body inclusion and liberation. In Jesus, God manifests an eros for us as we are in our marked particularity of race, gender, sex, sexuality, culture.<sup>41</sup>

Christ reveals to us a particularized humanity that defines and determines universally what it means to be human. However, it also seems that Christ's having particularity is where the tension between a universal account of human nature and the existence and importance of human particularity resides. It is thus by analysing humanity *as it is in Christ* that we can begin to understand particularity's role in human nature.

### **§1.3 *The Trinity, Personhood, and Being: The Quest for Human Telos***

So what is it that Christ reveals us to be? To answer this Christologically, we must ask a closely-related question: what does Christ reveal God to be, so that we might know how we are to reflect the divine image in our human ways of being? If we are to follow our intuitions about theological anthropology, we must begin here in Christ's unique revelation the nature of God.

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<sup>40</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, II.3.

Perhaps the most obvious candidate for the content of Christ's revelation about God is that God is Trinity. Deddo writes, "giving full consideration to the revelation that took place through the personal presence of Jesus and his self-interpretation leads to the discovery of the ultimate source of what is truly personal, namely, the Persons of the Trinity."<sup>42</sup> While some have argued that the Hebrew Bible offers hints about the triunity of God (distinct acts of the Spirit in creation, the plurality of God's self-reference in deliberation), it is not clear that God was understood at the time as being triune. It is not until the divine Logos becomes human, revealing himself to be the Son of the Father who will send the Spirit, that we get an explicit revelation of God as Trinity. At best, we might ascribe to these Hebraic hints the status of hindsight; looking back on them from our current Christological perspective allows us to say "ah ha! God was always Trinity!" There is certainly more that could be explored here, but it lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Relevant to our purposes is that, as Thomas McCall writes, "for Christians to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity at all is on the basis of God's revelation in Jesus Christ."<sup>43</sup>

This seems to be a good starting place for thinking about who God is fundamentally and what it is that humanity is to reflect in the divine nature for a number of reasons. First, as argued above, theological anthropologies that argue from the *imago Dei* tend to take what is fundamental about God to be that which humanity reflects in creation.<sup>44</sup> Given the ontological basis of human nature in the divine nature, what is fundamental about our reflection of God should be what is fundamental about God. Second, we can take the revelation of God as Trinity to be fundamental because it is the thing about God which is uniquely revealed in Christ. If Christ is the fullness of God's revelation and the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures, then what it is that Christ reveals about the divine nature ought to be associated with the fullness or completeness of God's self-revelation to humanity. For this reason, Torrance argues that "the doctrine of the Trinity belongs to the very groundwork of knowledge of God from the very start."<sup>45</sup> Torrance is fond of referring to the Trinity as "the ground and grammar of theology;" all our theologizing must begin with the revealed nature of God as Trinity. Third, emphasizing God as Trinity appears at face value to already be relevant to the broader purpose of this thesis: the doctrine of the Trinity introduces particularity into our understanding of the being of God. While

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<sup>42</sup> Deddo, "The Personal in the Onto-Relational Theology of T. F. Torrance," 145.

<sup>43</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 231.

<sup>44</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 226.

<sup>45</sup> Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 89.

the nature, extent, and meaning of this particularity is highly debated, some level of distinctiveness between the so-called “persons” of the Trinity is generally recognized. If we are to authentically include diversity and particularity in human nature, we must ground that in our reflection of the divine nature.

We ought not to step too quickly into this move, presuming that divine particularity somehow justifies any and all particularity in humanity. Karen Kilby points out how poorly this can be done: “projection, then, is particularly problematic in at least some social theories of the Trinity because what is projected onto God is immediately reflected back onto the world, and this reverse projection is said to be what is important about the doctrine.”<sup>46</sup> As demonstrated above, theological anthropology is often too quick to value features observed in our own humanity as important, project these onto God, and then dehumanize others who are different from us. Starting with God’s own particularity *ad intra* is thus essential to any account of particularity we can offer if all of humanity is to be included in the image of God. McCall warns, “it is wrong to allow other concerns—however legitimate and worthy in their own right—to dominate and dictate our doctrine of the Trinity,” but nevertheless maintains that there must be “some connection with our understanding of human relationships—even if that understanding needs to be corrected.”<sup>47</sup> Understanding the Trinity well at the outset, as it is revealed in Christ, can address many of the concerns with how theological anthropology has been done historically.

At the heart of Christ’s revelation of God as Trinity is the realization that “God is not ‘some abstract impersonal essence, but *dynamic personal being*, for God is who he is in the Act of his revelation, and his Act is what it is in his Being.’ The dynamic personal being of God acting for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ makes known God’s innermost being.”<sup>48</sup> There is something about the persons of the Trinity, their distinctiveness and their relatedness to one another, that defines God as Trinity. McCall, in analyzing the witness of scripture, concludes that the “distinctiveness of the divine persons...seems to be demanded by [the New Testament] witness. After all, it is only the Son who is baptized at the Jordan River, and it is the voice of the Father that is heard in the words ‘this is my beloved Son, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased.’ Only the Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism.”<sup>49</sup> This distinctiveness is often

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<sup>46</sup> Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 442.

<sup>47</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 226.

<sup>48</sup> Morrison, *T. F. Torrance in Plain English*, 116.

<sup>49</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 88.

thought to be in competition with the unity of the Trinitarian God that constitutes the monotheism of Judeo-Christian religion. This has commonly been called the threeness-oneness problem, which is a version of the philosophical problem of the one and the many.

McCall proposes a clever solution to this conundrum in the early chapters of his monograph on the Trinity. He assesses the various accounts of monotheism and the minimal commitments which ought to be placed on monotheism from the witness of scripture and historical condemnations of heretical views like modalism and polytheism. By clarifying what is and is not entailed by monotheism, McCall can clarify how the distinctiveness of the persons fits into the unity of God. From this, he offers the following desiderata:

- (1) A version of monotheism must be espoused which is consistent with the Second Temple monotheism of the New Testament authors.
- (2) Monotheism cannot rule out real distinctions between the divine persons or the attribution of a normal usage of “person” to Father, Son, and Spirit.
- (3) Father, Son, and Spirit are *homoousios*, being of one being with one another.
- (4) The strongest possible account of unity and oneness must be held which allows for both fullness of divinity of all persons and the distinction of persons.<sup>50</sup>

For McCall, these desiderata rule out ontological or necessary subordination in the Trinity, accounts of oneness that rely on merely collective or social unity, Trinitarian models that deny real distinction among the persons, and, important for our purposes, a rejection of the term “person” when applied to Father, Son, or Spirit in its normal usage.

Using “person” in this way holds the key to connecting God’s divine being with human imaging. In critical engagement with John Zizioulas, McCall argues that “to be a person is to be in relation to other persons.”<sup>51</sup> So what is personal about God is the relatedness of Father, Son, and Spirit to one another and, in Christ, to humanity and the rest of creation. “Person” becomes a fundamental category of our describing God’s being. At the foundation of our understanding of who God is, God is three persons in ontological unity (and not simply social unity). In other words, these three persons are not just three folk who get along really well; they are a single being. McCall argues that God is essentially a communion of the three, such that “the divine

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<sup>50</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 86.

<sup>51</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 190.

substance is the communion of holy love shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...communion is an ontological category.”<sup>52</sup> But what comes first, or perhaps better said, what is more fundamental: the unity (communion) or the plurality (personhood) of God? For McCall, “persons and communion come together; the communion is the communion of *persons* in relation, and the identity of the persons is found only in the communion...a son is just that only in relation to a father and a father is just that only in relation to a son.”<sup>53</sup> The loving and self-giving relations between the persons of the Trinity, and indeed their distinctive personhood in absolute ontological unity, is a brute fact of God’s nature. What God *is*, what Christ reveals God to be, is a communion of persons in loving relation to one another.

If Christ reveals God to be essentially a communion of persons, how does Christ reflect this as the *Imago Dei*? How, in other words, is human ontology reflective of the divine ontology? The claim that God is three persons comes with a metaphysical claim of identity. As Zizioulas argues, “the assertion of personal identity, the reduction of the question ‘Who am I?’ to the simple form of the ‘I am who I am’...is an assertion implied in the very question of personal identity. Personhood, in other words, has the claim of absolute being, that is, a metaphysical claim, built into it.”<sup>54</sup> If ontology is the answer to the question of what we are, then identity is the answer to the question of who we are, and for Zizioulas these answers are inextricably bound together in what it means for humans to be persons. Naomi Zack helpfully defines identity along these lines: identity “is used to mean both subjective experience and shared group membership that includes self-image...identity is that about an individual that he or she reflects on, accepts, and develops in the self” while also being “what others...use to distinguish that individual from others.”<sup>55</sup> That our being as human creatures is rooted in some fashion in our relation to the divine implies that we are similarly relational beings, being both identifiable selves and selves identified in relation to others. To be human is to be a person in a fashion reflective of divine personhood.

But what does our reflection of personhood include? For one, it seems to include the distinctiveness of identity. McFarland writes, “in the New Testament arguably no title is more central to the characterization of Jesus’ divinity than ‘Son,’ which in large part is why it came to

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<sup>52</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 193.

<sup>53</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 213.

<sup>54</sup> Zizioulas, “On Being a Person,” 33.

<sup>55</sup> Zack, *Thinking About Race*, 67.



be his particular designation in the later formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>56</sup> Any metaphysical claims we can make about the relation between Father, Son, and Spirit or their personhood are derived from the distinctiveness of their identities. Said another way, “self and identity share with personhood the facts of unity, singularity, differentiation from others, and specificity.”<sup>57</sup> As observed earlier, the distinctiveness of divine identities relies on the relation between the persons. The Son is only Son because he is Son of the Father. Humanity, then, is created as persons in relation to other persons. We are fundamentally relational beings in a way that constitutes our personhood. I have defended this idea elsewhere,<sup>58</sup> but for our purposes it is sufficient to observe that the essence of humanity is that we are personal beings who relate to other personal beings.

I began this inquiry into the nature of humanity by defining the *theological* version of that inquiry by its quest for meaning and purpose in relation to God. Personhood is not unique to this quest; psychologists, sociologists, cognitive scientists, philosophers, and others explore all kinds of questions related to identity, self-conception, and human social relationships. But what sets the theological quest for personhood apart is that it seeks a particular aspect of personhood: for what purpose does God gift humanity with a personhood like his own? This question cannot be answered by the aforementioned fields (at least not on their own). This is important to note as humanity currently lives under the effects of the Fall. We cannot, therefore, reify all human relationships to the status of essential without taking on a distorted and broken ontology of human nature. For instance, it is obviously outside of God’s creative purposes for a human person to relate abusively to their child. This means that we cannot define humanity by our observations of human relationship only precisely because we lack the categories to pick apart what is part of our purpose and what is a sinful distortion of that purpose. This especially becomes dangerous when talking about particularity and its relation to human nature. Rather, we ought to look to Christ’s *fulfilment* of human nature as revealing what we were created to be, to the *telos* of human nature as Christ embodies it. What we were created to be can tell us how we are broken by telling us what it is that we fail to live up to in our distorted ways of relating. This is something that we cannot do in our own reflection on humanity in its fallen state, but only

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<sup>56</sup> McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh*, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Baumeister, “Emergence of Personhood,” 69.

<sup>58</sup> Everhart, “The One vs. the Many.”

something that can be revealed to us in Christ's human embodiment of imaging God. We must turn to Christ's revelation of what it means to reflect divine personhood in our own human personhood if we are to understand what humanity is intended to be. It is in the Christological *telos* of humanity that the intended role of particularity in human nature will be found.

## §2

### **Humanity for Communion in Christ**

The question, "what does Christ reveal humanity to be?" is ultimately answered by the question, "to what does Christ restore humanity?". The imposition of the Fall on the created order distorts our vision of humanity's purpose in creation. It is only in looking to Christ's embodied restoration of our *telos* that we may understand what we were initially created for. Where other accounts of theological anthropology begin in places like Genesis, mining the biblical data for facts about the creation of humanity in relation to God, I instead begin with Christ's atoning work because it is only in Christ's restoration of humanity to its original purpose that we can see a vision of humanity which overcomes sin's distortion. As Torrance puts it, "revelation is unthinkable, therefore, apart from the whole movement of divine humiliation from the cradle to the Cross, apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...it is only through that atoning exchange that God's revelation achieves its end as revelation to and within a sinful world."<sup>59</sup> In what follows, I present a theologically-informed exegesis of scripture's witness to Christ's restoration of human *telos* in his atoning work. It is the reconciling and redeeming person and work of Christ, from cradle to cross, that reveals for what purpose God creates humanity as persons.

Because difference often breeds conflict, it is tempting to jump to locating particularity in our fallenness as a distortion of human nature. But such a move assumes too much about the distortion of human image bearing; we cannot know how humanity is broken if we do not first understand the *telos* from which we have fallen. What this *telos* of all humanity is and how it defines all human existence will set the stage for locating particularity and its role in that universal purpose.

What Christ does in the resurrection and ascension of his particular humanity is to bring humanity generally to a new life, such that in Christ there is a New Humanity which has been

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<sup>59</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 133.

healed of the defects of the old, fallen humanity. Adam Neder argues that Jesus “has made peace between himself and sinful humanity by overcoming sinful humanity and creating a New Humanity in its place.”<sup>60</sup> Our *telos* is not only something which Christ reveals in the incarnation, but that which Christ also assumes and *heals*. Torrance writes, “revelation and atonement are inseparable...for the speaking of the word and working out of the atoning deed are done within the one person of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> It is in the New Humanity, wrought by Christ’s atoning work, that we find the intended purpose of human personhood and, therefore, of being human. Human *telos* in Christology must be answered according to what Christ restores in us because that is the shape of God’s relationship to humanity in the incarnation. Christ became incarnate, God dwelling with humanity in order to restore human ways of existence, proclaiming, “I have come so that they might have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).<sup>62</sup> This life is in Christ, who is himself, “...the way and the truth and *the life*” (John 14:6).<sup>63</sup> This new life in Christ is the promise of a New Humanity which has been conformed to Christ’s Image (Col 3:10; Rev 21:1-5), transforming humanity into what it was always intended to be. Whatever needs to be healed in humanity is thus healed in Christ’s restoration of humanity in the incarnation; the assumed is healed.

### ***§2.1 The Reconciliation of God and Humanity***

So what is it that the incarnation heals or rectifies in humanity? What is perhaps most frequently attributed to the incarnation in the New Testament is the communion between God and humanity which it re-establishes. The hypostatic union has been traditionally understood to hold within the unity of Christ’s person while maintaining the necessity of each of the two natures. As has already been established, what is accomplished in the incarnation is a true union between the divine and human more generally through the particular union between Christ’s divinity and humanity. The particular union of the divine and human in Christ establishes a universal union between all of humanity and the Triune Godhead. In the unity of his own person, Christ brings about the reconciliation of God and other human persons.

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<sup>60</sup> Neder, *Participation in Christ*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν. Unless otherwise stated, all New Testament texts are my own translation.

<sup>63</sup> Ἐ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ. Emphasis added.

The Apostle Paul thus writes, “for if, as his enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, all the more will we be saved, having been reconciled, in his life” (Rom 5:10).<sup>64</sup> What is accomplished in Christ’s incarnation is the union of God and all of humanity. In this particular human person, Jesus Christ, all of humanity is restored to right relationship with God through the perfect communion Jesus has with his Father and Spirit as the Second Person of the Trinity. Amy Peeler argues for the ontological implications of this relationship for humanity in her book, *You Are My Son*. She writes, “the author of Hebrews presents God’s nature as a Father. There and in between, he describes the dynamics of God’s Fatherly character: granting to his son an unparalleled inheritance, his own name, and the roles and honors that come with it, and subjecting his Son to the process of perfecting so that humanity too can be God’s own *υιοι*.”<sup>65</sup> We receive and participate in Christ’s relationship to his Father and Spirit lived out in human ways. Because these intra-Trinitarian relationships are the being of God, our participation in them is also being-constituting. In becoming children of God, our very being is transformed into a perfected New Humanity.

This transmission of unity from Christ to humanity is attested by Christ himself, who prays for his followers, “that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in me and I in You, so that they may be in us” (John 17:21).<sup>66</sup> The Apostle Paul, again, picks up on this theme: “through him [it was God’s good pleasure] to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).<sup>67</sup> Christ’s humanity is vicarious, so that what happens to his humanity transforms all of humanity in kind. His humanity and atoning activity cannot be reduced to the effects of that activity on his own nature, but effects a change in all of humanity in relation to God. It is in Christ that our communion with God is re-established because Christ’s humanity participates in the divine communion. Paul frequently uses ἐν Χριστῷ language to depict this vicariousness of Christ’s work as essential to the righteousness and salvation of human beings.<sup>68</sup> This is important not only for its Christological centring of the Christian life, but for the Apostle Paul’s understanding of our reception of these benefits in Christ’s person.

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<sup>64</sup> Εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ.

<sup>65</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 193.

<sup>66</sup> Ἴνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ᾧσιν.

<sup>67</sup> Δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ. Paul goes on in verses 21-23 to connect this cosmological reconciliation with the reconciliation of human persons in faith.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 73-74.

Examples of this usage include “ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” (Rom 3:24) and “ζωή αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ” (Rom 6:23).<sup>69</sup> This usage of the ἐν Χριστῷ idiom indicates not simply something that we receive in a mechanical fashion as a reward for being united to Christ, but something that is accomplished by Christ himself and given to us within our active and continuous union with him.<sup>70</sup> Christ is, in this usage, both the agent and the instrument of our restoration.

One common explanation of what Paul is doing with this ἐν Χριστῷ language is describing human participation in the person and work of Christ.<sup>71</sup> Participation connotes a relational understanding of union with Christ, a self-giving of one person to the other.<sup>72</sup> In this self-giving relationship, Christ gives us that which he already has in himself: perfected communion with the Father and Spirit. This establishment of right relation between God and humanity in *unio Christi* is the end for which humanity was created and is accomplished through Christ’s solidarity with humanity. *Teleologically*, therefore, participation is the means of God’s redemption and reconciliation of humanity.<sup>73</sup> Our participation in Christ is a participation in his particular relationship with the Father and Spirit and thus an entrance into a corresponding relationship between God and humanity generally. Such an account of participation in the particular relationship of Father and Spirit with the Son constitutes a relationship between the universal and particular in Christ.

## §2.2 *The Reconciliation of Fellow-Humanity in the Incarnate One*

Furthermore, Christ re-establishes in himself the unity of fellow-humanity. It is no accident that when Jesus is asked what the Greatest Commandment is, he instead feels the need to name two commandments at once: “you shall love the Lord your God in all your heart and in all your soul and in all your mind...and the second is similar: you shall love your neighbour just as you love yourself” (Matt 22:37-38).<sup>74</sup> McFarland argues that this is the proper understanding of the incarnation and human participation in it. He writes, “the incarnation suggests a parallel

<sup>69</sup> See Gal 2:4, Eph 1:3, 2:7 for further examples.

<sup>70</sup> Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 207-208.

<sup>71</sup> Campbell, “Participation and Faith in Paul,” 58.”

<sup>72</sup> Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 331. The self-giving characteristic of participation expresses itself in Paul’s body and marriage metaphors.

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, “Karl Barth’s Reading of Paul’s Union with Christ,” 472.

<sup>74</sup> Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου...δευτέρα δὲ ὁμοία αὐτῇ· Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

between our experience of Jesus and our experience of any other human being: *what* we perceive is a physical substance—*something*—that can be subjected to the same forms of measurement and analysis as any other chunk of matter; and yet in perceiving this particular configuration of substance, we see a person—*someone*.<sup>75</sup> It is in encounter with and recognition of the other that our personhood fulfils its purpose. This parallel drawn between relationship with the divine other and relationship with a human other can be drawn only on account of the incarnate one, who brings these two kinds of relationships with the other together in his particular person by revealing to us the nature of our own personhood: we are created to love one another just as God loves us.

Here, too, we may turn to an account of what the *unio Christi* does to transform human persons in fellow-human community and neighbour-love. Community, closely related to communion, is a group human persons formed through the kind of second-personal union between persons described above. According to Barth, Christ is “the One to whom the Church belongs, whose body it is, who is Himself its true unity.”<sup>76</sup> In being united in Christ, human persons are gathered into a community constituted by belonging both to Christ and one another. In this unitive power of Christ’s becoming incarnate, in giving himself to us, Jennings identifies a “power we enter through participation. The crowd surrounding Jesus gathers in the desire of God... This crowd forming gives witness to one who has yielded his life to divine desire. Jesus gathers in God— divine desire permeating his life and work— and now in him we see what God wants: communion.”<sup>77</sup> The *unio Christi* is not reducible to the union of a single believer and Christ, nor even to that individual’s participation in the communion that constitutes the divine life. The believer, in being reconciled to God, is also called to reconciliation with other human persons, to participate in communion with other human beings established in Christ’s reconciling and redemptive person. J. B. Torrance connects participation with reconciliation in just this way: “the Christ who draws us into such wonderful communion is the whole Christ, the God-man, in whom and through whom God and humanity are reconciled. God and humanity are one in him, our mediator, who summons us to be reconciled to one another.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, the restoration

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<sup>75</sup> McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh*, 79.

<sup>76</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 685. While a relational view of the *imago Dei* should not be directly derived from the relational nature of this fellow-human communion, it can be identified as the outworking of union with Christ.

<sup>77</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 107.

<sup>78</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 87.

of human relationship to God in Jesus Christ restores also right relation among fellow-humanity. Human *telos* for fellow-human communion is grounded in the human *telos* for communion with God, which is itself grounded in the communion of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Many of the passages cited in the previous section to demonstrate Christ's establishment of union with God and humanity are immediately preceded or followed by exhortation to live in loving communion with one another as those united in Christ via the Holy Spirit's indwelling (Col 1:24-27; 3:5; John 17:21).<sup>79</sup> This is described in more depth in Paul's depiction of the people of God coming from varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds being built together into a dwelling place for God.<sup>80</sup> As his body, the Church is the dwelling place of Christ on the earth. In several passages, but we will take 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Ephesians 2:22 for the moment, Paul identifies the Church with the "temple (or house) of God" (ναὸς θεοῦ) and "a place of God's dwelling in the Spirit" (κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι). In both cases, the verbs ἐστε and συνοικοδομεῖσθε (along with their referents, ὑμῖν and ὑμεῖς) are in the second person plural. By contrast, the words for temple and dwelling, ναὸς and κατοικητήριον respectively, are singular. Many interpreters of these passages, both theological and exegetical, have leapt too quickly to the conclusion that every individual believer is their own personal dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. But a better way to account for the way that Paul phrases these passages, especially the plural verbs referencing singular objects, is to understand the body of individual believers as being built together (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into a single, unified dwelling place for God.<sup>81</sup> This reflects narratives in the Hebrew Bible which emphasize God's dwelling with his covenant people and the drawing in of all other nations into relationship with God through this particular people.<sup>82</sup> We are created for being built together into community. This indicates that fellow-

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<sup>79</sup> These passages were selected for their incarnational content precisely because they move from the union of God and humanity in Christ to the union of fellow-humanity in Christ. The loving union Christ establishes in his death and resurrection is both vertical and horizontal.

<sup>80</sup> Campbell, *Paul and Union With Christ*, 290.

<sup>81</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 99-100. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 183-185. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 413. Barth, *Ephesians*, 274. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 159. Perkins, *First Corinthians*, 75. Thielman and Fee in particular note the addition in early manuscripts of the η to emphasize this point, as well as the common use of the definite noun despite a lack of definite article.

<sup>82</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 114; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 184-186; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 160. Paul is here intentionally evoking temple imagery from Isaiah 28 and Ezekiel 43. The tabernacle and temple were God's dwelling place with his people in the early days of Israel, gathering those in covenant relationship with God into a community where they might belong both to God and one another. This motif, traced through the Hebrew Bible, demonstrates not only the dwelling of God with his people, but the outward expansion of God's presence and relationship with all of humanity through this particular people. This resonates

human relationality is, as well, an ontological category of human personhood. Because human relation to God necessarily happens in this being built together into a single dwelling, fellow-human relationality is also an essential part of the ontology of human personhood.

The kind of communion envisioned by scripture here is especially complex with regard to the role of particularity. Christ's assumption of a Jewish body and his fulfilment of God's promises to Israel in consistently Jewish ways essentializes the particularity of the covenant people. This is to say that his transformation of humanity does not erase embodied differences, or at least not Jewishness, because Israel and its embodied ways of human existence continue to be the starting point for all of God's activity in dwelling with humanity. And yet, it would not be true to say that the Jewishness of Jesus remains unchanged by Christ's transformative work. In his embodiment of his own Jewishness, Christ transforms the relations between Israel and other peoples, such as Gentiles (Matt 8:28-34; 15:24-28) and Samaritans (John 4; Lk 17:12-19), to include them in covenant relation to God without making them Jewish as well. Jennings picks up on this tension, advocating for a Christology of joining which does not subsume all particularity into a new particularity that supersedes all others (Christian), but which nevertheless transforms all particularity in relation to our belonging to one another in Christ.<sup>83</sup> Our particularity seems to be both essential to and also changed by the kind of communion established in Christ which crosses borders of difference to bring about belonging to one another. Andrew Draper describes such joined communion as "marked by differences [but that] shares table together in shared spaces...it is the life of the community scattered by racialization but pressed together within the particular body of the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>84</sup> This requires further exploration, but we can at least begin to see the shape of the role played by particularity in the kind of communion for which humanity is created. The particularity of Christ's humanity transforms the very being of persons now brought into communion with him, even though they might not share in a given particularity of Christ such as his Jewishness or his maleness. The identification (and when restored in Christ, love) of the other that is essential to personhood is extended thus to include fellow-human relation. This relationship Christ also restores in himself as part of the *telos* of human personhood.

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with the trajectory of the covenant God made with Abraham in establishing him as the Father of a people through whom all peoples would be blessed (Gen 12:3; 22:18; Rom 9:6-8).

<sup>83</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 272-273.

<sup>84</sup> Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place*, 314-315.



### §2.3 *The Reconciliation of the Created Order in the Incarnate One*

Finally, Christ reconciles humanity and the created order as the one “through whom and for whom all things were created” (Col 1:16).<sup>85</sup> In assuming human flesh, Christ is not merely reconciling humanity to himself, but is reconciling the *cosmos*. Again, looking at passages that demonstrate the reconciliation of God and humanity, we see that this reconciling work is intrinsically bound up in the restoration of the created order. The Apostle Paul writes that it was the Father’s will to “reconcile all things through [the incarnate Son] to himself” (Col 1:20).<sup>86</sup> It is here that we see the place of humanity in the reconciliation of all things in Christ. “The Triune God has created humankind as finite persons-in-relation who are called to acknowledge his creation by becoming the persons they are and by enabling the rest of the creation to make its due response of praise.”<sup>87</sup> This again hearkens to Jennings’ notion of the return of all things to the creator, something only possible on his account through a profound sense of belonging. Humanity belongs to the created order, both as its royal priests serving under the High Priest and as creatures themselves. In the gathering of all humanity into communion with himself, Jesus “enacted the joining desired by the Father of Jesus for all people. This is the coming of the one new reality of kinship. This is not only the continuation of Jesus’ work of forming the new [humanity] in [humanity], but the full disclosure of the desire of Jesus for the entire world. This in effect is the Creator reclaiming the world through communion.”<sup>88</sup> This belonging to creation is contextualized first and foremost by our belonging to God in Christ.

Humanity stands at a unique place in the created order, especially as that kind of being whose nature is taken on by the Second Person of the Trinity. It is in this becoming human like us, and through humanity’s restoration, that the cosmos is reconciled to a state of flourishing. The human person, according to Alexander Schmemmann, “stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God...he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the ‘matter’...and man was created as the priest

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<sup>85</sup> Τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται.

<sup>86</sup> Δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν.

<sup>87</sup> Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology, and Anthropology,” 61.

<sup>88</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 267.

of this cosmic sacrament.”<sup>89</sup> This orientation of the human person towards God in the created order is a different kind of relationship than the aforementioned God-human and fellow-human relationships, yet it, too, is part and parcel to what it means to be a human person. Jennings notes in “the fundamental equation in premodern collective identity (that is collective identity before colonialist land seizure and its commodity transformation) includes landscapes and its specific, animals, seasons, and so forth.”<sup>90</sup> Creation is a part of human identity, precisely because we are created for a kind of communion that includes creation. Our relationship with creation is meant to participate in (and thus be defined by) Christ’s reconciling and offering up creation to the Father. The High Priestly ministry in which Christ restores creation’s flourishing relationship with God is enacted in a decisively human way. Thus, James Arcadi argues, our High Priest gathers up our activity in cultivating this flourishing of creation so that we might participate in Christ’s priestly ministry. “The priestly function of the *imago Dei* is an imaging relation of God’s priestly function because God is offering the whole cosmos and returning it to God’s self. Humans image God by joining with what God [in Christ] is doing. God offers the cosmos to humans, yes, but God is also offering the cosmos to God’s self by means of the human.”<sup>91</sup> This, too, is ultimately a participation in the *unio Christi*, but one which can maintain both the distinctiveness and the commonness of the human creature with the rest of creation.

## §2.4 Restored to Communion

What Christ reveals human beings to be is creatures created for communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. The kind of communion we are intended to have is one that reflects the loving and self-giving relations of Father, Son, and Spirit. We know this to be the case because what we see Christ doing in his atoning work is principally to restore humanity’s relationship to God, itself, and the created order. Human beings, therefore, are at least partially constituted by their relationships with other persons and creation generally and depend on relation to others for their being.

These three kinds of relationships which are essential to human nature are distinct in that human relationship to the divine is different from human relationship to other humans which is

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<sup>89</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 344.

<sup>91</sup> Arcadi, “*Homo Arandus*,” 9.

different from human relationship to creation. Humans relate to God as children, other human persons as siblings in Christ and fellow image-bearers, and to creation as priests. This points already to a prominent role for particularity in the economy of human nature because human distinctiveness from the divine and the rest of creation is necessary for our constitution by these three kinds of relationship.

But this still does not get us an essential role for particularity at the fellow-human level. The ways that humanity is distinct from the divine and the rest of creation are ostensibly shared with all other human persons; this does not tell us why human beings are distinct from one another in ways that at least appear to significantly shape our embodied experiences. This, rather, is indicated by the Trinitarian communion which grounds human being-for-communion in Christ's revealing and reconciling embodiment of that being-for-communion. As argued above, that God is fundamentally a communion of persons relies on the distinctiveness of the divine persons. If Son could be identified as the Father, we would have no reason to attribute "threeness," to God nor the idea of communion as fundamental to God. Rather, the *filial* identity of the Son relies on the distinctiveness of the identities of Father and Spirit. Furthermore, our own participation in the divine communion relies on this distinction because it is in the relation of Christ to Father and Spirit that fellow-humanity finds its unity as a species and participates in the true being-constituting communion for which it was created. Because Father, Son, and Spirit are all "I's" which encounter a "Thou" in one another, communion requires some sense of distinctiveness between their persons which we would call particularity.

Because human persons are created essentially for a communion that reflects this one, human ontology assumes the potential to distinguish one from the other in the God-human relationship, the fellow-human relationship, and human relationship to the rest of the created order. The distinctiveness of identity that accompanies personhood as an ontological category is essential to human ontology. Particularity, therefore, is in some way essential to human nature because we must be particular beings to recognize and love the other in the self-giving ways that constitute our *telos*. There must be conceptual space between the identities of personal beings to provide the possibility of I-Thou relation, the possibility of communion. Gunton reminds us of this need for space, in which the identification of persons with particularity provides for the possibility of communion. He writes, "we require space as well as relation: to be both related to

and *other than* those and that on which we depend.”<sup>92</sup> The space of “otherness,” or the human recognition<sup>93</sup> of (and subsequent loving communion with) the other, is a necessary condition of the three ontological categories of personhood we have defined Christologically.

The relationships that occur within these categories, regardless of whether they live up to their intended *telos* of God-given communion or not, constitute the ontology of human persons and our identities in our createdness. But we know them to exist and to constitute our personhood precisely because they are the ways in which Christ embodies the human *telos* for communion. While this can tell us *that* particularity plays an essential role in human nature, it does not quite tell us *what* that role is, only that humanity was always intended to act in some distinctive and particularizing ways in relating to God, other humans, and creation.

### ***§2.5 The Space Between Adam and Christ***

It is at this point that we should address one common problem of locating the particularity of human nature in order to rule out some potential ways of framing particularity’s role in a Christological account of human nature. I have already raised the concern that social borders and divisions between various particularities (male and female, Jew and Gentile) tend to breed conflict and thus be identified with human sinfulness. The differences in human persons which we identify with particularity appear to threaten the *teleological* vision of communion because human beings so often twist and distort the loving communion for which we are created in relation to one another in virtue of our differences. The sin of racism is a salient example of this. In the sin of racism, we choose to oppress and instrumentalize our fellow image-bearers in virtue of the colour of their skin rather than loving them in the way that the Father, Son, and Spirit love one another. Because race is the identifying marker in virtue of which the racist oppresses and instrumentalizes, it might be tempting to say that race is not a part of Christ’s *teleological* vision for humanity. On such a view, particularities are understood to be distortions of human nature caused by sin. Our differences are something which the incarnation corrects for rather than something which is included in the transformation of human nature in Christ. On the other hand, we might be tempted to locate particularity entirely in Christ’s redemption of humanity because we consistently see Christ transform the relations between such differences

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<sup>92</sup> Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology, and Anthropology,” 53. Emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> See, Baumeister, “Emergence of Personhood,” 75-76.

rather than eradicating them. Each solution locates particularity exclusively within one epoch in the theological narrative of humanity. By epoch, I am referring to Paul's depiction of the old and New humanities in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Fallen humanity under the headship of Adam is distorted from its *telos* by sin and redeemed humanity under the headship of Christ is restored to that *telos*. These two poles raise yet another question for our understanding of particularity and its role in human nature: are the differences of particularity an essential part of human nature or are they fabricated by human sinfulness? To say that particularity belongs only to the old humanity is to see particularity as a distortion of human communion, something which is done away with in Christ's atoning work. To locate particularity only in the New Humanity is to affirm and reify all difference between persons, even those that would seem to be essentially sinful, such as that of slave and master, as essentially good.

This tension between the old and New humanities further reveals the shape of human particularity. This is precisely because Adam and Christ are taken *theologically* to be archetypes or representatives of what it means to be human, and they both do so in strikingly particular ways that have theological ramifications for how we understand our own human natures. Particularity is part and parcel to the ways in which this tension is felt. Difference and distinction become grounds for oppression and hatred contrary to the *telos* of loving communion as well as the basis for the fulfilment of this communion in the body of Christ. For this reason, there will always be the temptation to locate particularity conceptually on either the side of Adam or Christ. Because particularity is a tool of division and destruction under Adam, the temptation may come to treat particularity as essentially a feature of the Fall. In a theological imagination of race, we might conclude that racial categories, because of their inherent hierarchy and power structures, are essentially fallen and thus should be erased.<sup>94</sup> Such a conclusion hopes for a colour-blind picture of the eschaton in which racial particularity either ceases to exist or ceases to be recognized; we are all one, homogenous human race. On the other hand, because particularity provides the condition of otherness for our *telos* of communion, we might be tempted to uncritically essentialize all particularity. Some feminist and womanist theologians, for instance, have emphasized the femininity of the Spirit, asserting a Pneumatological soteriology for women

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<sup>94</sup> This is, in part, Jennings' argument in *Christian Imagination*. However, Jennings is not willing to concede that all difference which contributes to our racially-imagined categories are a result of the Fall, nor that erasing these categories is the best way forward (see *Christian Imagination*, 63).

distinct (presumably) from a Christological soteriology for men.<sup>95</sup> This reading of gendered particularity essentializes the distinctions between maleness and femaleness to the degree of distinct salvations for men and women.

But it is not obvious that particularity belongs wholly or necessarily on either side of this gap between the old and New Humanity. In fact, we see particularity operative on both sides of the gap in the communal ontology offered above. Particularity can provide both the condition of otherness for life-giving communion and be the basis for distortions of that communion which bring about death and oppression. Particularity must play some role in the flourishing communion for which humanity is created, as well as a distorted role in our fallenness. Particularity is essential to human nature in a way that translates across the space between Christ and Adam. Particularities thus can arise both as essential features of our *telos* for communion and of human fallenness. One way of framing this, at least within the particular metaphysical story which has thus far guided our Christological reflections about human nature, is to see human fallenness and sinfulness as a distortion of human nature itself.<sup>96</sup> Humanity is created for a particular *telos* and our fallenness is a distortion of that *telos*. We relate not in loving and self-giving ways but in ways that invert the character of the intra-Trinitarian relations which we are intended to reflect. Where we see particularity operate as the basis for oppression and distorted relations with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order, there is some good and divinely given particularity being twisted from its intended *telos*. This does not tell us which perceived differences in human persons are essential features of human nature and which are distortions of those features, but it does point towards an important role for particularity in human nature.

The communion for which humanity is created seems to require particularity of some kind in order for communion with the other to be possible. Which particularities count towards establishing such a divinely-wrought communion and how those particularities operate in the *teleological* vision of that communion remains to be seen. What we must say about particularity at the conceptual level is that it is in some way required for our *telos*. The way that it is required, moreover, cannot act as a barrier to communion as it often does in our sinfulness. So while we cannot precisely define the role of particularity at this point in the thesis, nor the roles of the

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<sup>95</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 104, 112. Kilian McDonnell criticizes Johnson as replacing Christ with the Spirit in “Feminist Mariologies,” 548. See also, Kim, “Revisioning Christ,” 82-92; McCoy, “Ignatian Spirituality and Christian Feminism,” 99-100.

<sup>96</sup> See, McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 4.II.B; 4.II.D.

specific particularities of race and gender guiding the Christological anthropology at hand, we can at least say that *some* particularity is essential to humanity and that it can be distorted in ways that undermine or resist the *telos* of human ontology.

This is demonstrated in the *teleological* vision which Christ embodies and reveals to humanity. Humanity is not meant to become simply another animal in the created order, but to uniquely stand out as the particular creature responsible for creation's flourishing. Humanity is not created for a homogenous vision of the *imago Dei*, but for genuine encounter with the other distinct from ourselves. Humanity is not created for union with the human Christ only, but for a participation in his relationship with the Father and Spirit, a genuine participation in the diverse communion of Father, Son, and Spirit that grounds the communion for which we are created. The vision, in other words, for this communion is of a humanity composed of "every tribe, tongue, and nation," united in worship of the Trinitarian God (Rev 7:9). At the fundamental level of our intuitions about human nature and particularity must be the affirmation that "God is a community or, more technically speaking, a communion of three divine persons that embodies unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Unity and diversity can coexist in perfect harmony. They are not mutually exclusive. In this sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is a resolution of the perennial philosophical problem of 'the one and the many.' The triune God embodies both unity and plurality."<sup>97</sup> Our account of particularity must sustain this vision of particularity in Christ even through its distortion under Adam. Holding this tension in our minds allows for a way forward in addressing the problem that particularity presents to Christological anthropology; where a particularity shows up on one side of the gap, it will be held in tension with something similar on the other side.

### §3

#### **Existing Answers to the Particularity Problem**

This tension is important to establish because it sets the stage for understanding the more general problem of particularity which this thesis aims to solve for Christological anthropology. That the particularity of Christ's humanity seems essential to his role as the ontological basis for all human nature and yet seems to consistently provide the basis for division and the inversion of

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<sup>97</sup> Chung, "Salvation as Reconciliation," 147; Crisp, "The Moderate Reformed Doctrine of Original Sin," 35-54.

union and communion is precisely the tension at work in the aforementioned particularity problem. Christ is particular and yet it seems like his being particular (and our being particular in different ways) could be a barrier to union and communion with him.

To address the particularity problem, that particularity seems to undermine the possibility of Christ being the universal human nature if he has particular human features that he does not share with every human being, I will present previously offered solutions to the particularity problem. In all fairness, these solutions are not intentionally offered as solutions to the particularity problem. Rather, these are solutions proposed to address a specific particularity and its implications for Christology, theological anthropology, or soteriology. However, there is some sense in which we might extrapolate from what these accounts do with a specific particularity to what they might do with other particularities. This is because particularity plays a specific role in the metaphysical conclusions of each account below. Insofar as the authors of each solution take other particularities *to be particularities*, it is safe to assume that they play a similar role to one another in human existence, and thus fall under a sufficiently similar solution.

The criteria for assessing these solutions is rooted in the eschatological (or *teleological*) ends of the particularities presented. These solutions are thus typically presented in the following manner: what happens to the particularity in question in the eschaton? This question is not really about what the eschaton is like, but rather about establishing what the transformation and glorification of human nature in Christ is like and what role (if any) the given particularity plays in glorified humanity. Because of the tension in the space between Christ and Adam, we may rule out solutions that reduce all particularity to either side of that ontological gap. At the heart of this critique is that we need to be able to say both that Christ assumes some particularities and that they are not barriers to his union and communion with others who are different from him. If our vision for human nature is truly grounded in the diverse and unified communion of Father, Son, and Spirit, neither diversity nor unity can be sacrificed in our vision for human particularity.

### **§3.1 *Parmenidian-Spherical Humanity***

One of the most common solutions to the problems that particularity poses to human nature is to think of particularities as not essential but accidental to human nature. This view utilizes modality to understand the role that different properties play in human nature: properties which are necessary for a being to be human (and therefore which every human being must have)



are “essential” and every property which humans have that could be otherwise is “accidental.”<sup>98</sup> Important for our purposes is how a property is to note that essential properties are common where accidental properties need not be; in fact noting instances of a particular of a kind not having a property is a common argument for that property being accidental rather than essential.<sup>99</sup> This is important to note for my arguments further on: while not all common properties are essential, all essential properties of a kind are thought to be common in this way of understanding natures and properties. So Christ’s maleness and Jewishness are not essential to his humanity, but are only accidental to his assumption of a human nature (and by extension, his salvific work). “This is because,” Do Vale argues, “of the method by which God intends to save, namely *essential* solidarity with humanity... assuming all of our essential properties is the means by which or at least a necessary condition for his salvific work.”<sup>100</sup> Do Vale’s article is principally aimed at addressing the conundrum posed by Reuther and other feminist Christologies: does Christ’s essential maleness rule out his salvation of women. Do Vale goes on to argue that Christ need only assume those properties that are essential to every human being, or to the natural kind humanity, in order save all of humanity, but that he can also assume additional properties which are not common to every human being nor essential to human nature. He writes, “Christ meets the aptness condition [for saving all of humanity] just in case he assumes *ABC* (all of the properties necessary and jointly sufficient for being human) *and* for any other essential properties he assumed, *DEF*, they must not be incompatible with *ABC*.”<sup>101</sup> Gender, for Do Vale, would be a *DEF* property. It is essential to Christ’s particular person, that is to say his individual essence, but accidental to his becoming human for salvific purposes.<sup>102</sup> This means that Christ assumes a humanity which is shared by men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and to which his particularity is accidental.

The problem with this solution is the *teleological* picture of humanity that it offers. The way in which it is problematic depends on how we read Do Vale’s solution. Do Vale is keen to

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<sup>98</sup> Ishii, Atkins, and Atkins, “Essential vs. Accidental Properties.”

<sup>99</sup> See, Mackie, *How Things Might Have Been*, 195. She writes, “kind relation will require that all actual members of the kind have some fundamental properties in common.”

<sup>100</sup> Do Vale, “Can a Male Savior Save Women,” 311.

<sup>101</sup> Do Vale, “Can a Male Savior Save Women,” 314-315.

<sup>102</sup> This can be explained in two ways: Christ can either belong to a kind (male) by possessing the essential properties of that kind or Christ’s maleness can be essential to his numerical identity to himself. On the former kind of essentialism, Christ assumes a human body and soul in virtue of which he belongs to (at least) two kind essences: human and male, but only needs to belong to the former to save all of humanity. On the latter, Christ needs to be male to be identical to his particular divine-human person.

emphasize that Christ's maleness is still essential to him, but in a way that is not essential to his belonging to the natural kind, human. One way of parsing this out is to say that Christ's maleness is essential to his person, or his individual essence, by accidental to his assumption of humanity, or his kind essence. One could thus argue that gender is a non-essential property of Christ's human nature because it is socially constructed and rooted in contingent biological realities that in no way determine or define the fulfilment of our *telos* as human beings.<sup>103</sup> This would mean that Christ assumes *accidental* properties *DEF* with respect to his becoming human. He assumes an accidental maleness, but he could have done otherwise or he could have belonged to a different kind essence (perhaps female or intersex) and still been the human saviour of all humanity. Similarly, both of the types of gender essentialism that Do Vale offers as explanations for Christ's assumption of essential properties *DEF* would entail that Christ's being male is accidental to his being fully human and thus being able to save all of humanity, even if they are essential to his person in some other way. Perhaps we can conceive of a female or intersex saviour who still is fully human and saves all of humanity, but there are other particularities which Christ could not be saviour without. Christ's atoning role as the High Priest of humanity necessitates that he be from Judah and from the covenant people. The redeemer of humanity had to come from the lineage of David. All of these particularities are not essential to his assumption of his humanity (on the views offered above), but are essential to the atoning work that occurs in that assumption. If Christ's atoning work is really "joined-up" with his assumption of a human nature (as has been argued both above and in Do Vale's article), then at least some particularities need to be essential to Christ's humanity. We will set aside the issue of which particularities need to be essential for the moment. What matters is that a description of Christ's essential solidarity with human nature pared down to only the properties essential for belonging to the kind essence, human (and thus held in common by every human), is that it is insufficient for the kind of work that Christ's assumption of a human nature needs to do. These particularities, if found in the group *DEF*, would be non-essential to Christ's salvific work in a way that is problematic.

Now Do Vale might return that this is only a problem if *DEF* is non-essential. By making them essential to Christ's individual essence, we avoid the problems posed by the essentiality of Christ's Jewishness, his being from the tribe of Judah, and so on. And this intuitively makes

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<sup>103</sup> See for instance, McKirland, "Image of God and Divine Presence," 309.

sense on the onto-relational account of human nature offered; Christ is in the business of saving persons and not just natures. *DEF* properties are essential to his person, just not to his being fully human so as to save our humanity. The problem of non-essentiality is only a problem for non-essentialist views, but those views which take Christ's particularity to be essential to him in ways beyond the essential properties of human nature need not fear the undermining of particularity in this sense. But this encounters another problem. If what Christ saves is that which he assumes, then Christ saves the minimal features of human nature, *ABC*. Christ does not, on the view proposed save all possible properties *DEF*. He may save those properties, *DEF*, which he assumes (such as maleness), but he would not save femaleness. If the goal of his *essential* solidarity, as Do Vale puts it, is salvation through the sharing of essential properties and if what Christ comes to do is to save persons, it would seem that only some persons (namely those who share Christ's essential *DEF* properties) are saved. This is a different sort of solution which will be dealt with below. For those views like Do Vale's which seem to say that it is only properties of the *ABC* variety that Christ needs to share in order to save humanity, it seems odd to say that Christ does not need to heal our particularity, those *DEF* properties which define us as persons, in addition to those things which are essential to our being human. The oppression of women by men throughout the course of history indicates that maleness does in fact need to be saved. Whiteness, despite being a particularity which Christ does not share in, similarly needs to be saved from its own destruction and oppression. If Christ assumes and saves only that which is common and essential to all humanity, then Christ leaves what makes us particular unhealed, even if Christ is able to assume some particularity essentially.

Thinking *teleologically*, to what does Christ actually save humanity on this view? What Christ assumes and saves is those properties that are essential to all humanity. While he may assume more essential properties than this, it is only these that are relevant to his becoming human and saving of all humanity. If the only things that are brought into Christ's salvific work are those essential properties held in common by all humanity, the eschatological future of human nature looks like a humanity without particularity. Maleness and femaleness are not included in *ABC*, and so they are not redeemed and saved and thus are not brought into eschatological humanity. Jewishness and Gentileness are not essential to Christ's assumption of a human nature, and so they are not carried into the *telos* of that salvific work. Humanity's future looks like Parmenidian spheres, being non-descript beings pared down to only their essential

properties with no variance or change in them.<sup>104</sup> Humanity's Parmenidian future has every human being becoming exactly identical to and indistinguishable from every other human being. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Intuitively, this looks nothing like the Christological *telos* of humanity to be united in a communion comprised of every tribe, tongue, and nation united in worship of YHWH. Instead, we get a collection of tribeless, tongueless, and nationless humans; a colour-blind, gender-blind, and ultimately non-descript commonality that supersedes all human difference. The content of relationality which relies on our being distinct from one another is erased. All particularity is instead superseded by the absolute unity of our common essential properties redeemed in Christ. This ultimately contradicts the *teleological* vision of humanity revealed in Christ, and so solutions to the particularity problem which make particularity inessential to Christ's assumption of human nature must be rejected. This does not include solutions which do in fact make *DEF* essential to Christ's assumption of a human nature and salvific in some way, but those will be contended with in another proposed solution below.

### §3.2 *Fractured Humanity*

So perhaps we should become essentialists about particularity. A particularity like gender would be included in *ABC* rather than *DEF* properties and thus would be included in the *telos* of humanity. While this addresses the problem with Parmenidian-spherical humanity, it comes with its own costs. In fact, this is precisely the problem that Do Vale's essay seeks to address. On this view, gender is so essential to human nature, that Christ's assumption of a male humanity entails that he is unable to save all of humanity, only men. Johnson aptly summarizes the problems raised by this solution:

Given the dualism which essentially divorces male from female humanity, the maleness of Christ puts the salvation of women in jeopardy. The Christian story of salvation involves not only God's compassionate will to save but also the method by which that will is effective, namely, by plunging into sinful human history and

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<sup>104</sup> This title is in reference to Parmenides, who theorized that nature is spherical because it can have no internal variation and must be absolutely uniform. Only the sphere is uniform with each point on its surface being the exact same distance from its centre. A being pared down to only its essential properties shared in common with others of the same kind would be non-descript and entirely indistinguishable from others of the same kind being analogous to Parmenides' spheres in this way.

transforming it from within. The early Christian aphorism, ‘What is not assumed is not healed’, sums up the insight that God’s saving solidarity with humanity is what is crucial for the birth of a new creation...if maleness is essential for the christic role, then women are cut out of the loop of salvation, for female sexuality was not assumed by the Word made flesh. Thus, to Rosemary Radford Ruether’s searching question, ‘Can a male saviour save women?’ interpretation of the maleness of Christ as essential can only answer ‘No,’ despite Christian belief in the universality of God’s saving intent.<sup>105</sup>

This is where the various conservative and feminist accounts of bifurcated salvation, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, come from. Male and female humanity are essentially different since they do not share all the same essential (*ABC* level) properties. Thus, Christ’s assumption of a male humanity is sufficient for saving men, but human women require another source of salvation. For conservative doctrines of gender, women are typically taught to find their salvation in being the Church as the bride of Christ or relationship to men themselves as those with direct incarnational access to the Image of God. For radical feminist Christologies and theological anthropologies, it tends to be something like the Spirit who saves women. This has also been historically extended to accounts of race or ethnicity. Most notably, we have 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century theological anthropologies that essentialize the difference between those of white and western European descent and those of African origin or eastern Asian origin or American origin.<sup>106</sup> Those of “lower humanity,” rely on the rationality and civility of the white race for their salvation, essentializing the relationship of slave and master in theological anthropology.

Such an account of particularity is, for obvious reasons, untenable. Its practical outputs essentialize the sins of racism and sexism, but the problem goes even deeper than that. It essentializes the borders between particularities to the degree of making communion with the other impossible. McKirland raises this concern regarding gender. She writes, “if human personhood is essentially male or female, then Jesus would necessarily have had male personhood. If this is true, it is unclear how women and those in the intersex community...would

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<sup>105</sup> Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 109.

<sup>106</sup> For instance, Kant, *Anthropologie in Pragmatischer Hinsicht*.

be fully redeemed, since their natures were not fully assumed by the incarnate Christ.”<sup>107</sup> Christ cannot be the New Humanity if the transformation and redemption of human nature occurs for some in other sources. Moreover, it begs the question as to what degree our differences cause this problem. If we are all different from one another in some way, do we not all need our own individual kind of salvation? Is the communion with the other for which we are created even possible if it is grounded in the sameness of essential features? Such a view leaves humanity *teleologically* fractured, or fragmented to put it into Jennings terms.<sup>108</sup> Each individual is trapped in their own subjective experience of humanity and, since we need to be essentially the same to have the kind of union and communion that Christ establishes, no such communion is possible. This view promises an eschatological humanity that is fractured and isolated, in which each person’s particularity separates them from the kind of communion for which we are created in the Image of Christ.

### **§3.3 Collapsed Humanity**

I raised in the section on Parmenidian-spherical humanity another way of reading Christ’s taking on essential features of the *DEF* variety in a way that allows him to heal those features in others. I will not say much on this solution’s problems, as they are dealt with more thoroughly in §III of this thesis. But this, too, is an untenable solution because it collapses all human particularity into the particularity of Christ. If Christ takes on common essential features *ABC* to become human as well as particular essential features *DEF* like his Jewishness or maleness, then we are able to say that Christ saves and transforms Jewishness and maleness as well as those features common and essential to all human persons. But we are not able to say that Christ saves and transforms those particular features which he does not assume. We are left either with the fractured humanity of Johnson in which non-Jewish and non-male persons must find their salvation elsewhere or we all must take on the particular features of Jesus in order to be saved. This is a rather strong reading of what it means to be “conformed to the Image of Christ,” but one which surprisingly has its supporters. While not thinking about union with Christ with particularity in mind, radical apocalyptic interpreters of Paul argue that union with Christ entails

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<sup>107</sup> McKirland, “Image of God and Divine Presence,” 292.

<sup>108</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, ch 1.

a cessation of our personal identity in union with Christ so that we all are subsumed into the particular person and identity of Christ.

I will go into further detail in §III concerning the arguments that radical apocalyptic interpreters make for this position and reasons why we should perhaps resist it, but simply from the problem of particularity this solution seems already unhelpful. The eschatological vision of humanity here is a humanity that is collapsed in the particular personhood of Christ and not a communion of every tribe, tongue, and nation united in worship of YHWH. And while radical apocalyptic interpreters of Paul would likely not want all of us to become first-century Jewish men, it is hard to get away from this as an entailment of all of us becoming Christ in the New Humanity. For us to take up Christ's identity in place of our own, we would need to take up those essential features that constitute his identity, both the essential *ABC* features and the essential *DEF* features.

Even before we get to the eschatological vision of humanity entailed by us all of having the same essential features of Christ's humanity (both *ABC* and *DEF*), we run into problems interpreting union with Christ in this way. Paul and the other early leaders of the Church expressly resisted the Judaizers' position that Gentile Christians needed to take up Jewish customs and religious rituals (more or less converting to the Jewish socio-religious identity) in order to join the body of Christ. Instead, Paul paints us a diverse picture of what the body of Christ should look like, with Jews and Gentiles united across borders of difference by their worship and love of God and their mutual love for one another. If Paul really thought that the entailment of his new identity in Christ was that every Christian had to become like Christ in both *ABC* and *DEF* respects, it seems unlikely that he would have argued for the diverse vision of *familia Dei* in the Church which he offers us. So while humanity is not meant to be pared down to the Parmenidian-spherical of its nature nor fractured by its particularity, neither is it intended to be collapsed into the particularity of Christ. Particularity, is doing something else with regard to those things that are essential to our being human.

#### §4

#### **Towards A New Vision in Theological Anthropology**

Unfortunately, the answers already on offer come up wanting in regards to their treatment of particularity and how it fits in to a Christological account of human nature. We require a

model of human being that maintains particularity at every level of existence, our creation with a particular *telos*, the distortion of that *telos* in sin, and the restoration of our *telos* in Christ. Solutions that essentialize particularity to the point of barrier-building leave most (if not all) of humanity without a saviour. Solutions that reduce particularity to accidental features that slough off of our humanity in the eschaton, either by collapsing all of humanity into the particularity of Christ or reducing humanity to Parmenidian spheres, leave us with an eschatological picture that looks nothing like our communal *telos* which Christ promises in his embodied revelation of the Triune God. These solutions are, in the words of McFarland, “dead ends in one respect because...they invariably entail the exclusion of significant categories of individuals on rather arbitrary grounds. But they are also dead ends because they tend more or less explicitly to measure human being in terms of conformity to some norm or standard—an approach that necessarily treats the differences between people as irrelevant to their identities as human beings.”<sup>109</sup> Such solutions leave us with an empty humanity lacking a robust sense of the other whom we might encounter. There is, in such solutions, no communion constituted by every tribe, tongue, and nation united in worship of God.

At the heart of the issue is a tension between the oneness and many-ness of humanity, between the unity of what all human beings have essentially in common and the diversity of our many differences. The problem of the one and the many, while ancient, requires a fresh look grounded in Christ’s revelation of divine and human natures. The metaphysical categories at play, as shown by the answers on offer, come up wanting. These categories of oneness and many-ness will need to be reconfigured in a way that can sustain the theological claims of Christ’s atoning work on behalf of humanity. It is to the nature of the atonement, then, that we must turn to make sense of nature, generally, and human nature, particularly, as it is revealed and transformed in Christ’s atoning work. In reconfiguring these categories, we might therefore offer a new picture of particularity and the role it plays in human nature defined and determined Christologically.

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<sup>109</sup> McFarland, *Difference and Identity*



## II

# The Many in Jesus Christ

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*When one of you makes a move, you all make a move. You live and you die with the consequences and the spoils.*

*-Sensei Kreese, Cobra Kai*

In §I, I offered a view of Christological anthropology in which the particular humanity of Christ is the ontological ground of all human persons. Christ reveals human persons to be essentially communal, having a *telos* of being in loving, self-giving communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. We are created first and foremost as persons in a way that images the distinctiveness of divine persons and we are intended to share in the kind of communion that they have. Within this view, there is a tension between the particularity of human persons and the universality of the New Humanity in Christ, made clear in Christ's particular humanity acting in the role of a universal human nature. After assessing several current proposals on the nature of particularity, it is clear that none are capable of answering the problem that particularity poses to such a Christological account of human nature because they rest on certain assumptions about the relationship between the one and the many. It is here, then, that the role of particularity is found on a Christological account of human nature.

This chapter seeks to resolve the tension between the particularity and universality of Christ's humanity through a careful reading of Christ's reconciling work in the atonement. Such a reading will provide a way forward for both identifying what particularity is in a Christological account of human nature and what role it is intended to play in our reconciled and redeemed humanity. To do this, I explore the following question: how is the particular humanity of Jesus Christ united with all human persons in the atonement? Because Christ's atoning work is a work of the one Christ in whom many human persons are united, it presents the best potential for making sense of this key tension between the particularity and universality of his humanity. This chapter begins by laying out further exegetical resources on the nature of the atonement in order to determine what sort of metaphysical categories can make sense of Christ's atoning work. What we shall find is that embedded in biblical accounts of Christ's atoning work is a unique conception of human nature, which I am calling Hebraic communalism.<sup>1</sup> Hebraic communalism

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<sup>1</sup> I would be remiss if I did not at this point regard James Barr's seminal work, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Therein, he criticizes approaches to biblical theology, like that of Torrance, which attempt to derive the mindset of a people directly from the structure of their language (33), use etymology to establish underlying theological structures to language (107), and often ignore the social and historical context of language and concepts. I have endeavoured, both above and in what follows, to avoid these errors while still speaking theologically about concepts in the Hebrew scriptures and their influence on New Testament authors. In this respect I consider my project to be following the work of Dru Johnson's *Biblical Philosophy*, who rather than treating language as a direct means to deriving a philosophical/theological structure, attempts to retrieve "philosophy as a way of being a people" through deep and critical engagement with the linguistic resources that Barr recommends. Following Johnson, my construal of Hebraic communalism and of personhood "hopes to avoid the word-root trap about which Barr is

stands in contrast to many modern philosophical constructions of the relationship between the particular and the universal which tend to favour one over the other. In showing the development of this Hebraic metaphysic in 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Jewish and Christian theological thought, I will reinterpret the relational aspects of the classical philosophical problem of the one and the many in light of this embedded view. Fortunately, recent work in social ontology and group agency provides a neat set of terms and concepts for re-conceptualizing the relevant metaphysical categories embedded in this problem in a decidedly theological way. This will give us a clear and concise understanding of the relationship between Christ and his people in the atonement, such that we may better understanding the universal one-ness and particular many-ness of human nature as it is in Christ.

## §5

### **The Particularity and Universality of Christ's Atoning Work**

The first step in answering this question of how the atonement unites the particular and universal in the human person of Jesus Christ is laying out the witness of the scriptures to the nature of atonement. Atonement, I will show, offers a unique way of relating the particular and universal in humanity. This conception of the particular and universal begins under Levitical Law and is then taken up in later witness to the atoning work of Christ to which earlier accounts of atonement point. By beginning in the Hebrew Bible, one can set the context for Christ's coming to dwell among humanity as the conceptual framework under which his atoning work was understood. As we see these Hebraic themes developed Christologically in the New Testament, their meaning and purpose will be made clear.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***§5.1 Old Testament Foundations of Christ's Atoning Work***

Christ's coming to dwell with humanity as a particular person did not occur in a conceptual vacuum. His person and work were prophesied and prepared for throughout God's

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concerned. But I will also push beyond Barr's limits to include the human and social body in reason" (7). In other words, Hebraic communalism is not an attempt to ascertain the meaning of "personhood" from a Hebrew lexicon, but to understand functionally how persons were understood through the historical and social context of the texts, the relationship between concepts and practices, *and* the proper use of linguistic tools.

<sup>2</sup> Barr's concerns about the stark distinction between Hebraic and Hellenistic thoughtforms and the theological unity of the Old and New Testaments looms large here. See, Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 8-10. Wary of these concerns, I am instead aiming to demonstrate the influence of Hebraic thought and language on Second-Temple Jewish authors who are nevertheless situated in their own contexts.

covenant history with the people of Israel. While this history makes proper sense only in light of Christ's self-revelation of God and humanity, it nonetheless provided the context for his revelatory work and a theological language by which to communicate who he is and what he is doing in the world. Christ's atoning work in the New Testament gives constant reference to the Hebrew scriptures and assumes some prior knowledge thereof. Thus, we will explore Christ's atoning work in light of this history.

### *§5.1a Atonement, Sacrifices, and Representation in the Old Testament*

In the Hebrew scriptures, the atonement was closely tied to sacrificial offerings and the associated rituals. These rituals served to cleanse or purify the community of sins. In atoning for sins, the community of Israel worked to maintain (and at times reconcile or restore) their covenant relationship with God by the gracious means of atonement which he gave to them in the Levitical Law.

There are generally considered to be two kinds of atonement. There is sacrificial atonement for unintentional and non-high-handed sins and there is divine atonement for high-handed sins. The latter can only be atoned for by God's gracious action towards sinful humanity.<sup>3</sup> The former kind pertains to human maintenance of the covenant relationship, while the latter depicts God, and God alone, acting to forgive and redeem a broken covenant. These high-handed sins (הַמְּזֵדָה), Jay Sklar argues, are those sins which refer to human rebellion against God, or blaspheming and rejecting the God of the covenant.<sup>4</sup> These sins directly contradict or undermine the covenant identity of Israel, and so can only be healed or atoned for by God, the establisher of the covenant. However, this atonement often involves the community taking responsibility for high-handed sins in divine punishment.<sup>5</sup> The pattern of correlation between the punishment and the sin, Patrick Miller argues, demonstrates the deeper purpose of divine punishment to bring about repentance and reconciliation through divine mercy.<sup>6</sup> This dynamic is shown in verses such as Exodus 34:6-7, where God promises mercy and forgiveness,

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<sup>3</sup> Sklar, "Sin and Atonement in the Pentateuch," 467-468.

<sup>4</sup> Sklar, "Sin and Atonement in the Pentateuch," 473-474.

<sup>5</sup> Sklar, "Sin and Atonement in the Pentateuch," 491. See also, Miller, *Sin and Judgement*, 134-137. Miller notes across a large swath of the Hebrew Bible how there is a pattern of correlation between God's punishments and the sins for which he is punishing.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgement*, 137.

but also promises to punish the guilty.<sup>7</sup> Oliver Crisp observes that this is God’s way of maintaining the covenant relationship with Israel by “placing limits on the actions of his people.”<sup>8</sup> In this kind of atonement, God is the agent, bringing about atonement through mercy and forgiveness as well as holding the people responsible through retribution.

The other aspect covers the human response to God’s covenant actions. It is through human sacrificial rituals that unintentional and non-high-handed sins are atoned for as a way for human agents to maintain their covenant relation to God. These means of atonement are still graciously provided for by God, but are enacted by the human community in covenant with God.<sup>9</sup> Sacrifices would be offered to atone for sins, with specific prescriptions in place which correlated different kinds of sacrifices for different sins. Similar to high-handed sins, atonement functions in these instances to purify the community, leading to reconciliation between God and humanity as well as fellow-humanity.<sup>10</sup> While the details of these rituals are fascinating, it is the representational aspect of these rituals, especially the Day of Atonement ritual, which warrants our attention. This ritual was conducted by a priest on behalf of the whole nation, so that the priest acted as a representative for all. Isabel Cranz observes, “atonement was a communal event that focused on the sanctuary and was facilitated by the ritual specialists residing there.”<sup>11</sup> The Day of Atonement ritual gave context and meaning to the individual sacrifices brought by families throughout the year. Cranz compares these individual rituals with the Šurpu rituals of neighbouring religious cults to get a clearer picture of ancient Israel’s religious context. From this comparison, she argues that individual rituals are communal as well as individual, often being conducted by the kings of foreign nations in representation of their people the same way an Israelite parent conducts these rituals for their household.<sup>12</sup> The sacrifices brought by individuals and individual family units are not entirely distinct from nor competitive with the Day of Atonement ritual. Rather, the Day of Atonement ritual provided a communal or corporate context of covenant maintenance within which individual sacrifices were understood. These individual rituals only make sense in the context of a whole community that is in right relation,

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<sup>7</sup> See also Num 11; 16:20-35, 47-49; 14:20-23; Jer 12:1-13.

<sup>8</sup> Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement*, 139.

<sup>9</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 125; Sklar, “Sin and Atonement in the Pentateuch,” 471.

<sup>10</sup> Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 184-186. Sklar establishes a connection between high-handed and unintentional or non-high-handed sins on the basis of the need for sacrifice to atone for both.

<sup>11</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 87.

i.e. communion, with God. The contextualization of individual atonement rituals by the Day of Atonement ritual is demonstrated in Leviticus 8, where the individual rituals are postponed until the communal ritual in Leviticus 16, suggesting that the communal must undergird the individual.<sup>13</sup> In this communal ritual, one person can come to represent the whole of Israel to God in the atonement. In this *one* individual's action of maintaining the covenant relationship, *all* are understood to be maintained in that relationship.

Themes of representation run throughout accounts of atonement in the Hebrew Bible. The priest represents the nation, the goat represents the sinfulness of the people being expelled from their midst, and God acts in a way that covers all persons in the covenant to restore them to relationship with him. Representation broadly construed is able to unify atonement for high-handed, non-high-handed, and unintentional sins. The relationship between individuals and groups thereby implied gives us a relatively unique view of human personhood: the individual, in all their relationships with God and others, is understood fully and properly only in the context of the group.

#### *§5.1b Corporate Solidarity and Human Persons*

The sense of representation we get from these texts relies heavily on a sense of corporate solidarity. Mark Boda argues that this is because, in the Hebraic context, individual persons are formed by the communities they are part of, establishing solidarity with the whole of the community including past generations.<sup>14</sup> This is basic to ancient Israel's self-understanding, specifically in regard to atonement for the community's sins.<sup>15</sup> Because sin and responsibility are understood in terms of personal agency, implicit in Boda's observation of corporate solidarity is a corporate understanding of individual human personhood. James Cone, in a similar line of thought, argues that "sin in the Biblical tradition...is only meaningful in the context of the Israelite community. Sin is not an abstract idea that defines ethical behavior for all and sundry. Rather it is a religious concept that defines the human condition as separated from the essence of

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<sup>13</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 119, 125.

<sup>14</sup> Boda, *Return to Me*, 155.

<sup>15</sup> Boda, "Prophets," 32. He here cites the Achan incident, Benjamin's association with Gibeah, and the generation that followed Josiah. This statement is made based on reflection of the prophets back on these events.

the community.”<sup>16</sup> It is the essence of being in community that defines the idealized (or *teleological*) human condition and human deviation from that ideal.

The interplay of the individual and community is further demonstrated in how atonement helps us to think about the nature of identity in covenant relationship. Israel’s corporate identity as God’s people was rooted in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. The particular identity of this relationship is set within the demands of this covenant, as when God proclaims: “for I am the Lord your God. Therefore, consecrate yourselves, being holy because I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with the swarming creatures that swarm on the earth. For I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore, you will be holy as I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45).<sup>17</sup> The purification of God’s people in atonement provides for the maintenance of covenant identity, an identity shared by the whole Israelite people.

Given that both atonement and the sins for which atonement takes place are communal, it follows that this identity of God’s people as a consecrated people is also communal. Cranz notes how “the communal aspect of Priestly atonement is also implicated by the element of disposal during the ritual of atonement in Lev 16, which finalized the expiatory process. During this ritual, the collective sins and pollution of all the Israelites were removed from the sanctuary and dispatched on a goat into the wilderness.”<sup>18</sup> Implicit, therefore, in the communal sense of atonement throughout the Hebrew Bible is an understanding of personal identity that is rooted in the identity of the community. An individual’s ability to identify themselves as one in relationship with YHWH relies in some sense on their belonging to this community and its corporate relationship to YHWH. The history of Israel’s covenant with God plays a significant role in the identity of individuals who are a part of that covenant community; individual identity in relation to God cannot be made sense of apart from the identity of the community. Cone puts it like this: “the key to the theological affirmation here is not only the verbal assent to the power of God to grant identity and liberation to an oppressed and humiliated people. Equally important is the verbal passion with which these affirmations are asserted and the physical response they elicit from the community in which the testimony is given.”<sup>19</sup> There is a group identity which

<sup>16</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 110.

<sup>17</sup> כִּי אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדְשְׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ אֶת־נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכָל־הַשָּׂרָץ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: הִנֵּה הַמַּעֲלָה אֲתֶכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהָזִית לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי:

<sup>18</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 21-22.

gives context to the identity of the individual. Atonement, therefore, conceptually presumes that the being of an individual cannot be understood in isolation from the being of the community.

§5.1c *Vicarious Priesthood*

On the other hand, the community cannot be abstracted from the agency and identity of individual persons. Throughout the history of ancient Israel, individuals are recognized as representing the community in matters of atonement and repentance, such as when the Levites represented the community in atonement rituals (Num 3:12) or in the royal (1 Kings 1:30; 3:7; 1 Chr 29:23; 2 Chr 26:1), military (2 Sam 17:25), and priestly successions (1 Kings 2:35; Jer 29:26). There are even instances where the entire nation is either condemned or commended based on the actions of a single individual (1 Kings 11:1-40; Josh 7; Ex 32:11-14).<sup>20</sup> Cranz observes in the priestly literature,

that *הקטאת* and *אשם* focus on the divine presence which was guarded and maintained by a centralized group of cultic officiants who had permanent ties to the sanctuary. Yet, nowhere in P do we get the sense that the sacrificial legislation was composed to supersede rites of individual atonement as we had encountered them in Šurpu. Instead it appears that the Priestly writers simply illustrated how their service at the sanctuary regulated the relationship between God and Israel. The Priestly writers were concerned with emphasizing the importance of sanctuary maintenance rather than challenging foreign ritual traditions, a fact that can also be observed for the purification of the *מצרע* in Lev 14.<sup>21</sup>

Cranz's observation highlights something odd about the communalism of the Hebrew Bible. It does not reduce the agency and identity of persons to a general spirit of the community; it is not anti-individualist. While this is a common trope, pitting communalism *against* individualism, many thinkers such as Simeon Zahl have argued that this trope is based on false assumptions,

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<sup>20</sup> Solomon's disobedience to God concerning his foreign wives and building places for the worship of foreign gods leads to God raising adversaries against Israel and dividing the kingdom. Achan keeps banned items from the conquest of Canaan, and God thus punishes all of Israel by removing his favor in battle. All Israel is called to atone for the sins of one. Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel, and God withholds divine wrath on behalf of the atoning actions of Moses and on behalf of his servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

<sup>21</sup> Cranz, *Atonement and Purification*, 125.



especially in Biblical scholarship.<sup>22</sup> Individuals within the community serve to represent the community to God, often *in virtue* of the particularity which individuates them, through certain actions such as the ritual sacrifices of the Day of Atonement. The priests act vicariously to enact the atonement rituals for the sake of the community's identity.<sup>23</sup> That priestly actions occur *because* of the particularity of these individuals (such as their Levitical lineage or role in the social fabric of Israel) and not in spite of their particularity is notable, as will be demonstrated below.

These atoning actions are reckoned on behalf of the community, not merely for the atonement of the individual representing the community. Ananda Geysler-Fouchè and Thomas Munengwa note the vicarious role of Levitical priests in atoning rituals, so that their actions count towards the covenant identity of the whole community.<sup>24</sup> Joel Kaminsky, likewise, argues that passages such as these serve to ratify the responsibility and agency of individual persons in a fundamentally corporate context.<sup>25</sup> It's not a question of reducing corporate agency to a collection of individual agencies; nor can the actions of the individual be chalked up to their collective context. Both the individual and the community play an active role in shaping one another. The priestly role of individuals in these passages implies that one person can represent many persons in their actions and identity. This is shown not only in the Levitical priesthood, but also in the representative role of Israelite kings and the role of Moses in representing the people to God.

Personal identity and individuality look rather different than the assumed categories posed to Christology in the particularity problem. Rather, the Hebraic construal of individual personhood, "(1) is deeply embedded, or engaged, in its social identity, (2) is comparatively decentered and undefined with respect to personal boundaries, (3) is relatively transparent, socialized, and embodied..., and (4) is 'authentic' precisely in its heteronomy, in its obedience to another and dependence upon another."<sup>26</sup> The many and the one are inextricably bound together in the Hebraic view of human persons.

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<sup>22</sup> Zahl, "Beyond the Critique of Soteriological Individualism."

<sup>23</sup> Geysler-Fouchè and Munengwa, "The Concept of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament," 5. This kind of representation is often called "vicarious," which, when found in the Hebrew Bible, refers to taking the place of another in a way that "can either be inclusive or exclusive, shared or substitutionary."

<sup>24</sup> Geysler-Fouchè and Munengwa, "The Concept of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament," 6.

<sup>25</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 184-186.

<sup>26</sup> Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology," 221.

The interdependence of corporate and individual identity does not disintegrate the particularity of these individuals, but rather it is precisely *because* of their particularity that they can serve in their vicarious roles that shape the identity of the community and other community members. In the examples given, the identity of the entire community of Israel is determined by the actions of individual persons who hold specific particularities within the communal framework. The priests must be Levites and descendants of Aaron, while the kings are a part of the Davidic lineage. Each of these have socially constructed particularity as well, so that Levites and royals hold certain social roles in Israelite society, not merely genetic or bodily features of particularity. The communalism of the Hebrew Bible is not a conceptual eradication of individuality or particularity, but a contextualization of particularity in communities of persons.

Herein lies a way forward for Christological anthropology. The view of personhood implicit in the Hebrew Bible's account of atonement *assumes* that the identity and agency of individuals depends in a non-reductive way on the identity and agency of the community. The identity of persons in the community of ancient Israel is constituted at least partially by the vicarious actions of the one priest who represents the community to God. The identity of the priest, in all their particularity, becomes a part of the identity of the many. Likewise, this representative identity can be reversed, so that the actions of many can come to determine the identity of individuals who then share in the responsibility for actions they did not themselves commit. While this does not close the loop on the particularity problem posed to Christological anthropology, it gives us a non-competitive way of conceiving of the personal categories of one and many, of individual and community.

### ***§5.2 New Testament Development of Christ's Atoning Work***

Because non-competition of community and individual identity and agency is intrinsic to the nature of atonement in ancient Israel, it comes to contextualize the early Christian understanding of Christ's atonement for humanity. The view of human persons as fundamentally socially-embedded beings implicit within the Hebrew Bible is made especially explicit in the Christological recapitulation of atonement in the Pauline corpus and in the Christology of Hebrews. These themes of representatives, corporate solidarity, and communal identity find their terminus in Christ, who gives ontological basis to their significance in theological anthropology.

§5.2a *The High Priest of Humanity in Hebrews*

The theme of a representative priest stands at the centre of the Christology of Hebrews. Recent work on Christ's role as the High Priest of humanity highlights the significance of Christ's bodily ascension. David Moffitt argues that the author of Hebrews, "stresses more emphatically than any other New Testament text that Jesus is currently the great high priest who now ministers for his people in the heavenly holy of holies."<sup>27</sup> Moffitt's work highlights the necessity of Christ's human bodily ascension in Hebrews for his role as the High Priest of all humanity. "Jesus' elevation to a status above the angels," writes Moffitt, "follows from the fact that when he ascended into heaven, he entered that realm *as a human being*... Only as a human being is he qualified to be elevated above the angels and to accede to the throne at God's right hand."<sup>28</sup> This, in Hebrews, is the basis for Christ's High Priesthood. Christ cannot serve as our great intercessor apart from his ascension in a resurrected human body. Moffitt further argues that Christ's death and resurrection serve to perfect his humanity so that "*after* Jesus was perfected...he became the source of everlasting salvation for all those who obey him, *being at that time* appointed by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek."<sup>29</sup> Christ's resurrected humanity, to which the author of Hebrews ascribes his "indestructible life," is a qualification for Christ's ascended work as High Priest.

This priesthood is unique, so that the representative work of Christ is not merely to represent the community in moral or ritual actions, but to represent our very humanity in its resurrected and redeemed *telos*. This is a development of the ancient Israelite understanding of priesthood. In Hebrews, Christ's High Priestly ministry is described in a way analogous to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament.<sup>30</sup> Similar to the Levitical priesthood, Christ's priesthood works to enact a particular identity before God on behalf of the many who are one in him. However, Christ's priesthood is of the order of Melchizedek, being accomplished not in virtue of his genealogy, but in virtue of having an indestructible human life. What he accomplishes on behalf of God's people is not only ritual actions for the sake of a ritual purity and renewed covenant identity, but a resurrected and ascended humanity, a New Humanity, which he now presents to God in the heavenly Holy of Holies.

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<sup>27</sup> Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 158.

<sup>28</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 159.

Through this development of the author's understanding of priestly ministry, human persons are not simply given a new moral status, but are constituted, at least partially, through relationship with God in Jesus Christ. T. F. Torrance has called what occurs in these covenantal relations between the priest, who is Christ, and the community, his people, "onto-relations." He writes, "the proper approach [to theological anthropology] would be one in which we consider things in terms of the actual relations in which they are found, relations which have to do with what they really are. These are being-constituting relations or 'onto-relations', as I call them."<sup>31</sup> He continues, "the relations which persons have with one another as persons are onto-relations, for they are person-constituting relations."<sup>32</sup> Onto-relations, then, are interpersonal relationships that are taken to be at least partially constitutive of a personal being; just as Father, Son, and Spirit are fundamentally three persons in relation, so too are human persons fundamentally persons related to other persons. Our relations to other persons, both divine and human, make us both who and what we are according to Torrance.<sup>33</sup> Because, as argued in the last chapter, personhood is the most fundamental category of human being, to be constituted as a human person is to be constituted as a human being.<sup>34</sup> This is because, Torrance argues, Christ's High Priestly ministry intensifies our understanding of covenant relationships from being merely identity-constituting to being-constituting.<sup>35</sup> Christ's assumption of and intercession for humanity brings together the categories of personhood and being because his ministry develops vicarious identity into vicarious being. Christ, therefore, represents the fullness of our human being in his atoning High Priesthood, not merely our moral identity before God. Christ's ascension as a resurrected human person indicates his representation of the very being of humanity because his resurrection and ascension in a human body is a prerequisite for his High Priestly ministry.

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<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> I have defended Torrance's onto-relational view of human nature elsewhere. See, Everhart, "One vs. the Many." Spatial limits prevent me from saying more about what it means to say or how it is that a person is constituted by their relations. This will be further explored in III, but future work will need to be done on onto-relational views of nature to better explain and defend this view. However, given that this view has a healthy constituent of defenders already, a full defence of onto-relationality can be left for other work. The above description will have to suffice for our purposes here as something of a metaphysical just-so story that will allow us to ask interesting questions of the metaphysics of human nature more generally.

<sup>34</sup> Deddo, "The Personal in the Onto-Relational," 143.

<sup>35</sup> Deddo, "The Personal in the Onto-Relational," 147.

Apart from this resurrected and glorified human body, we would not have a savior fit for the High Priesthood. What Moffitt highlights for us in Hebrews is not simply that Christ is bodily present with the Father, but that this constitutes a central feature of Hebrews' Christology. "The recognition of the importance of Jesus' glorified or perfected humanity in heaven explains the logic that unites the two foci around which the author's Christology is centered—the elevation of Jesus above the angels to the divine throne in heaven and the high-priestly service he renders there in God's presence."<sup>36</sup> Because, as Moffitt argues, Christ's High Priesthood is linked to the context of Yom Kippur sacrifices offered by Levitical high priests, his priesthood is concerned with the sanctification of holy space for God's dwelling.<sup>37</sup> In Hebrews, Christ sanctifies the heavenly Holy of Holies for the entrance of God's people in a way similar to the work of the Levitical priests in preparing a place for God's presence in which sacrifices are offered to God by his people. Sacrifices made for atonement are not primarily understood as suffering or dying to satisfy God, but rather the death of animals in sacrificial atonement rites is a part of the process of offering gifts to God.<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier, the primary purpose of this process is to sanctify the space in which God comes to dwell with his people. This has the two-fold effect of priests sanctifying themselves so that, in them, the community is presented as holy to God, and to sanctify the particular space in which God comes to dwell so that the community might be in his presence through their ministry. In this case, however, Christ himself is the sacrifice, so that what is offered to God is resurrected humanity more generally represented in the particular resurrected humanity of Christ. This is why the author of Hebrews sees this as an ongoing ministry of Christ at the right hand of the Father, and not as a finished work on the cross.<sup>39</sup> Humanity, in this atoning act of self-offering, is offered to God, being present with him through Christ in the heavenly Holy of Holies.<sup>40</sup>

There are two significant implications of this account of Christ's atoning work offered in Hebrews. First, there is a development of this theme of one representing the many in a priestly fashion. This is intensified in Hebrews, so that it is not merely in particular actions or corporate identity that Christ represents his people, but in their very being, so that resurrected human

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<sup>36</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> Moffitt, "Hebrews," 533.

<sup>38</sup> Gane, *Cult and Character*, 3-24.

<sup>39</sup> Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 170.

<sup>40</sup> Moffitt, "Hebrews," 535.

beings are brought into a true and ontological union with God through their shared identity with Christ.<sup>41</sup> This is not to the negation of Christ representing our identity to the Father, but rather an intensification so that our identity in Christ is also our being in Christ. What should be noted is the role particularity takes in Christ's atoning work. Christ is a High Priest of the order of Melchizedek and not a Levitical priest in virtue of his particularity. The author of Hebrews goes to great lengths to show the peculiarity of a priest from the tribe of Judah, a tribe specifically banned from having priests.<sup>42</sup> Because of the peculiarity of his priesthood, Christ can be a priest not according to genealogy, but according to his resurrected and perfected human life. Christ's human particularity, namely his genealogical particularity, is incredibly significant for his role as the heavenly High Priest. Despite the corporate identity and being of humanity that is given in onto-relation to Christ, his particularity is not eradicated by his resurrection, perfection, and ascension. Rather, it seems to be necessary for his ongoing High Priestly ministry.

This applies as well to our own humanity as it is grounded ontologically in Christ's and constituted in our relation to him as High Priest. Amy Peeler stresses Christ's identification as Son in relation to the Father as key to understanding our relation to God through Christ's High Priestly ministry.<sup>43</sup> As the incarnate Son of the Father, Christ is heir, through whom we are also made heirs. Peeler writes, "Jesus the Son of God becomes a son of man in order to bring God's sons and daughters into his household."<sup>44</sup> Thus, we become co-heirs with Christ in virtue of his High Priestly ministry of presenting a resurrected and perfected humanity to the Father.<sup>45</sup> Because Christ's relationship as an ascended human being to God is identified as familial, Peeler argues that our relationship to God through Christ's High Priesthood should be contextualized by the familial analogy and Christ's inheritance.<sup>46</sup> One notable characteristic of this analogy is that Christ's particularity as the one High Priest is retained in his ongoing work. He alone is the High Priest, whose Sonship establishes the inheritance of God's children. The implication of this for Christological anthropology is that our particularity as sons and daughters co-inheriting is also

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<sup>41</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 49. Peeler calls this work of Christ "relationship establishing."

<sup>42</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 201-208. Moffitt's argument implies that a priest according to genealogy would not hold the significance of Christ's heavenly priesthood. Christ's *heavenly* priesthood is argued for *on the basis* of this peculiarity.

<sup>43</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 66, 71-72. The reference to Psalm 8, argues Peeler, implies that this "takes place...precisely as a human being."

<sup>45</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 168.

<sup>46</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 115-118; 130-133.

maintained, as our inheritance is the New Humanity in Christ; we do not become High Priests as well, nor gain the particular peculiarity that qualifies Christ. In the same way that God's speech to the Son is relationship-establishing, "God's speech in the last days is delivered as a Father and, in these last days, God is speaking to the audience of the sermon, *the audience hears God speaking to them as a Father*."<sup>47</sup> God has particular relationships with his children through his firstborn, thus ratifying the significance of their particularity. Even though each particular relationship fits under the template of Christ's relationship to the Father, it is always in the context of otherness, which Peeler has elsewhere said is "the condition for the possibility of relationship."<sup>48</sup> Human particularity, therefore, not only persists in the High Priestly ministry of Christ for all human being, it is *essential* for its establishment.

Second, Christ's atoning work in the heavenly Holy of Holies is meant to mirror the earthly reality to which it is correlated. This is part and parcel to the apocalyptic cosmology of the author in which heavenly realities parallel earthly ones. Because of this parallel, earthly realities can be brought into the heavenly realm through glorification.<sup>49</sup> The sense we get from the Hebrew Bible of God's presence on earth being prepared for via priestly ministry is reflected in Christ's High Priestly ministry of preparing a heavenly space. There is a close relationship, therefore, between God's presence and unity with humanity and the ministry of the High Priest. The intensification of representation that occurs in the author's conception of the priesthood means that this occurs in Christ's human flesh for the sake of our own fleshly bodies. This will be significant for how we later make sense of the relationship between Christ's bodily presence in the heavenly Holy of Holies and his presence in his body, the Church, in the theology of Paul. For now, we will content ourselves to observe that in the Christology of Hebrews, Christ exercises a High Priestly ministry of creating a space for God's dwelling. In his onto-relational representation of humanity, Christ brings human persons into God's heavenly presence. If this is indeed reflected in Christ's earthly ministry, then Christ's union with his people on earth also

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<sup>47</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Peeler, "Human Teleology and Reconciliation." "I really try to stay away from words like harmony and I think we get ourselves into trouble when we think of unity as sameness and think of difference as opposition or antagonism and, therefore, also hierarchical. And I think our biggest problem is the fear of difference. Actually my very first book project was, in one sentence, arguing that otherness is the condition for the possibility of relation rather than precluding relation." See also, Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 176.

<sup>49</sup> Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 202-211.

warrants reflection, as it can further shed light on the relationship between the one and the many in Christ.

### §5.2b *Familia Dei in Christ in Pauline Literature*

No writer in the New Testament is more concerned with the earth-bound implications of Christ's atoning work than the Apostle Paul. Christ's atoning work as the High Priest of humanity and the unity that occurs among human persons in virtue of this atoning work are central to the Apostle Paul's ecclesiological ethics.

These claims are demonstrated in Paul's theology of the resurrection. The Apostle asserts that Christ must be raised bodily if we are to have a resurrection at all (1 Cor 15:12-19). This grounds, for Paul, the significance of Christ's humanity for our salvation. The salvific benefits of Christ's atoning work are accomplished in Christ's human flesh, and are thus received in union with Christ himself. T. F. Torrance writes, "that whole work of atonement, of establishing covenant communion, Christ fulfilled in himself, by incarnation and atonement. He fulfilled it in himself as a mediator, God and man in one person, acting from the side of God as God and from the side of man as man."<sup>50</sup> The humanity of Christ serves as the basis for Christ's mediation between humanity and God the Father (1 Tim 2:15). Paul thus writes, "for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, all the more (having been reconciled) will we be saved in his life. And not only is this the case, but also we celebrate in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we are now the recipients of reconciliation" (Rom 5:10-11).<sup>51</sup> This parallels what Paul says about Christ as the Second Adam: "for just as in Adam all die, then in the same way in Christ all are made alive"( 1 Cor 15:22).<sup>52</sup> For Paul, Christ is enacting a New Humanity in which death is overcome and human bodies are given new life. Christ accomplishes this as a human so that in our union with him, we might receive that which he has accomplished in himself. For this reason, Paul attests, "now [Christ] has reconciled you in the flesh of his body through death—presenting you all holy and blameless and beyond reproach

<sup>50</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες καταλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ· οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν.

<sup>52</sup> Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται.



before [the Father]” (Col 1:22).<sup>53</sup> The significance of Christ’s humanity for Paul’s theology is that our salvation is accomplished in Christ’s humanity. What Christ has done in his death and resurrection is salvific for humanity generally.

This is applied to our persons, for Paul, through our union with and participation in Christ. Participation is our partaking of those benefits that occur in Christ’s humanity, so that they apply to our own humanity in our union with Christ. Torrance describes this union as follows: “all who are redeemed through the atoning union embodied in him are made to share in his incarnational union with them through his birth, death and resurrection and are incorporated in to Christ by the power of his Holy Spirit.”<sup>54</sup> He continues that this “is not a figurative way of speaking of some external moral union between believing people and Jesus Christ, but an expression of the ontological reality of the Church congregate with Christ himself, who not only mediates reconciliation between man and God but constitutes and embodies it in his own divine-human Reality as Mediator.”<sup>55</sup> As noted in §I, Paul frequently uses the ἐν Χριστῷ idiom to signal this sort of vicariousness. In the act of accomplishing and self-giving, “Christ’s objective work...includes within itself the subjective realization of this work.”<sup>56</sup> He enacts in his own embodied life a redeemed humanity which is then given to us in a participation in his person. It thus follows that if what we require for our salvation is something accomplished in the human, embodied Christ, we must be united with the whole person of Christ and not his divinity only. We must be able to partake of those benefits in his humanity.

It is here that Paul points to the work of the Spirit in uniting us to Christ and to one another in Christ as his body. Even as Paul confesses that these salvific benefits are in Christ, he also states on several occasions that the gifts given in Christ are given through the Spirit’s indwelling (διὰ τὸ ἐνοικοῦν αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα ἐν ὑμῖν) (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:6).<sup>57</sup> The Spirit can do this precisely because the Holy Spirit is identified as the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9; Gal 3:5; Gal 4:6).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Νυνὶ...ἀποκατηλλάγητε ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου— παραστῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμόμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 66.

<sup>55</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, “Karl Barth’s Reading of Paul’s Union with Christ,” 456.

<sup>57</sup> These occasions include the new life, reconciliation, and resurrection that Paul attributes to being accomplished and received in participation in Christ.

<sup>58</sup> This is further reflected by other biblical authors, such as in Acts 1:4-5, Jhn 14:15-31, and 1 Jhn 4:13.

The Spirit is the one who unites us with one another and with Christ so that in him we might have these benefits: “for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13)<sup>59</sup> Our incorporation into the body of Christ is a work of the Spirit for Paul. Several Pauline scholars have noted the interconnectedness of these themes of incorporation into Christ and the unity brought about by the Spirit.<sup>60</sup> What the Spirit does is not simply uniting us with one another, but a unity with one another that occurs in the particular human body of Christ. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul writes, “the cornerstone being Jesus Christ himself, in whom the whole building is being joined together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:20b-22).<sup>61</sup> This dwelling for which we are built together is the body of Christ, the Church.

The connection that Paul makes between our unity with one another and our unity with Christ is grounded in his Pneumatology. I have already noted the corporate interpretation of verses like 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Ephesians 2:22, arguing for a single dwelling for God constituted by many individuals and implying an intimate connection between the unity of the body of Christ in the Spirit and the union with Christ by the Spirit.<sup>62</sup> Because of this, some scholars have advocated for a communal conception of atonement, in which Christ unites himself with and atones for this group called the Church, rather than uniting himself with and atoning for many individuals.<sup>63</sup> This coinheres well with the conception of a dwelling place for God offered in Hebrews, wherein Christ’s ongoing work in the heavenly Holy of Holies is a preparation and sanctification of an existing space, not simply of its constituent elements. Paul’s conception of the ecclesial body of Christ as an earthly dwelling place for Christ through his Spirit parallels this in the apocalyptic sense mentioned in the previous section. Our participation in Christ, on this account, would imply that human persons participate in Christ as the united ecclesial body of Christ, not merely as individuals. Our union with Christ is something we have together.

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<sup>59</sup> Καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 287, 409.; Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 153; Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 30, 169-170. Campbell, in particular, makes a connection between the locative and incorporative reading of the ἐν Χριστῷ motif in light of such passages.

<sup>61</sup> Ὁντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐν ᾧ πάντα οἰκοδομῆ συναρμολογουμένη αὖξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

<sup>62</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 99-100. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 183-185. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 413. Barth, *Ephesians*, 274. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 159. Perkins, *First Corinthians*, 75. Thielman and Fee particularly note the addition in early manuscripts of the η to emphasize this point and the common use of the definite noun despite a lack of definite article.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Thurow, “Communal Substitutionary Atonement,” 47-69.

These interwoven themes of union with Christ and one another by the Spirit are the basis for Paul's ecclesiological ethics. The thrust of many of Paul's letters to various churches is to advocate for unity amidst clashing particularities. Perhaps the most notable example is Paul's concern for Gentile inclusion by early Jewish Christians. In looking at adoption metaphors in Galatians and Romans, Erin Heim identifies the notion of particularity as a problem which Pauline ethics seek to address. She argues that Paul's use of adoption and sonship metaphors, "[enable] Paul to stress Israel's status as 'sons' without employing terms like πρωτότοχος (firstborn) or μονογενής (only child) that by nature would exclude others from sharing in these labels."<sup>64</sup> Paul is clearly concerned with unity amidst the distinctions brought about by human particularity. He does not want to allow Judaizers to hold themselves above Gentile converts. Paul does describe this particularity as a reality of the flesh (σάρξ) in places such as Galatians 4, and so one could be forgiven for thinking that particularity is left behind with our sinful human flesh in the resurrection.<sup>65</sup> Yet Paul elsewhere resists the dualistic option of relegating particularity to sinful human flesh.<sup>66</sup> He emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 15, as one example, that the resurrection is bodily, so that we cannot so easily separate our bodily particularity from our heavenly existence in the resurrection. Moreover, this seems to neglect the particularity of the Jewish people which Paul emphasizes in Romans 11.

Paul's theology resists the eradication of differences among members of Christ's body in the unity that the Spirit brings. Daniel Boyarin argues that Paul resists "a blindness to the particularity of Jewish difference which is itself part of a relentless penchant for allegorizing all 'difference' into a monovocal discourse."<sup>67</sup> This is part and parcel to Paul's eschatological vision for the *familia Dei*. Paul's familial or adoption metaphor, Heim argues, "hides those ethnic and religious boundaries that would inhibit some members from forming intimate bonds with members of different backgrounds from themselves by designating all members from all backgrounds with the same status of 'adopted son,' while maintaining that the unity this status

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<sup>64</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 296.

<sup>65</sup> See, Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, 92.

<sup>66</sup> Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 67. Boyarin argues that Paul is referencing physical descent and kinship (specifically Jewish identity) in his denigration of σάρξ, not of bodily realities. This is supported by Paul's emphasis on bodily resurrection and the way he construes the relationship between body and spirit in the letters to the Corinthian church.

<sup>67</sup> Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 224. This coinheres well with Jennings' warnings about supersessionism cited previously, warning that to supersede various particularities with the singular identity, "Christian," undermines the ecclesial vision of the New Testament for an empty colour-blindness: Jennings, *Christian Imagination*.

brings [overcomes], but does not eliminate, ethnic distinctions.’’<sup>68</sup> In Christ’s atoning for humanity, he unites himself with us and us with one another within a new communal identity in which we all share. The way that Paul depicts this new identity as existing in and transcending borders of particularity “implies the continuity of personhood and identity for individuals when they are transferred into a new *familia*...creating a unifying identity for the diverse members of Paul’s audience, while also affirming the presence of diversity.’’<sup>69</sup> Again, we see here a non-competitiveness of the oneness and many-ness of humanity in Christ. Identity and being in Christ does not supersede the other particular features of our identities.

Even though, it would seem, Christ’s atoning work for Paul is participated in corporately in the context of the ecclesial body of Christ, we nevertheless remain particular individuals united to one another. Neither the individuality (many-ness) nor the unity (oneness) of human personhood can be sacrificed to maintain this witness to Christ’s atoning work. If Christ’s atoning for humanity is how we become members of the New Humanity, our description of human personhood and human nature must reflect both of these elements in a non-competitive way.

### ***§5.3 Between the Individual and the Community in Christ***

For Christ to be, as previously argued, the ontological basis for all human being, the implied categories of human personhood found in the Hebrew Bible and intensified in the New Testament must be maintained. In particular, Christ’s union with and atonement for humanity must be for the community united as a single whole by the work of the Spirit. Because these categories find their origin in the accounts of atonement offered by ancient Israel’s covenant relations to God, I am calling this implied view of personhood *Hebraic communalism*. I say implied because, again recalling Barr’s concerns with biblical theology, we should remain cautious of attempts to draw fully-fledged theological concepts directly from the structures of biblical language and etymology. I am also using the term view here rather broadly; Hebraic communalism represents several important themes about how persons are functionally and conceptually treated in the various accounts of atonement represented in the Hebrew Bible and

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<sup>68</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 235-236, 247. What Heim means here by supersession is clearly distinct from what Jennings means. Jennings vision for supersession supplants all other features of identity, casting a homogenous vision of the body of Christ. This is what Heim is actively resisting.

<sup>69</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 247.

New Testament. I therefore define it below as a set of broad desiderata that represent these functional themes rather than as a closed set of propositions that entail a single view or model of personhood. That having been said, some views or models may better represent these desiderata than others, as this chapter will later argue.

On this approach to personhood, the particularity of individual persons is reified in the relation of the individual to others. Particularity is essential to the kind of representation that priests undertake on behalf of the community and the community's shaping of the identity and being of individuals. Because these categories are intensified ontologically in the New Testament, we need to be able to talk about the metaphysical oneness and many-ness of human nature in non-competitive ways. The commitments which our metaphysical categories of human nature need to be able to sustain can be summarized in the following desiderata:

- (1) Individuals are socially-embedded beings, so that personal identity is at least partially defined and determined by the shared social identities of the groups or communities in which individuals participate. The identities of social groups inhabit, in some way, individuals.
- (2) Identity, while grounded in embodiment and particularity, is fundamentally relational and relatively transparent with respect to the boundaries between persons. The definition and determination of an individual self, therefore, depends in some way on social relation to others and their particularity.
- (3) Identity and selfhood, especially as fulfilled in Christ's atoning for humanity, are revealed to be ontological categories so that what grounds our personal identity-in-relation also grounds our personal being-in-relation.
- (4) Our having particular identity (and therefore personal ontological) features does not undermine our belonging to identity-constituting (and thus ontology-constituting) groups, such as the group "humanity," nor does our belonging to such groups undermine particularity. Rather, particularity is in some way essential to the on-going formation and identity-constitution of the group.

More will need to be said on these desiderata below, but this will give us enough of a framework to begin thinking about what sort of metaphysical claims we need to make about human nature and the role of oneness and many-ness therein.

Hebraic communalism views human persons as individual beings who are socially embedded in significant ways. §I established that we are beings created for communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. It seems that the communities that form as a result of the fundamental relationality of human beings have something to do with individual identity and being. Individual human persons cannot be understood properly when abstracted from the groups in which they are participants, including the broad group humanity. Neither can the particularity of individual human persons be said to be erased by participation in groups. To provide a way forward for Christological anthropology past the particularity problem, a view of human personhood and its metaphysical categories must be constructed which can uphold both the individuality (particularity) and group-belonging (universality) of human persons in an ontological way.

## §6

### **Between The One and the Many**

Throughout the witness of the scriptures to Christ's atoning work, a unique relationship becomes evident between the individual person and the community of which the person is a part. This relationship is an answer to an age-old question about human nature, but not an answer which fits neatly into the categories previously offered by Western philosophy. The problem of the one and the many, simply put, is the tension between the unity and diversity of objects in the world. For our purposes, there is both a sense in which we talk about oneness or unity of this group we call humanity and a sense in which we think of this group as being composed of many different individuals who are diverse and distinct from one another. The tension arises from attempts to make sense of the relationship between the unity of objects like human persons and their diversity. What, in other words, comprises the universality of human nature and how does the particularity of those with a human nature figure into that universality? As is clear from the existing answers to the particularity problem assessed in §I of this thesis, approaches to the question of the one and the many tend to pit the one against the many, attempting to prioritize one over the other.<sup>70</sup> This philosophical discord is nowhere more prevalent, nor more damaging,

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<sup>70</sup> Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many*, 36-40. Gunton argues that modernity, in attempting to lead a revolt of the many against the one, often does the opposite: the one suppresses the many leading to a loss of the particular in modern thought.

than when the one and the many are pitted against one another in understanding human personhood.

Recent exchanges on the human nature of Christ will help to frame this false duality and chart a way forward for Hebraic communalism past the particularity problem. In a recent article, Christopher Woznicki offers an abstractist interpretation of T. F. Torrance's Christological anthropology. In response, Oliver Crisp has offered his own concretist account. It is significant, for our purposes, that both have chosen the Christological anthropology of T. F. Torrance, not only because he has been cited in this thesis but also because at the heart of their debate lies the bi-principled emphasis on the universality and particularity of Christ's humanity that stands at the centre of the particularity problem. For Torrance, as well as for the Christological anthropology proposed by this thesis, Christ's particular human nature is the new universal in which all other human persons participate for their humanity. By framing the debate in this way, we will either find a helpful set of metaphysical categories for uniting Christ's universality and particularity from among the usual suspects, or else lay out the categories for Christological revision.

### ***§6.1 The Problem of the Hebraic Communalism for Western Theology***

The articles by Woznicki and Crisp are part and parcel of a long-standing conflict between concretists and abstractists about human nature. These approaches are representative of two major philosophical influences on western theology and their attempts to answer the problem of the one and the many. There is a fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter, Raphael, titled "The School of Athens." Among the figures shown, an elderly Plato and a youthful Aristotle are seen talking together. Plato gestures upward, referencing his theory of abstract forms. Aristotle, in contrast, gestures horizontally below his waist to indicate his theory of concrete particulars. Their conflict has coloured debates about human nature for centuries. While Woznicki appeals to something like Platonic abstract universals to explain Torrance's Christological anthropology,<sup>71</sup> Crisp makes use of Aristotelian concrete particulars.<sup>72</sup> These two philosophical influences are in the background of the apparent conflict between the particular and universal in Christological anthropology. What Woznicki and Crisp do uniquely is ask age

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<sup>71</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 124.

<sup>72</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 15-16.

old questions about human nature on the Christological basis of Christ being both particular and universal in his humanity.

Both Woznicki and Crisp take on Torrance's bi-principled understanding of Christ's humanity, aiming to account for its universality and particularity. What happens in the atonement is a particular union between Christ's divine and human natures that is efficacious for all humanity. In the hypostatic union of Christ's divinity and humanity, all human beings are brought into union with the Triune God.

### §6.1a *Human Nature as a Woznickian Universal Abstract*<sup>73</sup>

Woznicki's account of Christ's humanity, and therefore of humanity generally, appeals to the idea of human nature as an abstract universal. Plato's concept of abstract universals, which he calls forms, functions thusly: concrete particulars participate in abstract universals, thus causing these particulars to be *what* they are.<sup>74</sup> For example, a blue shirt, the sky, and the Caribbean ocean are all blue. There must, therefore, be some abstract universal, "blue," which defines and determines the blueness of these objects. It is in virtue of participating in the universal, "blue" that these objects are rightfully described as blue. With respect to human nature, this means that there is some abstract thing called human nature in which human persons participate. Abstract nature is typically described as a property or set of properties. A being is necessarily human if they have these properties and every being that has these properties is human.<sup>75</sup> Abstract objects cannot be acted upon as particulars can. Universals simply are what they are; everything else is what it is in virtue of universals. Christ, on Woznicki's account, is the exception to this rule. What is instantiated in Christ transforms universal human nature. In Woznicki's own words, "Christ instantiates an abstract universal human nature and the rest of humanity participates in an abstract universal human nature."<sup>76</sup> What Woznicki means by instantiation is not what is typically meant by instantiation, but rather "a specific relation in which an abstract universal is related to a particular object in such a way that the abstract universal nature itself can be affected by other causes when the particular object it is instantiated

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<sup>73</sup> Many thanks to Christopher Woznicki for his clarifying comments on this section.

<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 78c10-79a5. While more complicated than this, for the purposes of assessing Woznicki's work as a philosophical descendant of Plato and its implications for theological anthropology, this definition will suffice. See, Harte, "Plato's Metaphysics," 207-208.

<sup>75</sup> Arcadi, "Kryptic or Cryptic?," 233.

<sup>76</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 105.



in is subject to causes acting upon it.”<sup>77</sup> Christ has a special relation to universal human nature which changes it through changes enacted on himself.

The function of an abstract human nature is to be the ontological basis for all concrete particulars called human. It is this human nature that makes all human persons decisively human and determines what that means. Any changes which occur to this universal nature would entail a change in the humanity of all human persons. One philosopher puts it like this, “forms appear to perform the central *function* that is typically adduced as the reason for introducing a universal, the performance of which has some claim to be constitutive of being a universal.”<sup>78</sup> Woznicki’s account functionally captures the universality of Christ’s humanity. What happens in Christ’s atoning work to transform and sanctify his particular humanity has the effect of transforming and sanctifying the humanity of other persons. Thus, the *function* of an abstract human nature is carried out according to Christ’s particular human nature.

The account he offers, however, is metaphysically odd. Christ is a particular that influences the universal through Woznickian instantiation and other human persons are influenced by universal human nature. Changes to Christ’s humanity only indirectly influence the humanity of others. There are three problems with this. For one, Crisp argues that Woznickian instantiation “means that Christ’s human nature is significantly unlike every other human nature.”<sup>79</sup> Christ’s ontological relationship to human nature, therefore, is qualitatively different from our own. While there are certainly ways that we would want to say that Christ has a different relationship to human nature, such as his having created human nature, the kind of solidarity he has with humanity would seem to demand that he does not have one kind of human nature qualitatively different from our kind of nature. While we participate in abstract human nature, Christ instantiates it. This entails a significant gap between the kind of humanity Christ has and our own, thus calling into question the very universality which Woznicki’s account provides a metaphysical basis for. Crisp therefore argues, “the very notion of vicarious humanity...ends up creating a significant ontological gulf between Christ’s humanity and ours.”<sup>80</sup> This pits the one-ness of humanity in Christ against the many-ness of humanity in

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<sup>77</sup> Woznicki, “The One and the Many,” 123.

<sup>78</sup> Harte, “Plato’s Metaphysics,” 208-209. Emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> Crisp, “T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation,” 16.

<sup>80</sup> Crisp, “T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation,” 16.

Christ, undermining the non-competitiveness of the universal and particular in Christ's High Priesthood.

Second, in pitting universality and particularity against one another, particularity is lost. Because an abstract universal can only capture those properties essential to all human persons, Christ's particularity is lost. Any changes to Christ's particularity in his Woznickian instantiation of humanity would have no effect on human nature. This becomes a problem when compared with the particularity that qualifies Christ for the High Priesthood. If Christ's property, "of the order of Melchizedek," cannot be shared or have any effect on these common essential properties, then there is no indestructible life in which we may participate in the heavenly Holy of Holies. Our participation in the particular narrative of Christ, his particular birth, death, and resurrection, is impossible on this account. It is only the universal and essential properties that Christ can effect. Gunton similarly argues that on such abstract notions of human nature, "the person is pared down to abstract qualities supposedly held in common. Our personal distinctiveness, our human particularity and individuality, so manifest both from what appears and from our bodily constitution, become irrelevant to who and what we truly are."<sup>81</sup> Woznicki's conception sacrifices the particularity of Christ's humanity (or at least its significance) in order to maintain its universality.

The third problem is that participation in Christ's humanity is, on Woznicki's account, indirect.<sup>82</sup> This misses a crucial aspect of atonement. The relationship in atonement between priestly individuals and the communities which they represent is such that community identity before God is changed by and contingent on the particular actions and identity of its priestly representative. The community does not participate in some third thing, but in the actions and identity of priestly representatives. That this is intensified in Paul's use of the ἐν Χριστῷ idiom only compounds the problem. We do not participate in an abstract human nature which is determined by Christ, but in Christ himself. There is not some image of God external to Christ in virtue of which he is human. Christ *is* the Image. To put this in the language of the concretist-abstractist debate, a concrete particular serves in the *function* of the abstract nature rather than an

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<sup>81</sup> Gunton, *The Three, The One, and The Many*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 105.

abstract object.<sup>83</sup> The abstractist view must further sacrifice Christ's particularity as priest of humanity in order to maintain his universality.

In Woznicki's own words, he wants to emphatically "affirm the fact that the sanctification of humanity occurs *in* Christ's human nature, not just that Christ's sanctification of human nature affects other parts of humanity."<sup>84</sup> Yet this is precisely what Woznickian abstract universals and Woznickian instantiation get us. Christ's particular humanity affects some general human nature outside of himself. While we have the generality or universality of Christ's humanity on this account, this transformation of human nature only occurs *in virtue* of Christ's sanctifying his own human nature and not *in* his own human nature in the ontological way demanded by Hebraic communalism.

#### §6.1a Human Nature as a Crispy Concrete Particular

Crisp, on the other hand, depicts Christ's humanity as a concrete particular, a view of natures attributed to Aristotle. Aristotle rejected his teacher's notion of abstract forms, arguing that particular subjects are the basis for reality with each particular being identical with its essence.<sup>85</sup> Returning to our example of the shirt, the Caribbean ocean, and the sky, rather than describing these as participating in the universal, "blue," Aristotle would say that "blueness" is derived from these particulars. It is a quality shared by these particulars rather than being that which causes these particulars to have that quality. In other words, we can only know what "blue" truly is by looking at all the blue objects and deriving from them a helpful concept of blueness.

To frame concretism in the terms of human nature, Arcadi writes, "a nature is a concrete particular instance of a certain kind that endows its possessor with properties and capacities." Whatever properties we might think essential to human nature, a concretist believes that Christ obtains these properties in virtue of assuming a particular human nature, in this case the human nature called Jesus of Nazareth. Plantinga argues that what Christ "assumed was a human nature, a specific human being."<sup>86</sup> In the incarnation, "a concrete-nature view is one that states that

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<sup>83</sup> Woznicki rejects abstract particular natures for capturing the particularity and universality of Christ's humanity, as it qualitatively divides Christ's nature from ours: "The One and the Many," 117-119. As such, it will not be addressed at length.

<sup>84</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 118-119.

<sup>85</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1032b1-2 Z6.

<sup>86</sup> Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," 183-184.

Christ's human nature is a concrete particular, perhaps a human body, but, traditionally, a human body and human soul distinct from the Word."<sup>87</sup> Christ the divine Logos assumes this human body and soul, and thus becomes fully human.

In terms of Christological anthropology, Crisp argues that "Christ's vicarious act on our behalf is all about Christ taking on a particular human nature that is qualitatively similar to our own, sharing the same limitations."<sup>88</sup> In his response to Woznicki, Crisp observes that the concretist view of Christ's humanity forces one to deny the universality of Christ's humanity in just the way that Woznicki applies it.<sup>89</sup> Crisp elsewhere argues at length against this understanding of Christ's human nature and its implications for the *an-enhypostasia*.<sup>90</sup> That Christ must be particular in the same way that we are particular, implies that at least some ontological value is placed on particularity in atonement.

This squares well with one of the principles we see operative in Hebraic communalism and its development in the New Testament. Christ is a particular being who acts and wills and is acted upon as an individual. He is able to do so, more importantly, in and through all the particularity that defines his High Priestly actions. The particularity of priests, such as Levitical lineage, serves as the basis for their representative role. Similarly, Christ's particularity as a Jew, the son of David, the Lion of Judah, and so on, serve as his qualifications to represent humanity to God.<sup>91</sup> Not only does Christ's humanity need to be particular, but his particularity is essential to the universality of his High Priestly role.

However, Crisp's concretism is not without problems. Most obvious is the lack of a mechanism for the universality of Christ. In terms of how the one comes to stand for the many in atonement, Crisp punts to being "a mystesian" about "the specific kind of action by means of which Christ brings about human reconciliation with God."<sup>92</sup> Certainly it is important that we recognize some level of mystery in the nature of the atonement. But Crisp's lack of mechanism indicates a deeper problem for his account. His account affirms a *kind* of universality to Christ's humanity, but one stripped of significance. The universality of Christ's humanity speaks only to

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<sup>87</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 16.

<sup>89</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 16.

<sup>90</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 88.

<sup>91</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 16-17; 22.

<sup>92</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 22.

Christ being qualitatively like us.<sup>93</sup> It does not cover what happens to Christ's human nature happening to every human nature. It reaches the finish line, establishing Christ's commonality with us as qualitative, and then sits down before establishing how that commonality does anything to transform other human natures.

This allows Crisp to be flexible about what it is that we have union with in our union with Christ. What Crisp thinks is happening with respect to universality regards Christ's person, not the human nature *per se*. Because Crisp sees the need for our union with the divine life of God to heal the brokenness of humanity, his account emphasizes *theosis*. He writes, "Christ's vicarious work in the incarnation and atonement are penultimate actions that are directed toward the ultimate goal of participation in the divine life...the hypostatic union is the means by which we are placed in a position to be able to participate in the divine life."<sup>94</sup> For Crisp, our participation seems to be in Christ's divinity only, not his humanity. Rather, his humanity commits some vicarious actions in virtue of which we may participate in the divine life; it is *merely* an instrument by which we are united to the divine life. This is helpful in one respect, namely that it captures the same aim of the Christological anthropology forwarded by this thesis: our union with Christ is ultimately a participation in the relations of Father and Spirit with the Son. But it falls short of the mark precisely because it avoids Christ's humanity beyond its instrumental use, to say nothing of our participation in his human particularity. We do not gain the benefits of restored humanity in Christ's humanity, but in his divinity.

This is demonstrated in his laptop analogy: a group of laptops are broken and require an update from the internet in order to be fixed. These laptops are automatically fixed once an engineer re-establishes the link between the hub and internet. "This is akin," he avers, to "the way in which the vicarious humanity of Christ is both particular, that is, having to do with the assumption of a particular human nature (like the hub), and yet also general, having to do with the transformation of all human natures as a consequence of what happens to the particular human nature of Christ (via the hardwired link to the internet)."<sup>95</sup> This clarifies Crisp's reading: the universality is only in that which each human nature is connected to, Christ's divinity, not his humanity. This is further illustrated in Crisp's recent Saint Andrean account of the Eucharist, in

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<sup>93</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 16-17.

<sup>94</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 23.

<sup>95</sup> Crisp, "T. F. Torrance on Theosis and Universal Salvation," 20.

which Christ's presence in the elements is another hypostatic union between his divinity and the bread and wine.<sup>96</sup> On this account of the Eucharist, we are not united to the humanity of Christ, but to Christ's divinity via the bread and wine body. To whatever degree we might participate in Christ's humanity on Crisp's account, it is instrumentalized, serving only the end of our participation in the divine life which alone heals our humanity. If the humanity of Christ were more central to his account of participation, we would expect that it would also play a central role in his account of the Eucharist rather than having that role replaced by the bread body and wine body. Christ's humanity appears on this account to be one instrument among many instead of the ontological foundation of all humanity (as this thesis claims). Christ's humanity is not universal in the way which is demanded by the nature of the atonement.

Crisp's reading of Torrance and the Christological anthropology it offers requires Christ's humanity only as a means for our participation in the divine life, and not as that particular humanity in which ours is transformed. For Torrance, as well as for the view of atonement and personhood argued previously, humanity participates in and is healed by Christ's sanctification of his own humanity in union with his divinity. It is his whole person, including his humanity, that is particular and universal. This highlights a significant pitfall for Crisp's concretism. Christ's humanity is so particular that his sanctification and transformation of his own humanity do nothing for us directly, but only allow his divinity to do something for us. Similar to Woznicki's account, it is not the particular humanity of Christ in which we participate to be human in Christ, but something else (in this case his divinity). While this reading has the advantage of our participation being in the person of Christ, it is still not in the particular humanity of Christ sanctified for us.

### **§6.2 *Hebraic Communalism and Particularity***

What is notable about Crisp's and Woznicki's responses to Torrance's criteria about the nature of Christ's humanity, namely the universality and particularity of Christ's humanity, is that both select one criterion in lieu of the other under the assumption that both cannot be affirmed altogether. Christ is either the oneness of humanity or simply another among the many with a significant impact on the many. His humanity is either universal or it is particular. As I have shown through theological exegesis of atonement in the Christian canon of scripture, the

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<sup>96</sup> Crisp, *Freedom, Redemption, and Communion*, 178.

Judeo-Christian view of human particularity and relationality need not hold such metaphysical competition between the one and the many. Rather, the many are comprehended in the one without losing their many-ness and the one at least partially constitutes the identity and being of the many. This oneness can (and usually does) occur in a single individual *in virtue* of their particularity as opposed to occurring *despite* the individual's particularity. Something about their particularity informs their effect on others. This culminates ultimately in the oneness of Christ's High Priestly role. The universality of the one necessitates the particularity by which we can affirm the many-ness of a given group. The one and the many are intrinsically bound up together, such that to reduce one to the other would be to deny the very being of humanity as beings for communion.

Hebraic communalism may therefore offer some nuance to at least one of these metaphysical accounts of Christ's human nature, allowing us to rethink the relationship between the one and the many in which the identities and being of the individual and the community are intrinsically and intimately bound together and individuals are essentially socially-situated. This can provide us with a more robust answer to the particularity problem because it unites the universal and the particular instead of pitting them against one another conceptually. As it is developed in light of Christ's fulfilment of God's promises under the old covenant, we are pointed continually to the language of community, of the social groups of persons to which an individual belongs, to account for human identity. The place of the individual person within the community is thus the primary way of understanding the relationship between the particular and the universal in human nature.

Let us take stock once more of the criteria for the Hebraic communalism that shapes the view of persons and their relation to the community. To construct, or in this case re-construct, metaphysical categories which might sustain the account of atonement witnessed in scripture and the view of personhood implied therein, said categories must be able to sustain the following desiderata:

- (1) Individuals are socially-embedded beings, so that personal identity is at least partially defined and determined by the shared social identities of the groups or communities in which individuals participate. The identities of social groups inhabit, in some way, individuals.

- (2) Identity, while grounded in embodiment and particularity, is fundamentally relational and relatively transparent with respect to the boundaries between persons. The definition and determination of an individual self, therefore, depends in some way on social relation to others and their particularity.
- (3) Identity and selfhood, especially as fulfilled in Christ's atoning for humanity, are revealed to be ontological categories so that what grounds our personal identity-in-relation also grounds our personal being-in-relation.
- (4) Our having particular identity (and therefore personal ontological) features does not undermine our belonging to identity-constituting (and thus ontology-constituting) groups, such as the group "humanity," nor does our belonging to such groups undermine particularity. Rather, particularity is in some way essential to the on-going formation and identity-constitution of the group.

Hebraic communalism, as explicated here, involves principally the metaphysical relationship between individuals and groups, that is to say the many and the one. So whatever metaphysic we employ must characterize this relationship. In doing so, there are a few initial observations to be underscored from this list.

First, we need to grant some sort of metaphysical status to groups. We need to be *realists* about groups as entities which can have identities and influence our behaviour as individual agents. This is clear from desiderata (1), (3), and (4). The assertion of (1) requires that we have some entity to which we can refer for the shared social identity. We might call this entity a group or community. To underscore this point, (3) connects our identity with our ontology; to espouse a group's shared identity is to imply some ontology of that group. (4), furthermore, elucidates that we cannot reduce a shared identity to the sum total of individual member identities, nor reduce the group's ontology to the sum total of individual beings. The same desiderata can be used in the other direction to affirm realism about individuals: we cannot reduce individuals to a mere instantiation or instance of a group entity, even a universal called "humanity." How this works is a question for metaphysical categories, but we ought to take on only those categories which can sustain these points.

Second, we must be capable of espousing a universal, like human nature, that describes the group as a whole and yet includes essential features not held in common by all members. This we derive from (1) and (4). From (1), we know that something about the constitution of



discreet selves relies on belonging to groups. From (4) we know that group formation and belonging do not rule out human particularity and difference. The individuality of human persons is not undermined by our belonging to groups, nor does it rule out the contribution of group belonging on individuality. Moreover, Hebraic communalism's development in Paul places a premium on difference, so that continued relation to the other is a valuable feature of ongoing group formation and development. This indicates not only that particular features that are not universal within a group must be possible, but that they might even be essential for the formation of such a group.

Finally, from (2) and (3) we get a reiteration of our ontological dependence on social relation to others from §I. From (2), we get a salient dependence on social relation to other individuals for the constitution of personal identity. From (3) we again get the affirmation of identity as tracking, in some way, our ontology. Our social dependence on other particular individuals is thus essential to the constitution of our being as persons-in-relation. Again, the emphasis here *teleologically* is relation to those of particularities which we do not share, rather than mere relation based in commonality. We therefore require metaphysical categories that ground our particularity and essence in belonging to and relation with others that do not share everything particular about us. Unity and universality, in other words, cannot be grounded in pure commonality.

In this respect, there are some helpful features of Crisp's concretism that could be critically reconfigured to account for the universality of Christ's particular humanity. Crisp's account of Christ's human nature presents the best candidate for reconfiguration precisely because of the emphasis it places on Christ's particularity. Crisp's emphasis on particularity being an essential part of the human nature that Christ assumes, for instance, is well substantiated within the view of Hebraic communalism thus far offered. In our relational dependence on others, we remain distinguishable selves. However, the particularity of Christ's humanity is the barrier to its universality on Crisp's account; Christ does not share what he is as a particular human person with any other human. In other words, it is not clear how what is particular about Christ's humanity transforms all of humanity universally. So while we ought to agree with Crisp that Christ's human nature (and thus human nature more generally) is concrete, particularity must have the potential for universalization. Christ as the particular person, the Son

of the Father, must be able to share that particularity with me in some way for me to be able to call God, “Father,” as the author of Hebrews does.

The account of Christ’s human nature thus far offered assumes that Christ can share with us that which he has in his particular relationship to Father and Spirit. We need to account for what happens metaphysically in interpersonal relationships so that the particular being-constituting content of one relationship can contribute to or be shared in another being-constituting relationship which does not have that particularity in and of itself. If each relationship partially constitutes an individual person, then we require some account of how Christ, or any human person for that matter, can share part of their relational constitution with other persons.

### ***§6.3 The Social Ontology of Hebraic Communalism***

Recent work in group ontology can help to account for these metaphysical claims and chart a way forward for Hebraic communalism because it can offer a metaphysic of social grouping and explain the relationship between the being and identity of a group and the being and identity of individual group members. In doing so, we may present a new way of relating the oneness of a group like humanity to its many-ness in a non-competitive way that can sustain the above desiderata of Hebraic communalism. If a new way of relating the one and the many is available in which neither needs to be sacrificed, then we can depict a role for particularity in human nature which need not challenge the unity of human nature in Christ.

Group identity and being is, according to Hebraic communalism, important for understanding individual identity and being. We may therefore take realism about group entities as potentially plausible and helpful for sustaining the Hebraic communalism of atonement. But this means that we need to establish what the relationship between a group entity and an individual group member is like. If we are going to be realists about groups, in other words, we need to do so in a way that is distinguishable from the being and identity of individual group members. If group identity and being is simply the sum of individual members, we don’t have an authentic group entity but only the *appearance* of one. On the other hand, if individual identity is reducible to group identity, so that an individual is nothing more than an instance of the group to which they belong, we have no good reason for talking about the role of particularity in groups

like humanity. Such a conception of group entities and their relationship to individuals must be able to sustain realism and authenticity about both individuals and groups.

Stephanie Collins has defended realism about groups and individuals, as well as the authenticity of each category's identity and agency under the right conditions.<sup>97</sup> By situating this distinction in agency, Collins is able to show the influence that a group can have on individual behaviour in virtue of the group's behaviour grounded in shared identity. While Collins' distinction is not reducible to agency, decisions made by agents can demonstrate the salient influence of a group's shared identity on individuals. She defends the distinction and interdependence of these entities by arguing that a 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.<sup>98</sup>

Collectives are distinct from other types of groups, which Collins calls combinations and coalitions, in that collectives are capable of agency in a way distinguishable from the sum of individual agents comprising them. Collectives can be agents insofar as their individual members are committed to the particular unanimity rule which coordinates the intentions and actions of individuals into a combined group agent.<sup>99</sup> This group agent is not reducible to the sum total of individual group members. In order for a group to be able to have agency in this way, they require some kind of a centralized decision making process by which the group can ascertain collective goals and coordinate the actions and intentions of its members to make decisions in order to meet those goals. Such coordination is a part of the collective's identity, defining it in

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<sup>97</sup> By authenticity, I mean that group agency is not merely the appearance of agency but said group is actually an agent.

<sup>98</sup> Collins, *Group Duties*, 169.

<sup>99</sup> Collins, *Group Duties*, 157-159.

relation to its group members and their particular roles or positions within that group.<sup>100</sup> Because corporate agency arises from an aspect of shared group identity, we can make parallel (albeit weaker) claims about non-agential groups as well; that which defines the group's identity contributes something to the identities of its individual members in a non-reductive way.

Collins' delineation offers a way of affirming realism about the ontology of both groups and individuals by drawing a distinction between the decisions of collective groups and individuals while maintaining that such groups arise from the coordination of individuals. Group and individual identity are inseparable and incomprehensible from one another, thus affirming (1) and, in some respects, (3), though our affirmation of (3) comes primarily from Hebraic communalism itself. Because individuals and groups are not reducible to one another and are distinguished by the content of their agency, (4) can be affirmed as well.<sup>101</sup>

Collins's delineation allows us to affirm realism about groups and individuals, but this does not necessarily tell us how individuals and groups relate to one another. Nor does it explain the relationship between individuals who share a group identity. This is essential to capture for moving Hebraic communalism forward as a metaphysical account of personhood that can make sense of particularity. We not only need to show that groups are real and play a salient role in individual identity and agency, but we need to show what that role does to change individual identity and agency and contribute to the relationships between individuals within those groups. In particular, we need to make sense of how both groups and individuals have identities and essences that contribute to and define one another without reducing one to the other. How is it that my identity and being can be distinguishably and uniquely mine while still relying on others in community for its constitution? How is it that the identity and being of the community is constituted by the relations of its members without being reducible to the sum of its parts?

To answer these questions, we must turn to Philip Pettit's seminal work on social ontology. In *The Common Mind*, Pettit argues that the collapse of the individual into the group or the conceptual isolation of individuals from one another are rooted in the false assumption that social ontology is binary: we are either social and defined absolutely by our participation in

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<sup>100</sup> Collins, *Group Duties*, 95.

<sup>101</sup> Insofar as we might think that group agency arises from the coordination of the group and such coordination is a part of that group's identity, we can make parallel claims about combinations and coalitions. The shared identities of these groups, like the agency arising from collective coordination, are distinct from individual members' identities in content.

collectives or we are autonomous individuals. Instead, he proposes a distinction between what he calls the vertical and horizontal issues of group ontology as a means of explicating the role that social relationship plays in individual agency and identity. What Pettit hopes to achieve with this distinction is an affirmation of realism about individuals and their agency without needing to sacrifice the salient role of social relationships in the constitution of those individuals.

The vertical issue is the relation of individual identity to group identity and the horizontal issue is the relation between individuals and their identities. Pettit offers the following distinction of these issues: the vertical issue concerns individualism versus collectivism while the horizontal issue concerns atomism versus holism. He writes, “individualists deny and collectivists maintain that the status ascribed to individual agents in our intentional psychology is compromised by aggregate social regularities. Atomists deny and holists maintain that individual agents non-causally depend on their social relations with one another for some of their distinctive capacities.”<sup>102</sup> An individualist, in other words, holds that we retain individual agency and identity in our belonging to groups, while collectivism understands the identity and agency of the group to either override or undermine the individuality of group members. A holist would hold that we depend on one another for our agency and identity, but in a way that can retain a distinctive sense of individual identity and agency. The atomist, by contrast, isolates the self conceptually as entirely autonomous: any action or identification that cannot be entirely reduced to me is not of my agency or identity.

Pettit’s individualism seems to be more helpful for Hebraic communalism than collectivism because it rejects the reduction of individual agency and identity to that of the group.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Pettit’s account of holism helpfully maintains that persons depend on relationships to one another in groups for individual agential capacities in non-causal ways.<sup>104</sup> In other words, we are individual thinking and acting agents, but we are not *merely* individual agents. We are, according to Hebraic communalism, socially-situated beings, acting in shared identity and agency with others around us in ways that influence and even make possible our own individual agency. Many studies have shown that the cognitive and psychological capacities

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<sup>102</sup> Pettit, *The Common Mind*, 118.

<sup>103</sup> Pettit, *The Common Mind*, 117-119.

<sup>104</sup> Pettit, *The Common Mind*, 175-193.

in virtue of which we act as individual agents are formed in relating to others.<sup>105</sup> Much of what we think contributes to our agency and identity, such as intentional mental states, cognition, and rationality, is derived from our thinking, acting, and attending to things together in groups, thus forming a basis of shared knowledge, agency, and attention from which individual agency arises. Because identity and agency depend on the holistic sharing of these mental states, what others share with me in relationship can become *contingently* a part of my own identity and agency. I still depend on them for that part of who I am, but I am nevertheless transformed or changed in my own personal identity through what they share with me. Holism gets us at (2), providing a basis for the union between individuals who do not share particularities and how those differences can be formative.

Taking together Collins' realism about group agency and identity, her distinction between individuals and collectives, and Pettit's individualism and holism, we now have metaphysical categories which can maintain the claims of Hebraic communalism. Groups, on this social ontology, provide the context in which interpersonal, non-causal dependence on others can contribute to the formation of individual selves. The group, in this sense, acts as a conceptual hinge between persons; persons can share relational aspects of themselves with others in groups without their identity being collapsed into that of the group or of the other member. The relationship between the two persons can tell us what is being shared; the nature of the group can tell us about what kind of relationship those two persons can have. For example, the priest and another member of the community have a particular relationship in which the priest offers sacrifices on that members' behalf. But the priest only has this relationship with that individual in virtue of their particular role within the covenant community structure; the group's covenant identity defines and determines the relationship between these two individuals in which they contribute something to one another's identity formation. The ways that one person contributes to the other in a group is by sharing knowledge, attention and particular relational features of their identity, in this case moral identity before God within covenant community.

This points towards a reflection of the fundamental communion that grounds human ontology. Again, we would do well to heed McCall's warning about too quickly proffering a

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<sup>105</sup> Sipova and Carpenter, "A New Look at Joint Attention and Common Knowledge," 260-274. Pettit is emphatic here the this dependence is non-causal, avoiding a collapse of the agency of the dependent into that of the dependee; if my reliance on another for my identity and agency were causal, it would be entirely their identity and agency at work and I would cease to be a distinguishable individual in that particular act: *The Common Mind*, 175.

human version of *perichoresis*.<sup>106</sup> Despite this warning, however, McCall still holds to a possibility of human reflection of the intra-Trinitarian relationship, so long as it does not over-extend its claims.<sup>107</sup> We may point to humans sharing in the being of one another, so long as it is qualitatively distinguished from intra-Trinitarian union for the reasons that McCall offers. Perhaps the easiest way around this potential stumbling block is to distinguish between human social ontology and divine social ontology. The sharing of being that occurs in divine person-constituting communion is so absolute, that the three persons are in fact one being. Humans, however, remain distinguishable; our participation in groups does not collapse our identity or essence into the being of that group. Even what is shared with us, to some extent, remains contingent in a way distinct from that which we share of ourselves with others. More will be said on this in §III of this thesis, but it is helpful here to point towards the metaphysics of relational human ontology as reflecting the sharing of being that occurs in God's self in a way that does not (1) collapse the identities and being of human persons and (2) does not distinguish the divine essence of the divine persons, for there is only one God.

Appealing to this ontology of groups offers us a way of describing how parts of relational being can be shared between distinct persons without appealing to the “mysterian” of the atonement or abstract human nature in ways that undermine either the universality or particularity of Christ's human nature. In union with Christ, Christ shares the content of his particular network of interpersonal onto-relations with the group, humanity. His particular network and ours remain distinct, yet it would be true to say that we are participating in his humanity by participating in his relationships, specifically his relationship with his Father enacted in humanly-embodied ways. In participation, we can have a reconciled human relation to the divine, so that our humanity is restored to right relation with God, one another, and the rest of creation.

Taking this development of onto-relational and Hebraic-communal Christological anthropology, we can modify Crisp's Torrancean concretism to avoid pitfalls of his view while gaining the benefits of Woznicki's Torrancean abstractism. The divine Word's assumption of a concrete human nature is the assumption of a particular set of human interpersonal relationships, including a particular body through which to participate in those relations. In this description of

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<sup>106</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 226-227.

<sup>107</sup> McCall, *Which Trinity, Whose Monotheism?*, 173-174.

assumption, we can easily identify the ways in which Christ's humanity is a concrete particular. He participates in his *particular* set of relationships and acts in the world out of that particular relational nexus and its bodily capacities. He is an individual network of relationships (including all the necessary bodily capacities to relate in human ways) and acts as an individual agent within those relationships. This does not negate his Trinitarian network of relations in which he existed before assuming human ones, but rather he is a divine and human persons, relating to persons in both divine and particular human ways.<sup>108</sup> This is sufficient for the particularity criteria.

Moreover, Christ is particular in a way that does not make Christ's human nature qualitatively different from our own. Christ's human nature, like every human nature, consists of relationships to other persons participated in bodily, and his human nature does not have some unique ontology in virtue of which it can cause change in other human natures. Rather, all human natures can share the relational content of one relationship with another in groups. This onto-relational account of human nature avoids the main pitfall of Woznicki's account by upholding Christ's particularity and its significance in a way that does not set an ontological or qualitative gulf between his human nature and our own. His human nature functions in qualitatively similar ways to ours, sharing his relational being in humanly-enacted relationships with other human persons.

This account also improves on Crisp's, in which the universality of Christ's humanity is lacking in two respects. First, Crisp's account only seems to hold to the universality of Christ's divinity. On an onto-relational account of Christ's humanity, our union with Christ includes a union with both his divinity and humanity. Christ shares with all of humanity that which he has in himself as the divine Second Person of the Trinity as well as his reconciled and redeemed humanity. Secondly, Crisp's interpretation is unnecessarily mysterious about the mechanism of our participation in the divine life through the incarnation. On an onto-relational and Hebraic communal account of Christ's humanity, his relational human nature *is* the mechanism of our participation in the divine. It is not as if Christ does something which allows us to directly participate in his divinity external to his humanity, but rather we participate in his humanity via onto-relations, those inter-personal relations which are being-constituting. This means that, in

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<sup>108</sup> More perhaps could be said, but spatial limits prevent further exploration. This, I take it, is important to defending the onto-relational view of human nature defended earlier in this chapter.



relationship with Christ, he transforms our natures by transforming our relationships with God and one another through his own human relationships. The mechanism for Christ to share his humanity and its relation to the divine with us is built into the relational nature of humanity.

To fully illustrate this modification, let us revise Crisp's laptop analogy. On Crisp's analogy, Christ is a wireless hub which, when reconnected to the internet by an engineer, allows computers to update and automatically self-repair. Instead, my account understands Christ's humanity as another computer (we might argue that this is a better analogy, for hubs and computers are qualitatively different). Now Christ has a certain relationship to his Father in virtue of his divinity. Let us say that the Christ laptop is properly connected to the internet because it is in the network group, 'Trinity.' When Wi-Fi is run through a network group, a computer must be in that group to have network access. However, a little-known function of most laptops is that they can be used as a wi-fi hotspot, creating a network through which other computers can share their network access. The Christ laptop is not unique in this way, but it is unique in its access to the Trinity network group. Thus, the Christ laptop could run the particular function which creates a network for the other laptops to join. When a hotspot is created and the hotspot computer chooses to share access to Trinity's internet connection, all connected computers gain the network access necessary to update and repair faults. It is in being connected to the network that the laptops are repaired, though they require the ongoing connection to the Christ laptop through the hotspot function in order to continue to have internet access and repair future faults.

This analogy is noticeably different than Crisp's. Whereas Crisp's analogy has each laptop connect to the internet (Christ's divinity) directly, in this analogy the network runs through a network group, and so a member of that group needs to share the network connection with non-members. Thus, we require union with Christ's laptop (humanity) in order to have access to his internet connection (divinity). Moreover, the laptops in Crisp's analogy would no longer require a Christ laptop after the engineer has used said laptop to fix the hub's internet connection. Instead, the group of laptops requires on-going connection to the Christ laptop in order to have internet access. Finally, because this happens in a group on a shared network, there is some sense in which the laptops connected to the Christ laptop are also connected to one another and to other devices that are used by the Trinity network group (let us call those other

devices, the rest of creation). Our participation in Christ's humanity leads to restored communion with God *and* one another *and* creation in the body of Christ.

## §7

### **The Many in Christ**

Hebraic communalism, as a unique answer to the problem of the one and the many, offers a way forward in the quest for a sustainable account of human particularity in Christological anthropology. Human beings, created essentially for communion with God, one another, and creation, are created with particularity for the purpose of that communion. In the atonement, Christ gathers a group around him, the *communio Dei*, in which such a communion is possible by the power of the Spirit. Far from threatening the oneness of universal humanity, particularity provides the possibility for it. As John Zizioulas puts it, "humans affirm their personal existence in the context of communion. It offers them the possibility of being fully themselves without being slaves to themselves, and it makes each one fully capable of saying 'I', but always in relation to 'you' and 'us', which is to say it helps humans to lose themselves as individuals and to become persons."<sup>109</sup> Universality is constituted, on the metaphysical view offered, not by only those features held in common but by shared identity formed through relationships between differences. To be a group in this way *requires* differences which we may share with one another and which may form and re-form the identity of the group and its members. Shared identity provides the basis for this group's unity, but differences are necessarily included in the definition of the group, as they contribute to its formation. What we get here is an intense sense of belonging to one another and belonging together. This is both an affirmation of holism and of a real collective, humanity, that grounds individual activity in the fashion of individualism. These metaphysical categories provide for the possibility of a universality of human nature in Christ that includes both his particularity and ours. These particularities, and how they define and determine our identities as personal beings, can be shared in a human reflection of God's inner life of *perichoresis*. In the human version of *perichoresis*, which is itself a participation in the divine *perichoresis* of Father, Son, and Spirit, the persons who share their beings with others remain distinct ontologically from those with whom they share themselves. How those particularities interact, what the content of that sharing is, and how these beings remain distinct

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<sup>109</sup> Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 35.

now become the key questions for understanding Christological anthropology and the nature of human particularity. But because these metaphysical categories are reframed in such a way that the many-ness of humanity in Christ is not a threat to the oneness of humanity in Christ, we may turn in §III to explicating the nature and content of our oneness and the role of our many-ness therein.

### III

## The One in Jesus Christ

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*“You see, there’s a fundamental connection between seeming and being. Every Fae child knows this, but you mortals never seem to see. We understand how dangerous a mask can be. We all become what we pretend to be.”* Chronicler relaxed a bit, sensing familiar ground. *“That’s basic psychology. You dress a beggar in fine clothes, people treat him like a noble, and he lives up to their expectations.”* *“That’s only the smallest piece of it,”* Bast said. *“The truth is deeper than that...It’s like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story... You meet a girl: shy, unassuming. If you tell her she’s beautiful, she’ll think you’re sweet, but she won’t believe you. She knows that beauty lies in your beholding...And sometimes that’s enough...But there’s a better way. You show her she is beautiful. You make mirrors of your eyes, prayers of your hands against her body. It is hard, very hard, but when she truly believes you...Suddenly the story she tells herself in her own head changes. She transforms. She isn’t seen as beautiful. She is beautiful, seen.”*

- Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*

§I of this thesis presented a Christological anthropology in which Christ is the one in whom all humanity finds its being and meaning and that our union with Christ implies union with one another and creation. I then outlined the problem that particularity poses to this view. §II of this thesis established that the nature of Christ's atonement demonstrates a non-competitive relationship between the universality and particularity of Christ's humanity. It is in virtue of his particularity that Christ is the one in whom all human persons find their being, such that Christ's particularity defines how he transforms and heals humanity in its universality. This is a very different account of human nature than we are usually offered called Hebraic communalism, which implies a view of human personhood as relational beings that are at least partially constituted by relation to other persons through non-reductive participation in social groups. I developed this view to argue that, as relational beings, human persons *perichoretically* share aspects of their personal being with others in interpersonal relationship in order to constitute and be constituted by those relationships. In §II, we identified this sharing with a theological kind of holism; to be who we are requires a non-causal dependence on and belonging to others in community.

§III will thus explore how social groupings help us to think more clearly about the theological holism of personal identity and ontology as it is rooted in Christ. The constitution of selves in relation to others in groups is an important claim for this thesis, as it grounds the unity of the universality and particularity of humanity in Christ. But it also raises important questions. For instance, the claim from §II that human beings share particular aspects of ourselves with others in being-constituting ways that do not collapse the being of the sharer and receiver is not yet metaphysically clear. And yet it seems important that we think clearly about this sharing of particularity across borders of difference if we are to answer the particularity problem with a Christologically informed account of what particularity is and what role it plays in our being human in Christ. If Christ shares his *filial* relation to the Father with all of humanity (and if this is fundamental to Christ's particular identity), how is it that we do not cease to be ourselves and become Christ? Is a oneness that can sustain the ongoing existence of particularity destined to collapse all human beings into the identity and being of Christ?

This cuts to the heart of recent debates about the nature of union with Christ, specifically whether persons continue to be themselves in this union or whether their identity is subsumed

into Christ's.<sup>1</sup> In the §I, I called this solution to the particularity problem “collapsed humanity,” because all human beings become metaphysically identical to Christ in virtue of their sharing in his identity. This is an important problem facing Christological anthropologies which see persons as having a new identity and a renewed being constituted in union with Christ. This chapter will give an account of how human beings have a holistic and perichoretic union with the incarnate Christ, such that we come to have a new shared identity in Christ and have, as Paul says, “the mind of Christ” without ceasing to be distinguishable individuals (1 Cor 2:16). If we do not negate the significance of particularity, flattening our sense of human ontology to those essential properties commonly held by all, how does our sharing in Christ's being not result in our being subsumed into him? How do we *remain* particular in our own ways while still sharing in the particular humanity of Christ?

## §8

### **Approaching Oneness in Christ**

One promising approach to this theological puzzle is to deepen our understanding of the psychological processes involved in social interactions. Because social psychology studies the ways that human beings relate to one another, it has much to offer our understanding of our relation to the human Christ without competing with theological understandings of those relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Now one who has followed the Christological methodology of this thesis in approaching the human creature may become nervous at this point. After all, shouldn't we be focusing on Christology rather than turning to the sciences? It bears repeating the clarification of Christological anthropology offered in §I.1.2. First, the priority of Christology in our understanding of the human creature is *theological* in its methodology, meaning that it is not claiming to be a methodological approach for, say, biological or evolutionary or sociological or psychological accounts of the human creature, but instead it is only claiming Christological

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<sup>1</sup> McCall, “Crucified With Christ.”

<sup>2</sup> For example, Jeeves, *Emergence of Personhood*. One way this could be described is as a multi-level model. On such a model, theology another level of explanation in addition to biological or psychological explanations, providing a *telos* or purpose for these processes. See, Fang, “Multilevel Modeling and the Explanatory Autonomy of Psychology,” 177; O'Malley, Brigandt, Love, Crawford, Gilbert, Knight, Mitchell, and Rohwer, “Multilevel Research Strategies and Biological Systems.”

priority in theological accounts of the human creature that attempt to explain the nature of humanity as made in the image of God. Second, while the claims of Christological anthropology are theological, they nevertheless are made about an object, the human creature, which is also studied by biologists, psychologists, and other scientists. Without losing the theological emphasis on Christology, we may still draw upon these sources to help us answer theological questions about the human creature.<sup>3</sup> The Christological emphasis of this methodology is not lost, to my lights, so long as Christology guides our theological-anthropological questions asked of the sciences.

Social psychology and the cognitive science of group behaviour are just such sources which may help us to answer our distinctively theological questions without compromising the Christological methodology of this project. In the formation of social identity, we develop particular selves in relation to the social groups in which we participate. This is called Social Identity Approach (SIA), a combination of two families of psychological theories: Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT).<sup>4</sup> One way these processes are described is through “joint attention.” Despite debates on the specific function and means of joint attention, it is broadly agreed that, “in joint attention we focus on things together with others... Thus, joint attention allows us to share experiences about the world with others, to coordinate our thoughts and behaviors, and to cooperate successfully with others.”<sup>5</sup> This describes group members holistically sharing things like knowledge, intentions, and actions while remaining distinguishable agents.<sup>6</sup>

Many theologians and biblical scholars have appealed to joint attention to describe aspects of human personhood, specifically how personal knowledge of others is acquired in relationship.<sup>7</sup> However, joint attention in these uses, draws almost exclusively from developmental psychology and describes only the formation of selves in person-to-person relationships. This is rather myopic. This emphasis on joint attention could be improved in two

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<sup>3</sup> See, Perry and Leidenhag, *Science-Engaged Theology*.

<sup>4</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 45.

<sup>5</sup> Sipsova and Carpenter, “A New Look at Joint Attention and Common Knowledge,” 260.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of these applications of joint attention, see Gómez, “Second Person Intentional Relations and the Evolution of Social Understanding,”; Scaife and Bruner, “The Capacity for Joint Visual Attention in the Infant,” 265-266; Reddy, “Omitting the Second Person in Social Understanding.”

<sup>7</sup> See, Eastman, “Knowing and Being Known,”; Eastman, *Paul and the Person*; Stump, “Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal,” 29-53; Stump, *Atonement*; Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*.

ways. First, the study of joint attention in theology would benefit from a broadening of its usage beyond developmental psychology. While developmental psychology has a lot to offer theological inquiry on joint attention, it has thus far been used as an absolute paradigm for all human life. Joint attention, by contrast, has many uses across different sub-disciplines of psychology; to reduce the sociality of our faculties to early years of development undersells the significance of our sociality throughout our lives.

Second, because joint attention is significant beyond just the developmental stages of human life, theological appropriation of joint attention can benefit from group psychology. The already prominent usage of this concept could be broadened to include social group contexts. How group dynamics and behaviour contribute to the social formation of selves can give us a fuller picture of human sociality than relationships between individuals can on its own in line with the intuitions of Hebraic communalism. Joint attention in the context of group dynamics can be used to depict the sharing of mental states among group members, in this case the body of Christ, and how this relates to the formation of personal identity<sup>8</sup> in union with Christ. Understanding personal identity as bound up in group-forming social relationships allows us to describe group members as sharing certain mental states in virtue of group participation. In the sharing of mental states, I can offer an account of personal identity in which each human person is an individual and distinguishable agent, yet their personal identity overlaps with others. Because this sense of identity corresponds to the relational being of humans, we can use the language of joint attention and group psychology to describe the holistic sharing of being, the human reflection of *perichoresis*, to describe relational human nature.

## §9

### **Christological Anthropology and the Ontological Problem of Numerical Identity**

How is it, then, that what happens to Christ's particular humanity happens to ours without collapsing our particular humanity ontologically into his? If Christ assumes our humanity and

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<sup>8</sup> This understanding of identity is drawn from the psychological literature engaged here and is not to be confused with personal identity as used in philosophical discussions in reference to the conditions for persistence over time. This psychological understanding *assumes* persistence over time. In other words, the sense in which my interpersonal relations to others change my identity does not compromise the continuity of the self across time and change. I am still me even as I grow and change the ways in which I am distinguishable.



shares his own with us, in what ways is our humanity bound up in his vicarious humanity and in what ways are they distinguishable? Because this problem that identity poses to our account of Christological anthropology threatens to collapse our personal identity into Christ's numerical identity, I am calling this the *ontological* problem of numerical identity.

### **§9.1 I and Thou: The Identity Problem for Onto-Relational Christological Anthropology**

The sharing of being implied by the communal Christological anthropology I have offered, and for our purposes here the sharing of identity and mind, is precisely where this identity problem arises for Christological anthropology. If personal identity is shared, am I as a member of the *communio Dei* now indistinguishable from Christ since I share in his identity? If I have his mind, is my agency identical to Christ's? In the social-ontological terms previously offered, this would be to go beyond the non-causal dependence of holism to a *causal* dependence of all Christians upon Christ's agency. Some Pauline scholars seem to think that this is the case. One passage commonly interpreted in this way is Galatians 2:19-20. In it Paul claims that he has died and now it is Christ who lives in him.<sup>9</sup> Some apocalyptic interpreters of Paul have taken this to mean a cessation of the existence of the "I" (ἐγώ), so that all become the single person of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Beverly Gaventa, for instance, has argued vehemently that, for Paul, identity in Christ is "singular in that it is all-consuming: there is no more."<sup>11</sup> The sharing of identity and mind on this account is so absolute, that we cease to be distinguishable individuals. We lose that I-Thou-ness of relational anthropology and simply become "I" in Christ.<sup>12</sup> This further falls prey to McCall's warning against over-extending human accounts of *perichoresis*, as argued in the previous §II.

Yet this reading of Paul is not obviously true, nor do we need to commit our reading of human *perichoresis* to it. In fact, many including McCall have pushed back convincingly on this interpretation, showing how Paul readily recognizes individuals as distinct from Christ and one another despite sharing in Christ's identity. As Susan Eastman puts it in her work on Paul's view of persons, "the power of God [in union with Christ] works in his life without obliterating his

<sup>9</sup> Ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός.

<sup>10</sup> See, Campbell, *The Deliverance of God*, 848; Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 237-241; Barclay, "Paul's Story," 143. This is similar to a problem raised by J. T. Turner, who argues that abrupt transformation entails a cessation of being: Turner, "Purgatory Puzzles."

<sup>11</sup> Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel Revisited," 195.

<sup>12</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.2, 42.

‘self’...the power of God frees Paul to be an agent, an acting subject.”<sup>13</sup> McCall raises several concerns with reading Paul as claiming a cessation of his identity. He demonstrates not only how Paul consistently treats believers as individual agents, but also problematizes thinking of our agency, which is sometimes sinful, as being conflated with the agency of Christ.<sup>14</sup> If our identity and being is collapsed into Christ, then every sin we commit as individuals is rightly attributed to the sinless saviour. Instead, McCall proposes that we think of a *transformation* of Paul’s “I” that comes about through interpersonal relation to Christ’s “Thou.”

If McCall’s assessment is correct, then these more radical apocalyptic interpreters have conflated the conditions for numerical identity, the sense in which I am the same subject across time and change, with the descriptive psychological sense of identity we are using here and its reference to relational personal being. If these interpreters are correct, then any change in a person’s interpersonal relationships, any new relationships, and the breaking off of any relationships would so fundamentally change the being of the person that they would cease to be themselves and become a whole new being distinct from their prior self. Yet there is no reason to think on a relational human ontology that a change in my being entails that I am a completely new and distinguishable being.<sup>15</sup> Said another way, the “I” prior to my union with Christ is the same “I” which is now in union with Christ even as Christ transforms that “I” into his image. The Gospel becomes a rather empty proclamation if Christ does not save me, but only a better version of me. Rather, the fact of numerical identity is assumed in reference to relational being, even as that being and its particularity changes over time. The mere fact that there are subjects which relate to one another assumes the kind of continuity which McCall’s account of union with Christ demands.

Yet there is another problem that arises from this conflation more closely related to our questions here. Not only does this conflation call into question the continuity of Paul’s selfhood before and after union with Christ, but it seems to conflate Christ’s identity (and therefore personal being) with Paul’s identity (and therefore personal being). To account for the relational sharing of being and how it corresponds to sharing new identity in Christ, we must also be able to maintain the kind of ontological distinction consistent with numerical identity when describing

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<sup>13</sup> Eastman, *Recovering Paul’s Mother Tongue*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> McCall, “Crucified With Christ,” 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, *Faith and the Self*, 264-265.

this sharing in the being of others. This conflation of persons in the radical apocalyptic interpretation of Paul is the identity problem I would like to address. How does the “I” share in the “Thou” without becoming “Thou?”

One way that many theologians have attempted to answer this question of the sharing of identity and mind is by drawing on recent accounts of joint attention and second-personal knowing of others in union.<sup>16</sup> The theological appropriations of joint attention are well rehearsed and defended, and so I will only summarize them briefly for the purposes relevant to this part of the thesis. On Stump’s account, for instance, the unitive love between persons “is reciprocal, and requires mutual closeness.”<sup>17</sup> By sharing in close second-personal presence made possible by joint attention, persons can empathetically share second-personal knowledge of one another, so that “one person has within herself something of the mind of the other.”<sup>18</sup> The kind of knowing these accounts aim at is the knowledge of persons, often called interpersonal knowledge or second-personal knowledge. This is different from what we might call first-personal knowledge, my own subjective perspective rooted in my particularity, and third-personal knowledge, which is typically associated with propositional knowledge. So when I share something of my particular self with another, I am sharing my first-personal knowledge with them, which they receive as second-personal. This distinguishes to some extent a particular aspect of my identity which I have in virtue of my own identity and a particular aspect of someone else’s identity that is shared with me in the human version of *perichoresis*. This is the sort of knowledge at play in personal identity by which we can distinguish one person from another: “for mature subjects, interpersonal knowledge typically brings with it some knowledge-who by which the known person can be individuated.”<sup>19</sup> When persons mutually attend to one another in joint attention, they can read one another’s mental states through the sharing of interpersonal knowledge.

Stump uses this to describe union with Christ, so that Christ can take on our mental states on the cross in the cry of dereliction and we can take on Christ’s mental states in the reconciliation of our minds through atonement.<sup>20</sup> McCall helpfully summarizes this use of joint

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<sup>16</sup> See, Eastman, “Knowing and Being Known,” 157; Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 113-119.

<sup>17</sup> Stump, *Atonement*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Stump, *Atonement*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Benton, “Epistemology Personalized,” 824-825.

<sup>20</sup> Stump, *Atonement*, 164-166.

attention: “Paul and Christ know one another to such an extent that Paul and Christ come to share the same affections and intentions. Thus Paul comes to know—even if imperfectly, yet more and more—what Christ values, what Christ loathes, and what Christ loves.”<sup>21</sup> This extends, as McCall notes, to include further persons in joint attention, so that Paul can participate in Christ’s relationship with his Father by attending to Christ’s affections and intentions towards his Father.<sup>22</sup> This provides a way of thinking about Paul having the mind of Christ and having a new identity in Christ without Paul ceasing to be a distinguishable agent through interpersonal knowing. Rather than Christ assuming and replacing our particular networks of relations, he becomes a part of those networks to constitute “a new system of self-in-relationship...embedded and bodily enacted in the new relational matrix generated by belonging to Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Our relations that constitute our being are still distinguishable, even though they overlap in the sharing of identity and minds.

### ***§9.2 We: The Recontextualization of I and Thou in Communio Dei***

Yet this account does not completely resolve the identity problem at hand, nor is it bereft of its own issues. For one, the way that Stump (among others) use joint attention is rather narrow in the psychological literature upon which it draws. Reicher, in his work on the Social Identity Theory, argues that psychological concepts such as joint attention function in group contexts in a way that *presupposes* group membership. Reicher, et al. demonstrate how concepts like joint attention are often used in a decontextualized way, abstracting individual social interactions from the social group contexts in which they occur.<sup>24</sup> Social relationships do not happen in a vacuum. Rather, as Eastman argues in her use of joint attention, they occur in social systems that she calls “we-centric spaces.”<sup>25</sup> For group psychologists working on these concepts, shared social identity in groups can provide a basis for the psychological processes described by joint attention. “Shared social identification transforms relations between people in such a way as to enable effective co-action. Where [SIT] implicitly assumes that identification is the basis of collective

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<sup>21</sup> McCall, “Crucified With Christ,” 20.

<sup>22</sup> McCall, “Crucified With Christ,” 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 47-50. This lack of context is precisely where the reduction of personal identity to social identity occurs.

<sup>25</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 69.

action and social power, the work [on joint attention] fills in the gaps. It details the processes which produce intra-group coordination and hence social power.”<sup>26</sup> If Reicher is correct, then joint attention can rely on group participation in certain situations and thus be more fully understood via analysis of its role in group social contexts.

Second, because these uses of joint attention are focused solely on person-to-person relationships, they isolate the being-constituting interpersonal relations of individuals from the participation of individuals in groups, the significance of which was raised in §II. These approaches fail to integrate the communal-situatedness of individual identity and being. Treating social relationships as if they lack group context, according to Reicher, et al., often leads to the collapse of personal identity into social identity in a way parallel to the missteps taken by radical apocalyptic interpreters.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is not clear that joint attention on its own adequately avoids the identity problem posed in this paper, because it is not clear *where* Christ’s mental states, now shared with Paul, stop and where Paul’s mental states begin. It is only clear *that* there is some assumed place where Christ ends and Paul begins because there must be two persons in order for joint attention to occur. Insofar as Paul internalizes Christ’s mental states and comes to love, value, and intend the same things as Christ, it is not obvious how Paul’s having the mind of Christ does not eventually make him indistinguishable from Christ, even if they are ontologically distinct. This does not result in a single Christ into which all humanity is collapsed, but several carbon copies of Christ; every human being who is in Christ sheds their own particularity and becomes Second-Temple Jewish men from Galilee with a particular relationship to the Father and Spirit. Furthermore, while joint attention provides a way for describing our union with Christ, it does not account for how we share in his mind *together*, sharing the identity and mental states of Christ with fellow-believers in *communio Dei*, and how we remain distinct from one another in that sharing. Joint attention, in these accounts, would benefit from an extension that includes contextualization via shared social identity. These recent theological accounts of joint attention, if properly nuanced by being grounded in shared social identity because the socially-situated understanding of individual persons that seems native to the Second-Temple Jewish

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<sup>26</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 48.

perspective of Paul seems to be able to make sense of shared identity while maintaining the individual distinctiveness.<sup>28</sup>

So what metaphysical claims about persons and identity do we need to make here? More specifically, what do we need to say about the relationship between shared identity and personal identity in the sharing of being that occurs in interpersonal relationships like union with Christ? It does not seem to be the case that personal and shared identity are one and the same; shared identity does not eclipse personal identity. Neither would it be true to say on this view that shared identity is purely accidental to personal identity. The social situatedness of persons, especially in the Hebrew Bible which forms the basis for Paul's theological anthropology, would seem to imply that the group which shares a given identity provides the *a priori* context for the identity of individuals to arise.<sup>29</sup> Prior to the "I" and "Thou" of human relationality, there is a "we" which provides the basis for understanding the formative causal contact between the "I" and "Thou."<sup>30</sup>

Human beings, being created for the *telos* of *communio Dei* in which we have restored relationship with God, fellow humanity, and the created order, are what we are meant to be only in that particular group. The *communio Dei* contextualizes us, contributing to our identity and the ways that our minds work. Yet our identities and our individual mental states are not reducible to the shared identity and mental states of the group. Rather, they constitute one (or perhaps several) of the elements that contribute to the identity and mental states of individuals. Gunton puts it like this: "we require space as well as relation: to be both related to and other than those and that on which we depend."<sup>31</sup> Contextualizing I-Thou relation in group relation provides a way to describe this space in the distinction between group and individual identity. For someone else to contribute something to my personal identity and mental states, it makes sense that they must contribute something which I do not already have for their contribution to my personal being not to be trivial. Hence, this account also requires the otherness of "I" and "Thou" in order for the social situatedness of "we" to be meaningful.

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<sup>28</sup> See, Eastman, *Paul and the Person*; Zahl, "Beyond the Critique of Soteriological Individualism."

<sup>29</sup> Everhart, "Communal Reconciliation," 12.

<sup>30</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology," 53.

Onto-relational Christological anthropology need not go the apocalyptic route with respect to sharing in the identity and mind of Christ. It seems instead to require the space of otherness *as well as* the ontological sharing of being. Such a proposal can build upon accounts of theological anthropology that already draw upon the psychological literature of joint attention by contextualizing the individual in their social group context. This can provide a corporate basis for joint attention that protects it from the ontological problem of numerical identity problem, as will be explored below.

As socially situated beings, we are created for relation with others, sharing in their personal being and sharing our own being with them. Even as we are ontologically distinct from one another we are also ontologically dependent on one another for our relational being. Humanity, insofar as it is created to be in *communio Dei*, is both corporate and individual. Our individual identities and minds through which we relate are neither reducible to a collective identity and mind, nor are our identities and minds wholly ours. What I mean by “not wholly ours” is this: as argued in II.6.3, much of what contributes to our minds and identities is the minds and identities of others in community. This means that while my identity and mind are mine (and indeed, no one else has my identity or my mind), my identity and mind rely non-causally on other’s identities and minds and on the community in which I relate to them. Moreover, my identity and mind contribute to the identities and minds of those around me. This continuous interdependence means that my identity and mind are not an isolated thing constituted and controlled by myself alone; others have contributed immensely and my identity and mind would be very different without the contributions of others. To understand, therefore, the fundamental sense in which we are “I’s” in the context of “we,” we must understand what the “we” contributes to the identity and mental states of the “I.”

## §10

### **Between the One and the Many in Group Psychology**

It is at this point that I shall turn to the resources of group psychology to better understand the human psyche and its capacity for relationality in groups of persons, otherwise known as communities. In looking at the basis of joint attention in Social Identity Approach (SIA), I can offer a helpful corrective to past uses of joint attention in theological anthropology

while combatting the identity problem that Christological anthropology faces. Psychology is such a helpful tool at this point because it is precisely in our human ways of knowing and relating to one another that God relates to us, becoming incarnate and taking on a human network of interpersonal relations in order to restore our relations with God, one another, and the created order. How group psychology depicts the interplay of group and individual identity will help us to understand the human relations of persons in *communio Dei* and give us clear language to describe the Christian's sharing in the incarnate Christ's identity and mind. That is to say, Christ becomes incarnate, taking on a network of human interpersonal relations and shares with us through this human relationality his identity as a child of God and his human mind sanctified through its union with his divinity. How this contributes to the personal identity of individual members of the *communio Dei* without subsuming their identities will allow us to bypass the identity problem for Christological anthropology.

Because this takes place in our social-situatedness, the basis of our I-Thou relationality in a prior "we," it will be helpful to briefly recall our language surrounding the nature of groups and the relation to individuals. As outlined in §II, Pettit offers two key distinctions in thinking about the nature of groups and individual agents: individualism versus collectivism and atomism versus holism. Collectivists might reduce Paul's identity in union with Christ to Christ's influence on the identity of the *communio Dei*. A collectivist would appeal solely to abstract social forces to explain the attitudes, identities, and agencies of individuals in this group. The atomist, on the other hand, would reject that Christ's personal being, as well as those united with Paul in the *communio Dei*, could have any transformative influence in Paul's personal being. The views thus far explicated of onto-relational Christological anthropology would seem to say both that individuals exist in such a way as to not be reduced in being, identity, or agency to the social regularities of groups, but that they nevertheless depend holistically on relation to one another as socially-constituted beings. We require a view of human persons and their relationships in groups or communities which is both individualist and holist. We require an interplay between the identity of the group and the individual.

### ***§10.1 Group and Individual Identity: The Interplay of Social Identity Approach***



One approach in psychology to explaining human social behaviour, and especially the relation between group and individual identity, has been Social Identity Approach (SIA). This approach arises from the combination of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT). “These theories are linked by their concern with the processes which surround the way that people define themselves as members of a social group – which, here, is the meaning of the term ‘social identity.’”<sup>32</sup>

One thing that makes this approach so persuasive is that it draws on the actual functions of groups in society, offering practical insights applied to a number of different kinds of groups including elective groups, physical and psychological crowds, and work organizations.<sup>33</sup> Rather than the abstract collectivism against which Pettit warns us and which reduces individual identity to that of the group, this approach is grounded in the actuality of individual persons influencing, persuading, leading, and modelling for one another in the sharing of group identity: “it 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 group norms, values and understandings rather than idiosyncratic beliefs.”<sup>34</sup> The appeal of this approach, then, is both in its broad application to a variety of kinds of human social groups and its practicality in accounting for individual agency within those groups. It, further, allows us to describe the social-embeddedness of human individuality in a way consistent with Hebraic communalism.

SIT contributes to our understanding of personal identity “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.”<sup>35</sup> SIT was developed in light of a series of studies on group behaviour in which arbitrary groups were formed in order to determine how individuals understand themselves in order to act according to group interests.<sup>36</sup> From the formation of group behavior in these arbitrary groups, Tajfel reasoned that “people come to

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<sup>32</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 45.

<sup>33</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 46.

<sup>34</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 48.

<sup>35</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 50.

<sup>36</sup> Tajfel, “Experiments in a Vacuum,” 58.

define their selves in terms of group membership... break[ing] with the traditional assumption that the self should only be understood as that which defines the individual in relation to other individuals, and to acknowledge that, in some circumstances, we can define ourselves through the groups to which we belong.”<sup>37</sup> The development of SIT led to positive understandings of what groups contribute to the identities of individual members, seeing groups as a part of the formation of personal identity.

This usually occurs in two ways. First, we can compare ourselves with other members of our groups, identifying with our commonality. Second, we can positively differentiate ourselves from members of other groups, defining ourselves by what we are not in relation to social groupings.<sup>38</sup> Social identification is about how we as individuals see ourselves (and don't see ourselves) as members of various social groups.<sup>39</sup> One's personal identity is thus both individual and corporate at the same time. Reicher, et al. offer the following presentation of this simultaneity: “on the one hand, my social identities – ‘I am a woman’, ‘I am a Scot’ or whatever – speak in a fundamental way to who I am in the world. But what any of these memberships mean cannot be reduced to my own or indeed anybody else's individuality...social identity provides a conduit through which society inhabits the subject.”<sup>40</sup> There are aspects of personal identity which are drawn from our participation in social groups. Because this is often done positively in contrast with other persons, we can already see how the significance of otherness, even in shared group identity, is essential to this theory.

This is where SCT comes into play. SCT is one way of describing the internalization of a shared group identity in such a way that it can influence personal identity. Said differently, SCT accounts for how the “I” comes to understand itself as a member of the “we.” SCT was developed to clarify “the distinction between social identity and other aspects of the self concept, to explain how the self system is organized and what makes any one part of this system psychologically active in a given context.”<sup>41</sup> This protects the distinguishability of individual persons within a group by maintaining that the shared identity is not the totality of personal

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<sup>37</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 48.

<sup>38</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 49.

<sup>39</sup> Neville, Drury, and Reicher, “Shared Social Identity Transforms Social Relations in Imaginary Crowds,” 2.

<sup>40</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 48.

<sup>41</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 51-52.

identity. Rather, it is a part of personal identity, interacting with other aspects to constitute the individual person's full identity.

As the name indicates, SCT concerns our categorization of ourselves, but also of one another. SCT is our individual recognition that we are members of a given group and the recognition by others as members of that group.<sup>42</sup> To this effect, many thinkers point out how SCT is not a purely individual construct. The identity of the group, as well as my personal identity in relation to the group, is not wholly defined by me. Rather, it is a conglomeration of many members categorizing the group and categorizing one another within the group.<sup>43</sup> A group's shared identity, as a result, has a recursive effect, making it a rather dynamic concept. The definition of a given group grows and transforms as new members are added or as current members develop in their understanding of the group's identity. Likewise, this dynamic shared identity, as it changes, changes what it contributes to the personal identities of individual members. The result is a kind of relational feed-back loop in which groups change the identity of members, members change the identity of groups, and so on.

When combined, the resultant SIA tells us that the self, while a distinguishable and individual self, is always defined in terms of relation to others. As Turner, an early proponent of SIA, clarifies, the self is identified in comparison and contrast to others at various levels of abstraction; one can be identified in terms of this group versus that group or one can be identified in terms of this particular group member versus that particular group member.<sup>44</sup> While we can do this sort of identification at various levels of abstraction, with each level respecting different degrees or aspects of homogeneity as particular as "I" compared to everyone else or as broad as human compared to divine, it is nevertheless impossible to so thoroughly abstract this relationality so as to isolate a definition of the "I" from relation to others. SCT develops the ontology of groups implicit in SIT to maintain that "(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."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Neville, et al., "Shared Social Identity Transforms Social Relations," 5.

<sup>43</sup> Neville, et al., "Shared Social Identity Transforms Social Relations," 4.

<sup>44</sup> One way this is described is in terms of depersonalization and stereotyping: the ways in which we act in contrast to those we consider other and act more like those we consider similar respectively. For more specific examples across different kinds of groups, see Turner, et al., "Self and Collective."

<sup>45</sup> Reicher, et al., "Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology," 52.

The upshot of SIA for the purposes of human onto-relationality is this:

First, social identity is a relational term, defining who we are as a function of our similarities and differences with others. Second, social identity is shared with others and provides a basis for shared social action. Third, the meanings associated with any social identity are products of our collective history and present. Social identity is therefore something that links us to the social world. It provides the pivot between the individual and society.<sup>46</sup>

We are, as onto-relational beings, created in such a way that we are ontologically dependent on the relations to others that we have in our participation in social groups. This provides a way to describe our sharing in one another's relational being using the language of identity. One way that shared identity is established in individual agents is through a shared *telos* or end: many studies have shown "increase shared social identity by invoking a sense of shared fate with other passengers."<sup>47</sup> This is not unlike the *teleological* account the *imago Dei* offered in §I. In the same way that, on an onto-relational account of Christological anthropology, we are dependent on our relations to one another in *communio Dei* to be what we were created to be, we are dependent on our relations to one another in social groups to be identified both from and with one another.

This account of shared identity provides a way to describe both our relational entanglement with one another through shared group identity as well as how we remain distinguishable agents in that entanglement. *Communio Dei*, as that group for which we are created, is the social context of our being as human creatures and the reason for human inclination towards forming social groups. As Willie James Jennings puts it, "building...is a gift given to us by God. It is a doing that speaks to our destiny, and it is inescapable. We build either toward life or toward death."<sup>48</sup> It is in our nature to build community and form social groups precisely because we are created to form and be formed in *communio Dei*. While this *telos* of human nature expresses itself in many forms, some perverse and oppressive while some are life-

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<sup>46</sup> Reicher, et al., "Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology," 45.

<sup>47</sup> Neville, et al., "Shared Social Identity Transforms Social Relations in Imaginary Crowds," 14. See also, Drury, "Prejudice is About Politics," 20-21; Drury, "The Role of Social Identity Processes in Mass Emergency Behaviour," 38-81; Drury et al., "Cooperation Versus Competition in a Mass Emergency Evacuation," 957-970.

<sup>48</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 76.

giving and freeing,<sup>49</sup> all speak to the intended *telos* of human nature in communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order.

### ***§10.2 Joint attention and Shared Mental States: Recontextualization of I-Thou in the We***

With this understanding of shared social identity in our *telos* as being for communion with God and one another, we may now return to joint attention, offering a contextualized account of I-Thou relation. This will provide for the space of otherness required for relational entanglement in onto-relational Christological anthropology.

SIA has generally been used to provide a basis for our conception of group actions and agency. Thus in SIA, “shared social identification transforms relations between people in such a way as to enable them to act together harmoniously and productively.”<sup>50</sup> One way that SIA has been applied in group psychology has been to give an account of human empathy via joint attention.<sup>51</sup> Because this account of shared identity relies on SCT, it is a decisively cognitive account of identity, relying on our cognitive capacities for the perception and recognition of various relational aspects of identity.<sup>52</sup> SIA can be used as a basis for the sharing of mental states through joint attention among group members in virtue of shared identity.

While we have already seen some biblical scholars and theologians make use of joint attention, I noted that these scholars often abstract joint attention from a group’s shared social identity. What I have shown in the previous section is that SIA understands social identity to come about through self-categorization and identification with groups. Thus, we ought to think of joint attention in union with Christ in terms of our participation in *communio Dei*. This benefits our uses of joint attention in three ways. First, this gives proper disciplinary autonomy to the psychological sciences from which joint attention is drawn by representing views of joint attention and group identification active in the field. Allowing group psychology to join the

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<sup>49</sup> For more on the delineated possibilities of freedom and oppression in community, see Everhart, “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”

<sup>50</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 57.

<sup>51</sup> While there are significant debates in psychology on the specific nature of joint attention, we can adopt a broad framework of joint attention to describe group phenomena: joint attention is when multiple persons attend to something together. We need not commit ourselves to more detailed accounts of joint attention; we need only recognize that persons in groups sometimes attend to things together and that there are psychological and neuroscientific processes which support this attending. See, Sipsova and Carpenter, “A New Look at Joint Attention and Common Knowledge,” 60-61; Milward and Carpenter “Joint Action and Joint Attention,” 2.

<sup>52</sup> Reicher, et al., “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 52.

theological conversation along with developmental psychology gives psychology more of its own voice in theological conversations about how human beings socialize. Second, this helps us to make sense of our relational ontological dependence on other human persons and God in Christ in order to be who we are. This integrates our relationality with God, fellow-humanity, and quite possibly even the created order in a way that mere joint attention fails to do so. It is not only about the relationships between persons, but also about the kind of relationship between those persons as determined by the social context in which they are relating. Third, by rooting joint attention in shared social identity, in this case *communio Dei*, we can avoid confounding our individual identities and mental states with Christ's even as we share in his identity and mental states to the degree of fullness which apocalyptic interpreters desire.

This offers a slightly different account of joint attention than those offered by McCall and Stump.<sup>53</sup> Because joint attention is made saliently possible in shared identity, and because shared identity occurs in the categorization of our selves with particular groups, then joint attention relies on groups in these situations in order to function the way that it does. This is how proponents of SIA avoid the sort of "great man" history which reduces the agency, mental states, and identity of groups to their leaders: "we do not identify with others through our common link to a leader. Rather, we are bound together through our joint sense of belonging to the same social category. Hence, what we do as group members is not constrained by the stance of a particular individual but by the sociocultural meanings associated with the relevant social category."<sup>54</sup> Let us be clear: proponents of SIA will also readily admit to the significant influence of leaders within groups in virtue of their role or position in that group. I only mean to illustrate that the shared identity of a group acts as a medium through which identity and mental states are shared. Thus, we might think that we could have a group in which a leader has absolute power and control to determine the identity and agency. SIA would still require that persons self-categorize

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<sup>53</sup> Eastman does think of joint attention as happening properly in "we-spaces" which contextualize interpersonal relation. But the we-spaces to which she refers are rather inert, much more akin to what Collins calls combinations or coalition. Such groups do not have agency aside from the agency of individual members, and thus the sense of group identity at play is much weaker than what is intended by SIA. As such, we will need to strengthen the importance of "we-spaces" in Eastman's account.

<sup>54</sup> Reicher, et al., "Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology," 50.

(and are categorized by others) as members of that group in order to share in that particular identity and contribute to the group's agency.<sup>55</sup>

We therefore cannot reduce an individual, say Paul, sharing in the mind of Christ by taking on a new identity in him to the particular relationship between Paul and Christ. Rather, this unitive relationship brings Paul into the body of Christ, that group communion of creation, human persons, and the Triune Godhead. In this group, we partake in the shared social identity of the *communio Dei*. Now for theological reasons, we might want to say something to the effect that in virtue of Christ's particular High Priestly role in this group, he solely or primarily determines what that shared group identity is. In fact, this seems to be what Paul has in mind when he talks about having a new identity in Christ. This affords us a way to avoid conflating our individual identities as members of the body of Christ and the identity of the group, *communio Dei*, as it is determined primarily by Christ. In the same way that SIA understands the distinction between shared group identity and the personal identity of individual members, so too can we distinguish between Christ's identity as it is shared with the group and our own personal identities because what is shared with us is a group identity given in *communio Dei*. We can understand, on this conception of sharing in a new identity in Christ, how relation to Christ yields a new personal identity in which we share in Christ's identity without the eradication of the "I." I might have good reason to believe that *communio Dei* is not the only group that contributes to my personal identity, even if it is the group which contributes to or transforms my identity the most.

Because we share in this group identity in our participation in the *communio Dei* then joint attention with Christ happens as a corporate activity. Rather than only Paul and Christ attending to one another, Paul attends to Christ with other members of the body and Christ attends to Paul with other members of the body. The body of Christ *together* comes to know Christ interpersonally and shares with one another the second-personal knowing they have of him. As the body of Christ comes to know God interpersonally, it does so under the group agency of those brought into union with one another in Christ. Just as we might distinguish personal identity from the shared identity of the group, so too should we espouse a distinct

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<sup>55</sup> This is not unlike Collins' model of collectives, which require individual assent to the coordination of the group (even if it is resistant or rouge assent) in order for the group to act.

category of mental states, those shared mental states of “the mind of Christ,” which the members of the group can share in according to self-categorization and identification with the group. So while we do want to say that, in joint attention, Paul comes to know God through Christ second-personally and share in Christ’s affections, intentions, etc. towards his Father, we ought also to add that this done together with the whole Church as that *communio Dei* united together by the Spirit of Christ. To interpersonally know God in Christ as “Thou,” we must be brought into that *a priori* “we” that is the communion of persons and creation in union with Christ.

## §11

### ***Communio Dei: Towards Sharing in the Other***

In union with Christ, the *communio Dei* comes to know God in Christ and one another in Christ interpersonally. We share in Christ’s mental states together, sharing the mind of Christ as a corporate entity. We can do this because, in unitive relationship to Christ, persons are brought into this new group, the *communio Dei*, which shares a new social identity with those persons. This identity is primarily, if not solely, determined by the personal identity of Christ, who is the Lord of his Church. In understanding our sharing in the person of Christ in this way, we offer several benefits to the onto-relational Christological anthropology with which this thesis began. First, we have a way of describing the psychological realities of human embodiment as human persons share in the relational being of one another through self-categorization and social identification. Second, this description, by understanding our sharing in one another as occurring in social groups, allows us to describe the relational entanglement of our ontological dependence on God and one another without collapsing or eradicating the distinctions between distinct yet overlapping networks of interpersonal relations. Third, because these descriptions are contextualized by identification and categorization within groups, we can integrate our interpersonal knowing of God, fellow-humanity, and the created order so that union with and second-personal knowing of God in Christ is something that happens together with creation in *communio Dei*. This offers better grounds for considering how union with God heals and reconciles our relations with fellow-human beings than joint attention can offer on its own. Finally, we can appeal to joint attention and the kind of interpersonal sharing of mental states as a way of describing our sharing in the mind of Christ without fear of collapsing the agency of “I”



into Christ's "Thou." In our shared identity in *communio Dei*, humans come to know together the affections, values, and love of Christ, loving God, one another, and the created order as Christ does in communion with one another.

Human beings share in features of one another's personal identity through our belonging to communities precisely because we are created to share in Christ's personal identity through participation in this particular community, the *communio Dei*. Moreover, because we do this ultimately in Christ in such a way that we do not cease to be distinguishable selves, there are limits to the degree to which this sharing in the relational being of one another occurs; my sharing in the being-constituting content of group  $x$  through relationship with another does not entail that I am now a member of group  $x$ . Rather, there is something about the  $x$ -ness of the person in whom I am sharing that transforms or changes something about my particularity as it functions in my own personal identity. Our being and identity is transformed in relation to the other as we come to know that relational content of the other second-personally in community.

Particularity, then, has a transformative function in human nature. In being in communion with those who are different from us, we come to be transformed in our own particularity by the particularity of the other. My maleness is transformed in relation to femaleness, my whiteness is transformed in relation to blackness, and so on. Our *telos* for *communio Dei* requires that human beings be capable of being transformed in these ways through communion with the other; to be human is to have the destiny and desire for the building of community and sharing oneself with others in that community. This is what it means for human nature to be defined by its *telos* in Jesus Christ for *communio Dei*.

## IV

# The Particularity of Jesus Christ

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*What are you, a scorpion in a Navajo fable? Everyone can change their nature, Morty. It's what defines our species.*

- Rick Sanchez

Human beings are created in the Image of Christ for loving communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. I have outlined the particularity problem which this account faces, namely that our particularity is either insignificant in a way that compromises human individuality or so significant that we cannot be saved through the particular humanity of Jesus Christ. An analysis of Christ's atoning work demonstrated that this problem rests on false assumptions about the relationship between the one and the many. Human beings are socially situated and communally contextualized individuals, relying on one another in order to be themselves. This view of persons, called Hebraic communalism, depicts human beings as distinguishably individual and ontologically dependent on other persons, so that human persons naturally form groups which contribute to and are constituted by the identities of individual members. This sort of relational entanglement, explored through engagement with social-cognitive sciences, shows us that human persons share in one another's personal being, in the individual networks of interpersonal relations which persons are, via the sharing of second-personal knowledge. Because persons share in one another's particularity without ceasing to be particular in their own ways, we remain distinct from Christ even as we share second-personally in all that he is.

Particularity is bound up in our relating to one another in structured groups or communities called collectives. What makes me particular relies on both my relationships to others (I am  $x$  in contrast to my friend who is  $y$ ) as well as the communal context in which those relationships occur ( $x$  has relationship  $z$  to  $y$ ). As these social structures which we have built change over time, so too do the particular features of our identity to which these groups contribute, making particularity rather dynamic. If the structure of a group changes so that the relationship  $z$  between  $x$  and  $y$  changes, then the relational content of  $x$  and  $y$  might change as a result. For example, if a group's structure changes the socially regulative relationship between the identities "male" and "female," then something about how individuals identify as either "male" or "female" will also change. Particularity, in this way, is changeable and dynamic. Because this thesis has already made the claim that identity features such as these track our ontology as relational beings, then something about our relational being and its reliance on relationships with others is dynamic as well.

Herein lies an interesting feature of human particularity; human efforts appear to be able to generate or change these particular features of human nature. At least intuitively, it would be

metaphysically odd to argue that the distinctiveness of our being is contingent on factors which we ourselves (as well as other creatures) can manipulate. If there is something about my being which relies on others, would that not make my being human and my distinctiveness as an individual manipulable by others? Could another person change who or what I am? Especially when one considers how differences in particularity have historically been the grounds for dehumanization and oppression, this conception of our malleability should concern us. This may be why the theological anthropologist is so often tempted to conceptually locate particularity in the fallen epoch of Adamic humanity; if the differences they bring are merely a result of the fall, we do not need to accommodate their role in human nature because they will be eschatologically eradicated.

This is often why theologians ground human nature in something which is universal to every human being and stable so that we may continue to identify human beings by that feature in future generations.<sup>1</sup> But this is much harder to sustain when considering the significant role which particularity plays in Christ's Image-constituting assumption of a human nature. As McKirland writes, "while discussions of abstract human natures can yield some productive insights, we need to be wary when our theological abstractions undermine Jesus's actual humanity. He remains a male, Palestinian Jew. While fully human, he is human *in this way*."<sup>2</sup> If humanity is intended to be particular in at least some ways, then we do need to provide an explanation for the role particularities play in the *telos* of humanity for a community of "every tribe, tongue, and nation" united in communion with God and the created order. Before we can locate any socially-constructed difference in our human personhood on either the Adamic or Christological side of humanity's redemption, that is to say declare a given difference "good" or "bad," we must first understand why we have particularity in the first place.

§IV thus explores the question: what purpose does human particularity, in all its socially-constructed fluidity, play in our being conformed into the New Humanity in Christ? In other words, what role does particularity play in the Christological *telos* of humanity for becoming a loving communion of divine persons, human persons, and creation grounded in the communion of Father, Son, and Spirit? In understanding the purpose of particularity, we can better understand the ways in which it effects human existence on this side of the eschaton. To do this,

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<sup>1</sup> McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*, 3-6.

<sup>2</sup> McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*, 4.

I inquire not into generally human experience of particularity, but into Christ's experience of his particularity and the specific role it plays in his atoning work. While Christ takes on several socially-constructed particularities that are significant for his ministry, he does so in a way that is irreducibly embodied. I argue from this that particularity is constituted by both socially-constructed and embodied elements and that these elements are mutually informing. I then argue that the way in which Christ embodies his various social identities centres relationships with others who are different from us as essential to forming the kind of community that can be transformed into *communio Dei*. I thus argue that we are created with particularity for the purpose of creating *diverse* community and that this diversity is essential to human *telos*. I explore the formative power of this diversity, arguing that, because our *telos* includes our particularity being transformed in relation to God, fellow-humanity, and the created order in a way that does not result in a flattening of particularity, we are created with a nature that is dynamic and changeable through social interactions and community building.

## §12

### **Why Do Humans Beings Have Particularity?: A Teleological Perspective**

Particularity serves some role in human nature, allowing us to distinguish between distinct beings. But this does not tell us how this role serves the *teleological* end of human nature to be in *communio Dei*. It does not tell us how our having particularities contributes to our formation into the New Humanity. If Christ is indeed the one in whom all humanity is formed into this communion, and if he instantiates the New Humanity in his becoming incarnate and atoning for humanity in an embodied, human way, then we must look to Christ's embodying of particularity in his life, death, and resurrection to understand to what end we are created with particularity. How Christ lives out his particularity will point towards the ultimate purpose of our own particularities in forming the *communio Dei* for which all humanity is intended in Christ. We must think Christologically if we are to think *teleologically* about humanity's transformation from what we are into what we are intended to be.

It is significant, too, that Christ enacts his atoning work in an *embodied* way. Christ only takes on his various human particularities when he takes on human flesh. It is his being born of Mary that makes him Jewish and a descendant of David. It is his taking on a body that makes him male. It is his body that spatio-temporally locates him as a resident of Nazareth and Galilee.

As Copeland puts it, “the body of Jesus of Nazareth presents a formidable entry point for the scandal of particularity in theological anthropology: formidable because of the marks of that body (gender, race, sex, culture); because of that body’s openness to, turn toward, and solidarity with even radically different others (Matt 15:26-27); and because of that body’s pledge to be given and poured out for *all* others across time and space.”<sup>3</sup> These particularities and their relevance to his atoning work as the incarnate one point us towards embodiment as being critical to how particularity is formed and functions in Christ’s human relationality (and therefore our own).

### ***§12.1 Embodied Relations, Relational Bodies***

How, then, do the socialized features of identity relate to our being embodied. Asking this question Christologically, how do Christ’s various social identity features (his Jewishness, his Nazarenehood, etc.) relate to his taking on a human body? Is particularity reducible to embodiment, or is it only our social construction around our bodies that make us particular? The latter option may be particularly tempting given the significance of social construction to the formation of identity explored in the last chapter. But this would seem to undermine the embodied nature of human existence, and even of particularity. We often connect our particularities intuitively with physical features of our embodiment; race is often viewed as a genetic feature that gives rise to other physical features like skin pigmentation or eye shape;<sup>4</sup> theologically conservative views of gender often reduce one’s identity as male or female to physical features like genitalia or chromosomal make up.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there is a salient emphasis

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<sup>3</sup> Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> It is precisely this view of race as a biological category which Fuentes argues against and which will be addressed below. Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies*.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Farris, *An Introduction Theological Anthropology*, 207-209. Farris argues that gender is determined by sexual biology, citing what he calls “God’s perspective on the subject.” This turns out to be Reformed and Catholic accounts of sexuality written predominantly by men which he admits fail to account for “exceptions of exceptional ambiguity.” In comparison with his view of a particularity like race, Farris argues earlier in the book that this is an essential feature of human nature. It is noteworthy that the basis for such an argument does not include reflection on perspectives of the oppressed, but is based on his own conception as a white man: “I can conceive of my having been born in a different ethnicity or race, which would yield the fact that race is contingent and not essential to who I am as an individual human being...but I have a harder time conceiving of my being female,” 200.

on embodiment in the Christian tradition. Too much work has been done in theological anthropology to emphasize our being embodied to ignore its significance to our particularity.<sup>6</sup> This sometimes reductive emphasis on the physicality of particularity is often done in reaction to accounts of particularities like race that emphasize the social construction identities. Jorge Garcia, for instance, argues for “a kind of diffidence about claims of racial and ethnic affiliation, recognizing that we are unsure of their content and scope, and on that basis, that we adopt a more deflationary approach to such claims, minimizing considerations of such matters in our deeper self-conceptions and in our emotional and moral lives, *therein repudiating the very idea of ethnic and racial identities.*”<sup>7</sup> But neither ought we to assume that we are reducible to the particularities of our bodies either, and that social construction plays no important or positive role the formation of identity. For one, the psychology of group identity shows that Garcia’s assumptions about how identity works are patently false; we do not simply get to decide to ignore or minimize the effect of a group identity on our personal identities. In some sense, identity just does not work this way in the real world. This leads to a second concern: if the socially constructed elements of identities like race really do play such a salient role in our lives, to what degree is it helpful or even possible to imagine a world in which they are entirely repudiated? If we truly are relational beings, our social relationships and the social identities that contribute to them are incredibly important for being who and what we are in Christ. But the quote from Garcia helps demonstrate precisely what is at stake in the questions of this chapter: as will be shown in what follows, neither physical nor social features alone can account for what human particularity is and its function in humanity’s *telos for communio Dei*.

When the Second Person of the Trinity becomes incarnate, he does so with particular features. For instance, he comes into the world as a member of the Jewish people, identifying himself with the people group, Israel. This is an embodied reality because he does so as one born to a Jew; his human genetic material is of the same people group as his human parent. Now there are ways for a hypothetically Gentile Christ to have become a member of the Jewish people, but this would not have fulfilled the promises God made to Israel; namely, that a redeemer should arise from among God’s chosen people, specifically from the Davidic lineage (Gen 12:3; 22:18,

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<sup>6</sup> Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom* and Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Souls Embodied*. Moreover, the distinction between divine and human *perichoresis* relies on our being embodied.

<sup>7</sup> Garcia, “Racial and Ethnic Identity,” 47-48.

Mic 5:2, 1 Chr 17 :10-20). Christ's particularity, specifically these two features that are essential to his role as the High Priest, are not merely socially constructed. He did not enter into these identity features by joining at-will collectives. Rather, he took on these social identity features by taking on a body which had these features. In doing so, Richard Bauckham argues, God "*particularizes himself and does so by identifying with a worldly reality.*"<sup>8</sup> We could also make similar claims about Christ's being embodied and coming from Nazareth and Galilee. While these are not genetic, Christ nevertheless requires a body of some sort in order to be residentially located. We could intuitively make similar claims about most, if not all, of Christ's particular features: Christ's being particular is necessarily embodied.

This does not mean, however, that we can reduce particularity to embodiment only. For instance, there were certain social implications that came with Christ having a Jewish body which cannot be reduced to a mere set of biological or physical properties. He was treated with deference in specific contexts, such as when speaking to non-Jewish believers (Jhn 4:1-42, Matt 15:21-28), learning and teaching at the temple (Lk 2:41-52; 21:37),<sup>9</sup> and navigating Jewish society in general. His circumcision on the eighth day and presentation at the temple speak to the close relationship between the Jewishness of his body and the Jewishness of his social identity. A Gentile convert might have been circumcised upon conversion and been given some of the aforementioned deference, but only one born to the Jewish people would have undergone this ritual on the eighth day and received the subsequent presentation at the temple. While these are social realities that mark the Jewishness of Jesus, they point to and are constructed around him having this particular kind of body. This also becomes apparent in Christ being handed around to various rulers and tribunals prior to his crucifixion (Lk 23:1-25). He is judged by the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate according to various features of his identity: his Jewish lineage, his origins in Galilee, and belonging to the Roman empire respectively. The features in virtue of which he is judged hold varying degrees of physicality and sociality, but all to some extent require both. Jesus had to live as a being with a spatio-temporally located body with certain physical features *and* there had to be various social groupings constructed in those contexts, such as the group Galilean or the political structure of the Roman Empire which made Galileans the jurisdiction of

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<sup>8</sup> Bauckham, "The Incarnation of the Cosmic Christ," 33.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that so young a person could teach the scriptures was itself astounding, but he was only accepted as doing so because he had been circumcised.



Herod. These social features are constructed around physical features of Christ's human embodiment.

Moreover, these social features seem to affect Christ's physical embodiment. For instance, the practice of circumcising Jewish males on the eighth day removes a part of Christ's flesh so that he now has a physical feature which identifies him as one of the covenant people. At the time, Jesus would have been identified both as male and as Jewish in virtue of the physical features of his genitalia. It has also been argued by biblical scholars that Christ's identification as religiously Jewish was the basis for the kind of execution he was given, implying that the social features of his Jewish identity led to visceral changes to his body.<sup>10</sup> Christ's social identity features, those features which we generally identify with particularity, are enacted in embodied ways and in ways that change his embodiment. Christ's embodiment of his particularity in socially-constitutive ways grounds Paul's later development of a relational constitution of personhood discussed in §III.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus seems to embody his particularity in socially-constructed ways that point to us embodying our own particularity in ways that depend on and can be changed by social construction. But do our bodies actually relate to our social relationships in this way? This question can be answered in critical engagement with biological and cognitive scientists. Augustin Fuentes, for example, has explored this connection by deconstructing outdated appeals to "nature or nurture" for explaining human behaviour. He argues that "the challenge to understand the human, in an evolutionary sense, is the challenge to develop a model that integrates the influences of history, biology, culture, language and institutions in the human experience and offers a toolkit that enables connecting these processes with evolutionary outcomes."<sup>12</sup> Humanity cannot be explained through only the lens of the biological properties of human bodies, especially for biologists interested in human evolution and development. On the contrary, Fuentes argues that human social structures are "part of the group's perceptual and

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, Maccoby, "The Jewishness of Jesus," 54; Van Henten, "Jewish Martyrdom and Jesus' Death," 139-168; Vines, "The 'Trial Scene' Chronotype in Mark and the Jewish Novel." Sonderegger similarly argues that Jesus' death is best understood within the matrix of his Jewishness and as a threat to Roman power: Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> See, Eastman, *Paul and the Person* and Martin, *Corinthian Body*. Eastman argues that, for Paul, the self is a "self-in-relation-to-others," constituted not in some autonomous sense in which I am what I am regardless of who I am to others (or who they are to me), but in the sense of an embodied individual ever-related to the other in social systems and communities. Martin similarly demonstrates Paul's "porous" view of embodiment, one in which our environment and context inhabit us even as we continue to shape and change the environment around us.

<sup>12</sup> Fuentes, "Human Niche, Human Behavior, Human Nature," §3.

physiological experience, as well as constitutive of the social ecology in which the group exists.”<sup>13</sup> Because of this, human behaviour and cognition are “socially mediated internal and external constructive processes operating over both developmental and evolutionary timescales.”<sup>14</sup> We are biological beings, with physical features and chemical makeups that contribute to how we think and behave, but our biological features which contribute to these processes are also contributed to by external realities including our social ecosystems. As an example, Fuentes highlights varied human responses to heat; how an individual handles environments of intense heat relies on a number of physiological and social factors including genealogy, previous exposure to such environments, one’s wealth and social standing (i.e. whether one can afford air conditioning), availability of heat-mitigating tools, and so on.<sup>15</sup> While response to heat is an undeniably biological feature of human beings (shaped by other biological features), it is also shaped by socially constructed features of our existence. Human socialization and community building creates social environments that shape and inform our embodiment of our particularity.

There is perhaps no better illustration of the contributions from both social construction and biological features to particularity than racial particularity. Fuentes argues in *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies* against race as a biological category, citing both the damaging effects of biologies of race and demonstrating the absurdity of reducing racialization to its biological components. While it is true that there are biological components, such as melanin count, which help us to identify racial categories, Fuentes points out the salient social constructions which arise from and contribute to the concept of race such as socio-economic inequalities, racial bias in financial and medical institutions, and social perceptions of racial groups.<sup>16</sup> Racial categorization relies on social institutions and norms to exist. Fuentes goes to great lengths to demonstrate the constitutive contributions of social construction through statistical analysis and empirical studies.<sup>17</sup> These socially constructed categories are so often associated with biological ones because we use biological features to identify each category. But the reduction of race to these biological features excludes the salient impact of social ecosystems

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<sup>13</sup> Fuentes, *Why We Believe*, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Laland and Brown, “The Social Construction of Human Nature.

<sup>15</sup> Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies*, 100.

which create the categories to which we attribute said features. But to say race is entirely a social construct would also be false. The socially constructed aspects of it are intimately tied to the biological features around which they are constructed. Fuentes shows how “the realities of social race and associated racism and inequality can become biology: race can impact physiological and epidemiological systems...Race is a social reality that can have lasting biological effects.”<sup>18</sup> We construct social meaning around biological features of our embodiment which then can change how we experience our embodiment. Particularity is *both* the distinctive physical features of our embodiment and the social constructions we build around our embodiment through relating to one another.

These social features of ontology-tracking identity are embodied. Human beings, in living out their *telos* for communion and community-building, build social groupings and identities around features of our embodiment. The ways that particular human beings live out their embodiment are fundamentally relational because it is in our nature to socially construct around them. Relationality, furthermore, requires embodiment; we cannot relate apart from our having bodies. The ways that we relate to others are bound up in the particularities that we bear in embodied ways.

This indicates both a fluidity and stability to the nature of particularity. As Dale Martin puts it, “the body—or the ‘self’—is an unstable point of transition, not a discrete, permanent, solid entity.”<sup>19</sup> Where a self is discernible, it is malleable, changeable, and transformable. Yet this malleability is limited in some form by the physicality of embodiment. I cannot wake up one morning and decide that I am a dragon. Even if I convince every other person to whom I am related that I am a dragon and that they should treat me as such, I have not effectively transformed my human nature into a dragon nature (and believe me, I have tried). There is, at least intuitively, nothing inherently dragon-esque about my embodiment. The particularity of our bodies in some way limits or constrains the ways in which we can socially construct our particularity. This having been said, our particularity is not reducible to embodiment nor is our embodiment unchangeable.<sup>20</sup> The social constructs which we build determine the value and meaning which various aspects of embodiment carry in different contexts.

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<sup>18</sup> Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies*, 100; 111.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, 242-243. See also, Barrett, *Thriving With Stone Age Minds*. Barrett demonstrates at a number of points the relationship between socialization and human neuro-biology, such as

To demonstrate, let us take once again the example of racial particularity. There are various social features of being black which we might point to as “blackness.” Jennings notes, for instance, the problematic ways that values of intelligence have been assigned to black bodies in various contexts; the comparative intellectual inferiority of black persons posited by several 18<sup>th</sup>-century academic communities would not have been assigned to black bodies in African-American predominated communities.<sup>21</sup> The identity of blackness that black persons see in themselves is different from the social value placed on them by white slave masters. The social space one occupies plays a significant role in determining the social value and power that is assigned to one’s embodied physical features.

However, becoming treated socially as black in these contexts and identifying with the social features of blackness is not sufficient for being black. For we might imagine a person who wishes for the identity “black” and therefore begins to describe themselves as such. One famous example is the case of Rachel Dolezal, a woman of white, western European descent who claimed to be and changed her appearance to pass as a person of African descent, even at one point leading the Spokane branch of the NAACP.<sup>22</sup> Once the truth came to light, Dolezal claimed to *identify* as racially black despite her white ancestry.<sup>23</sup> This naturally sparked outrage from individuals and interest groups. However Dolezal came to the conclusion of this social identification, there was a disjunction between this identification and her embodied, lived experience. Certainly one could take on certain social features that are born out of and constructed around embodied black experience. One can enjoy African-American culture, participate in various social groups dedicated to the well-being of black persons and celebration of black culture, and can even study the perspective of persons of African descent in America. But none of these makes the person “black” in and of itself because none of these can fully capture the embodied experience of being black in an anti-black society. Whiteness and its social construction of racial identity is not merely a social imagination, but, as Jennings puts it, is “a global vision...a way of organizing bodies by proximity to and approximation of white bodies.”<sup>24</sup> The socially constructed elements of race do not occur in a vacuum; they rely on and

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how our developing social systems of hunting, gathering, and cooking food allowed our brains to develop advanced capacities for tool-building and tribe-formation. Human socialization directly impacts our evolution.

<sup>21</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 193.

<sup>22</sup> Brubaker, “The Dolezal Affair,” 414-448.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, Pérez-Peña, and Eligon, “Rachel Dolezal in Center of Storm, Is Defiant, ‘I Identify as Black.’”

<sup>24</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 59.

are built around our embodiment. So while the stability of the particularity “black” comes from the embodiment of persons of African descent, various social values and meanings are constructed around that embodied particularity. It is this dynamic and changing social construction which determines and defines the social interaction which constitutes the onto-relations between persons.

Particularity in human ontology is constituted by two salient components. First, particularity is embodied. Second, particularity is socially constructed around those distinctive embodied features. We do this because of the *teleological* communion for which we are created. While it is easy to see how our social construction around particular features of our embodiment often goes awry, such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the systemic segregation of persons of African descent, it would be odd to define human nature (and particularity’s role therein) by distorted ways of socially constructing around embodied particularity. This has, historically, been a problem specifically for philosophical and theological anthropologies that have treated racial minorities as sub-human.<sup>25</sup> The problems introduced by such anthropologies are, in part, why I have approached the question of particularity in the way that I have. Moreover, it would also be untrue to assume that any distinctive feature of our embodiment is necessarily as it was created to be, especially given the negative effects that distorted social construction can have on embodiment. In this respect, it is important that we do not begin with the distortions (whether obvious or obscure) of our ways of community-building in order to make sense of what our particularity is or for what purpose we are created with it. We can, however, take our social constructing in distorted ways as evidence (though not conclusive evidence) of a given capacity for relationality and community building. We can more clearly understand our socio-embodied particularity, including understanding how we have distorted this particularity, by first understanding the purpose of our nature for social construction around embodiment. What is it that our having embodied differences and our constructing social identities around those differences are intended to do in the *communio Dei*?

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<sup>25</sup>Jennings cites as an example the anthropology of Christopher Columbus, who ties various racial characteristics to geographical location and argues that certain environments have produced transcendental racial characteristics. These characteristics notably centre whiteness as indicative of greater intelligence and attractiveness than the “darker races” and relate geographical features to Euro-centric spaces: *Christian Imagination*, 30-31. Kwok Pui-Lan observes how these trends are still entangled in modern theological education, citing the dearth of minority perspectives in normative theological courses and how feminist and black theology are relegated to optional electives: “Can the Native Speak Theologically?,” 1008. The perspectives that might disentangle the problematic aspects of white theology are made out to be non-essential in western theological education.

### §12.2 *Jesus, Otherness, and the Crowd*

These particularizing features, at least on a Social Identity Approach, help us to contextualize our inter-personal relationships. How I, with a particular feature salient for forming a social identity,  $x$ , might relate to a person with the feature, not  $x$ , is different than how I relate to another person with feature  $x$ . Simply put,  $x$ -folk encounter non- $x$ -folk as different or other. This does not preclude a relationship between  $x$  and non- $x$ -folk, nor does it necessarily privilege one kind of relationship over the other. As argued previously, change is introduced into a group's shared identity when (a) new members join who introduce new features into the shared identity of the group which those members derive from other groups or (b) former members change what they are contributing to the shared identity of the group, usually through formative causal contact with out-group members. Apart from particularity, it would seem, we cannot have any meaningful differences in virtue of which change can be introduced into the groups to which we belong.

In theological discourse, this is often referred to as "otherness." Humans are created with particularity in ways that allow persons to be other than or distinguished from other human persons. Particularity, then, is a given otherness in virtue of which the various aspects of particularity can change and be transformed over time. Such otherness is essential to a *teleological* view of human nature precisely because nature must be transformed to become what it is intended to be. Gunton calls this "identity-in-otherness," arguing that the constitution of the self requires relation to those who are different from the self. Relation to the other is essential to our creation in and formation into the *imago Dei* precisely because the Trinity is essentially three "others-in-relation."<sup>26</sup> Otherness is essential to the kind of communion for which we are created because we need those who are different from us in order for our identity-in-otherness to transform.

Let us look again at Christ's embodiment of his own particularity. If particularity is indeed a given otherness, then how is it that Christ encounters the other? Jennings points us not to isolated relationships of I and Thou without context, but to Christ's encounter with those who are other in the context of the crowd. In painting a Christian vision for belong to the other, Jennings writes,

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<sup>26</sup> Gunton, *The Three, the One, and the Many*, 16-22.

there is a central image in Scripture that illumines the trajectory of this creaturely belonging. It is the image that drives this book. It is the picture of Jesus and the crowd...*The crowd is everything. The crowd is us...People being forced to press up against each other to get to Jesus, to hear him, to get what they need from him. People who hate each other, who would prefer not to be next to each other. Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, rebels, insurrectionists, terrorists, murderers, tax collectors, sinners all...widows, the orphans, the poor, the rich, sex workers, wonderers, magicians, musicians, thieves, gangsters, addicts, magistrates, city leaders, people from all over the Roman Empire...Jesus teaches a motley crew.*<sup>27</sup>

The meaning of I and Thou in relation, the sort of relation that constitutes human nature, is found in what Eastman calls the “we-spaces” of the crowds.<sup>28</sup> The group, in other words sets the conditions for relations between persons across borders of difference.

This is displayed throughout Christ’s atoning life. Let us take the example of Christ and the woman at the well. Throughout the story, we see their interaction shaped and formed by each person’s particularity in a way contingent on the social structures of the day. She offers to draw water for him because of her femaleness and his maleness, as was the social norm in that time.<sup>29</sup> She shows up at that time of day because she has been ostracized by her community for her infidelity. She speaks to him with a certain kind of deference about worship and the temple because she is a Samaritan and he is Judean, understanding him culturally to have a sort of “first-access” to the worship of YHWH (Jhn 4:9). We note similar things about Christ’s interactions with other women during his ministry. In a different “crowd” or social context, their particularities might take on different meanings. Yet in this context, their relationship is at least partially determined by the particular social norms of the time and place in which their relationship occurs.

This becomes an important theme for how Jesus interacts with women throughout his ministry. As Judith Gundry puts it, “Jesus’ treatment of women differed from that of many of his contemporaries, and was not according to the stereotypes that brought social and religious

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<sup>27</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel,” 33; O’Brien, “Woman at the Well,” 507;

disadvantages for women.”<sup>30</sup> Christ’s engagement with women does not erase their femaleness, but instead acts within and transforms the social norms of the day. Women, who were not typically treated as disciples, witnesses, patrons, or teachers, are suddenly raised to equal status to men among Christ’s followers. Lucy Peppiatt argues that these roles “demonstrate the spiritual authority and responsibility that was conferred on women by Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus demonstrates awareness of women’s place in society in the day, taking on those norms and acting within their expectations while simultaneously challenging and transforming them. “Their being assigned these roles is significant also in the light of the fact that a woman’s word was commonly considered unreliable, as the reaction of the disciples to their report on the first Easter illustrates... Later the women’s words are authenticated, and thus their role as witnesses is legitimated, overturning contrary culturally-conditioned opinions and practices.”<sup>32</sup> We see several examples of this as Christ draws women in as followers alongside men; Jesus begins the engagement on the terms set by the community’s social norms and then transforms those norms to set female disciples on equal footing with their male counterparts (Lk 7:36-50; 10:38-42, Matt 28:1-10, Mk 3:31-35). R. T. France notes the blurry distinction between Christ’s male and female followers; what distinction there is seems to speak to the uniqueness of Christ’s ministry in raising up female disciples as equals alongside male disciples rather than an authority of male disciples over women.<sup>33</sup> Christ’s encounters with those different from him are defined by cultural norms even as they transform those norms according to the Image of God.

We might note here, too, Christ’s preference for those who experience a specific kind of othering in the crowds where Jesus is found. When feeding the five-thousand and when his teaching is interrupted by children, Christ elevates children’s standing. Children always have a place at his feet and we should actually learn from them what faith means, such as trusting the faith of a boy with nothing but five loaves and two fish. When Christ encounters women, who in Second-Temple Jewish society were treated more as background characters, he elevates their status by drawing attention to their worship and work.<sup>34</sup> It is no small thing that Mary is the first

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<sup>30</sup> Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel,” 33. See also, Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture’s Vision for Women*, 30-31.

<sup>31</sup> Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture’s Vision for Women*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel,” 33.

<sup>33</sup> France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*, 78.

<sup>34</sup> Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture’s Vision for Women*, 32; Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel,” 32; Bailey, “Women in the New Testament,” 2.



apostle to bear witness to the risen Christ, and not one of the male disciples who would have been culturally expected to take on such a role. Even the Samaritan woman is a notably odd choice for the sort of interaction she has with Jesus. It is through her that Christ transforms the lives of her whole village; this is odd because she is a woman in a society where men are typically the religious teachers and she is a woman whose entire community avoids or rejects her because of her sexual immorality. So it is not simply the ones who are other to himself that Christ encounters and elevates, but the especially othered—that is to say marginalized—within the crowd that gathers to him. The crowd sets the conditions, or one might say expectations, of otherness in which these Christ-encounters occur.

So what does Jesus do in these relations to the other? He transforms them. The woman at the well becomes an evangelist to her town, her femaleness and her past sins no longer a barrier to her being a teacher. He both welcomes children while changing their social status before their elders. He takes those at the margins of society and centralizes them. The prostitute on her way to be stoned, for instance, is both saved from her sexual immorality and from the crowds impending violence (Jhn 8:1-11). Jesus enters into the social structures of the day and transforms how they are constructed around embodied differences, changing those bodies in the process. As Jennings puts it, “Jesus will challenge the very foundations of social life by challenging the power of the kinship network, which organized the central social, economic, and geographic realities of life in Israel. Jesus entered fully into the kinship structure not to destroy it but to reorder it—around himself.”<sup>35</sup> So this transformation of particularity does not just change the individual’s embodiment of that particularity, it changes their particularity as it exists within the formation of the crowd.

Christ’s communion with the other is transformative for the crowd precisely because it resists what the crowd is always attempting to do. This crowd, according to Jennings, is constantly pulled by the two-fold impulse for hegemony, the institutionalization of control or mastery in the crowd, and homogeneity, the institutionalization of sameness across persons and their particularity in the crowd. Those who are not homogenous are pushed to the bottom of the hegemonic structure. Those who are at bottom get the least amount of say in what is normative for the homogenous vision of the structure. He is describing Western institutions of theological education, but has in mind broader forms of structure including the political, social, ecclesial,

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<sup>35</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 89.

and corporate.<sup>36</sup> He writes, “theological education in the West was born in white hegemony and homogeneity, and it continues to baptize homogeneity, making it holy and right and efficient — when it is none of these things. ‘Hegemony’ and ‘homogeneity’ are words that mean control and sameness, a control that aims for sameness and a sameness that imagines control.”<sup>37</sup> According to Jennings, such institutions are trapped in cycles which aim at these two things in distinctively racialized ways. Distorted crowds aim to form members who are all part of the same tribe. Part and parcel to that sameness is a control of one’s self and one’s world, amounting to self-sufficiency. This kind of formation is a decidedly racialized one, paralleling theological distortions of racial imagination. “Crudely put,” Jennings states, “theological education vacillates between a pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming white self-sufficient men and a related pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming a Christian racial and cultural homogeneity that yet performs the nationalist vision of that same white self-sufficient man.”<sup>38</sup> The distorted vision, in other words, that crowds have is a homogenous vision of the self-sufficient male, pale, and stale who not only fit into the controlled mould of their institutions, but serve to proliferate it.

Yet Christ enters into these sorts of crowds, ones which place the elite, religious men of pure Israelite descent at the top of structures that marginalize the poor, the Gentile and Samaritan, women, and sinners, and transforms them. The poor and powerless become essential to the kingdom vision which Christ preaches. He doesn’t just transform maleness and femaleness, Jewishness and Gentileness, slave and freeman, he transforms the very conditions for their definition. He transforms how they relate to one another in embodied ways. This does not replace difference with homogeneity and hegemony, but instead essentialize otherness as a condition for authentic communion.

### **§12.3 *Communion with the Other***

Otherness, therefore, is a pre-condition for the kind of communion for which humanity is intended. Particularity is thus an essential feature of human nature. Rather than construing human nature in terms of those features which we all have in common, it should be thought of in terms of the crowd drawn together around Jesus; of this particular human being calling every

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<sup>36</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12.

other particular human being into communion. In this interpersonal encounter, Christ transforms our particularity. This transformation includes also a transformation of the nature of the crowd itself. To put it in Jennings' terms, where the crowd gathered only so that each might get what they need from Jesus, the crowd is reshaped into a discipling community in which each desires the flourishing of the other: the *communio Dei*. We need each other in our gathering around Jesus. The crowd does not all become one sort of particularity either. Jennings warns us against such supersessionist readings of Christian particularity that read "Christian" as a new national, racial, or ethnic identity that flattens particularities.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the transformed community is one in which the differences of otherness persist; the crowd does not cease to be a motley crew.

The so-called crew does, however, change. Where the differences were previously borders to authentic communion, they are now conceived of as the basis for authentic communion. In criticizing theological accounts of racial reconciliation that amount to what Bonhoeffer called, "cheap grace," Jennings demands a reconciliation in which the other remains other.<sup>40</sup> What is transformed is the relations between others so that they are no longer enemies but brothers and sisters in Christ. Andrew Draper develops Jennings' ideas into what he calls "an ecclesiology of joining." In his Jennings-endorsed vision for transformed communion, Draper offers a picture of "Pauline somatic ecclesiology," according to which "the church is present inasmuch as there is diversity of ethnic and socioeconomic groups functioning together in whole and healthy bodily unity as they are joined to their head, the Jewish Lord."<sup>41</sup> He continues, "the scandal of the body of Christ is that people who have no business being together are intentionally intermeshing their lives in shared space so as to constitute a new creature (a new "people"), an inseparable whole in which difference is maintained while being conjoined."<sup>42</sup> Rather than a new people group which supersedes the various group identities in which members of the body participate, the body of Christ is a group informed by the particularity of the various other memberships of its members. The transformation of the group is not one that seeks to obliterate particularity, but one that transforms the relations between particularities. Such a transformation is only possible where diversity in particularity is found.

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<sup>39</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*.

<sup>40</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place*, 281.

<sup>42</sup> Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place*, 281.

So what sort of transformation of the group's structure is necessary for such a diverse community to be formed? To be certain, there are many ways we could imagine that a transformative interaction between two differing particularities might occur. Before exploring the transformative power of otherness, we might outline a handful of parameters from the above considerations. First, we may rule out "transformation" that results in the collapse, erasure, or otherwise homogenizing of particularities. When the male Christ encounters women, he does not do so to transform them into men nor flatten the distinctiveness of their witness in their particular socio-cultural context. When Christ encounters Gentiles and Samaritans, we see him similarly ratify the significance their particularity to their witness while also changing it. The goal of encounter with the other in communion is never to erase their otherness. Rather, the transformation that occurs in Christ retains otherness while changing the experience of our particularity in relation to the other.

Second, Christ's interaction with otherness seems to prioritize the perspective of the poorest and most oppressed of any social structure which we might inhabit. While Jesus came to save the entire world, it is the poor and oppressed who know him most truly and apart from whom the rich and the oppressor cannot know God (Matt 25:40; 1 Cor 1:28; James 25). As McCaulley writes, "Jesus preaches the gospel to the *poor*, the brokenhearted are healed, and those in bondage are set free. This shows that those whom society has declared secondary receive the place of priority in the kingdom."<sup>43</sup> This, McCaulley argues, is part and parcel to the kingly office of Christ. "The king—who reflects God's own justice—is on the side of the poor and disinherited. Jesus' kingly sonship is inseparable from God's justice because Israel's king cares for the poor."<sup>44</sup> Jesus embodies relations to particularity that not only recognize difference but recognize the distorted ways in which we have socially constructed around that difference. While oppression is not an essential reality of the oppressed (for God did not create them to be oppressed), God commandeers their social status and makes them essential to his revelatory and reconciliatory ministry.

This is a principle argument of Cone, who argues that it is because of God's solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized of society that they have this particular epistemic access to the heart of God. Cone argues that all our knowing of God necessarily takes place from the

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<sup>43</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 92.

<sup>44</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 90.

perspective of our own experience and that it is primarily in the experience of the oppressed that God is truly known.<sup>45</sup> In fact, he goes as far as to argue that “any view of the gospel that fails to understand the Church as that community whose work and consciousness are defined by the community of the oppressed is not Christian and is thus heretical.”<sup>46</sup> The God who is himself perfect communion and the brokenness of our own communion with one another cannot be known outside of our particular embodied and socially-constructed experiences. This experience, Cone argues, is always socialized because even in our brokenness, we exist in distorted forms of community.<sup>47</sup> He therefore argues that, “if the truth of the biblical story is God’s liberation of the oppressed then the social *a priori* of oppressors excludes the possibility of their hearing and seeing the truth of divine presence, because the conceptual universe of their thought contradicts the story of divine liberation. Only the poor and weak have the axiological grid necessary for the hearing and the doing of the divine will disclosed in their midst.”<sup>48</sup> Theology, therefore, is always at its best in conversation with or coming from the experience of the oppressed. Theologies from the contextual perspective of persons of colour, women, and those who are regularly pressed to the bottom of our hegemonic structures of power are prophetic in this way; they speak from God’s solidarity to the social structures that at least partially constitute human existence.<sup>49</sup> Because the first-personal perspective of the oppressed holds this epistemic priority, relation to the other that much more significant to our bearing the image of God; we are more likely to be community with the oppressed when we do not limit our relationships to those who are like us. Homogeneity breeds hegemony which continues to sponsor homogeneity.<sup>50</sup>

This is important because, while all difference brought about by particularity might provide for the possibility of authentic communion, it is communion with those victimized by the hegemony of our broken social structures that is essentialized. Because this epistemic access is grounded in the first-personal perspective of being marginalized and oppressed, its insights into the God who is himself a diverse communion of persons does not flatten diversity for the sake of

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<sup>45</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 16; 32.

<sup>46</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 86.

<sup>49</sup> Reddie, *Black Theology in Britain*, 138. A similar move has been made with regards to neuro-divergent persons, such as those with on the Autism Spectrum. Brock, for instance, argues that differently-abled persons can embody a living challenge to and condemnation of ableisms that have become embedded in the Church and society, pointing the towards more authentic ways of embodying the Kingdom of God. See, Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12.

unity. The unity of the community which the Spirit forms in solidarity with the oppressed is self-aware of human hegemonic and homogenous impulses for this reason. This is demonstrated in black theological readings of Pentecost, such as when Anthony Reddie writes,

Pentecost demolishes any notion of cultural superiority or government-inspired attacks on multiculturalism in favour of the mantra of sameness and integration... In the Pentecost narrative, we hear people speaking in their mother tongue. There is no presumption of pre-eminence in terms of particular language, culture, or expression. The ability to have visions and dream dreams is the preserve of all humankind irrespective of class, ethnicity, or culture. The God of all, in Christ, has called all humanity into an unconditional relationship with the divine, in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>51</sup>

While this vision for the *communio Dei* recognizes that all particularities, in all their socially-constructed and embodied elements, are equally called to this community and that each has something to offer the communal vision of God beheld in Jesus Christ, it also recognizes the actuality of the power structures in which these particularities exist, calling some to contribute more to this vision than others. It is not enough to welcome the other into our space; we must do so in ways that do not attempt to homogenize them into what we are as a condition of their welcome nor place them into a hierarchy on the basis of their difference. Such an empty welcome offers false promises of communion while simultaneously flattening the diversity with which God creates humanity.<sup>52</sup> The *communio Dei* demands not only a welcome of all to the table, but a reformulation of what welcome entails in light of the social structures in which our particularities exist. Reddie's liberational epistemology thus begins and ends with "the God who challenges us to seek the good of our neighbor and encourages us to find human fulfillment in radical hospitality, in community with others and in communion with God, revealed in Jesus Christ."<sup>53</sup> It is not enough that we know God in diverse community. We must know God in diverse communion which centres the voices of the marginalized. Our knowing of God and our construction of community that reflects God's own nature are at their best when they reflect the

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<sup>51</sup> Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 121.

<sup>53</sup> Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 81.

mode of Christ's own ministry: Christ identified and empowered those on the margins of societies to lead the way in bearing witness to him. When we do so, otherness becomes essential to how we construct community.

We are created fundamentally for communion with God, one another, and the created order that recognizes and reifies our distinctions. These distinctions are not borders to union and communion, rather they are the pre-condition for it. Christ fundamentally transforms the groups in which we participate by undermining our hegemonically and homogenously built communities and centring those at the margins. It is only once we centre these particularities that we recognize otherness as essential to our being conformed to the Image of Christ.

### §13

#### **Formative Otherness in the *Imago Dei***

If otherness is essential to our being formed into the *teleological* vision of humanity revealed in the *Imago Dei*, then particularity is essential to human nature defined *teleologically*. It is difficult, as demonstrated by the solutions rejected in §I.3, to treat our differences as transformative and essential without painting either a homogenous or fractured picture of human nature. The formative power of relation to the other must be cast in such a way as to allow for difference to persist without differences making transformation impossible. In other words, how does being in close, second-personal relationship with those who are different from us in *communio Dei* contribute to our being transformed in the New Humanity that is in Christ without making us all into one kind of thing?

This, Jennings identifies, is the problem of translation and its inherent power. Translation for Jennings is a theologically rich concept which captures our sharing knowledge, stories, and perspectives—unique pieces of who we are—with others who are different from us in a way which they can receive in their own particularity. Translation is about second-personal communication across borders of difference. At its best, translation is a humble activity intended for “the divine life to be spoken in the words of everyone, one people at a time, each translating a revelation into their own tongue.”<sup>54</sup> But translation is “close to ultimate power,” Jennings warns, “the power to call worlds into existence through words, spoken and written.” Just as “translation opens up endless possibilities of boundary-crossing freedom and life...” it can also open up

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<sup>54</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12.

“endless possibilities of boundary-crossing slavery and death.”<sup>55</sup> The difference between these two outcomes is whether the aim of the particular community in which translation is occurring is one of hegemony and homogeneity or one which is oriented towards the freedom of divinely-wrought *communio Dei*, the freedom to be particular. Relation to the other and translation across borders of difference are essential to such community. We require, therefore, an account of how particularity can be translated across borders of difference without erasing those borders or building hegemonic structures around those borders.

### ***§13.1 Translation as Communal-Ontological Intersubjectivity***

Such translation, because of its inherent power and potential, is difficult to account for. Yet we must make sense of how a first-person perspective, rooted in an individual’s particularity, can be translated second-personally to another without needing homogeneity or hegemony. Apart from such translation, the relation to the other has little to contribute to our formation as individuals. If, as was argued above, we need relation to the other in order to be formed into our *telos* for *communio Dei*, then we require a coherent account of translation across borders of difference which does not need to homogenize those with whom we share aspects of ourselves nor place others into hegemonic structures in order to share our perspective with them.

So much of the history of philosophy has pitted our experience as subjects, our first-personal knowing situated in our socio-embodied particularity, against our knowing of anything outside of ourselves. Linda Zagzebski offers a broad history of this tension between what she calls the two greatest ideas. The first idea, which we might call “objectivity,” is “the idea that there is a universe with a unified rational structure.”<sup>56</sup> Objectivity concerns the idea that reality is knowable in a meaningful way beyond our perception of it. The human mind can conceive of and perceive, at least partially, the world around it. While included in the first great idea to a degree, the second great idea came to eclipse the first in modern thought. This idea is sometimes called “subjectivity,” namely “that the human mind is capable of grasping itself.”<sup>57</sup> In grasping itself, the mind understands its own limits in perceiving the outside world; this grounds the assumed conflict between objectivity and subjectivity. This shift led to a skepticism of the

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<sup>55</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 10.



mind's ability to comprehend the objective reality of the world, including other minds.<sup>58</sup> Examples of this skepticism can be found in thinkers like David Hume, who argued for “the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding.”<sup>59</sup> This became a basis for his criticism of universalizing ideas like theology as “sophistry and illusion.”<sup>60</sup> Zagzebski observes, “what was dramatic about the ascendance of the second great idea was the shift from the view that the human mind grasps itself through grasping the world to the idea that the human mind grasps the world through grasping itself. People began to think that one's consciousness is the gateway through which all of knowledge of the world must pass.”<sup>61</sup> As we come to better understand consciousness and the ways in which it relies on and is influenced by bodily realities, social relationships, and other external, structural factors, it becomes more difficult to espouse a universal sense of our perception of the external world; the way in which I know the world from my first-person perspective will always bear differences to how someone else perceives the world.

This tension presents a problem for Jennings' concept of translation. If subjectivity limits our knowing of the world to our first-person perspectives, then the world, God, and other persons are not knowable in their own particularity, only within the scope of our own. This would mean that my first-personal perspective is insulated from others and that I can only know them insofar as we are homogenous with regards to our particularity. I could not know others in their particularity and they cannot know me in mine because of our differences, creating an unassailable boundary between particularities that rules out the kind of translation Jennings aims at.

This boundary is often associated with Immanuel Kant, whose epistemological distinction between reality and our perception of it is thought to have closed the door to the possibility of things like substance metaphysics. More importantly for our purposes, it seems to render impossible my having a true representation of someone else's mental states in my mind because their first-person perspective is outside the bounds of my first-person perspective. Most of us at some point have sat with a friend enduring a hardship and offered the familiar aphorism: “I can't possibly understand what you are going through, but I am here for you,” or heard a

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<sup>58</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 15-16.

<sup>59</sup> Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, 162.

<sup>60</sup> Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, 165.

<sup>61</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 14.

frustrated teenager decry to their parents that nobody understands them because no one else has had to go through what they are going through. These common parlances assume that we can only know within the bounds of our subjective experience of an object. Kant thus argues, “it would be absurd for us to hope that we can know more of any object than belongs to the possible experience of it or lay claim to the least knowledge of anything not assumed to be an object of possible experience which would determine it according to the constitution it has in itself.”<sup>62</sup> For Kant, our ability to know a thing is limited by both the possibility of our experience of it and the reality of the object itself. For the knowledge of persons, this would mean that one can only know of another person’s perspective that which they share with them. That which is other cannot be meaningfully shared because it is beyond the scope of our subjectivity. We all, in this way, become trapped in our own subjectivity. Subjectivity is an inescapable reality of human knowing and we will always interpret reality through the lens of our categories.<sup>63</sup>

Many analytic theologians, however, reject the *absoluteness* of this barrier. As McCall puts it, “so many theologians are well aware of Kant’s work (and the common claims made about that work), but they don’t think that he did anything to shut down the kind of work they are doing.”<sup>64</sup> While theologians and philosophers have proposed their own reasons for doing so, this thesis might offer its own. First, the kind of communion for which we are created necessitates the possibility of a perichoretic sharing of things like mental states which are grounded in our particularity. The previous chapter has already defended this possibility through the second-personal sharing of mental states in structured group. Such sharing neither collapses the first-person perspectives of persons, leaving Kant’s boundary intact, nor insulates individuals to their own perspective, making Kant’s boundary permeable. In other words, we have *theological* reasons to think that translation of some kind is not only possible, but essential to the *telos* with which God creates humanity.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena*, §59.

<sup>63</sup> Wolterstorff, “Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?,” 10.

<sup>64</sup> McCall, *An Invitation to Analytic Theology*, 31. While there are many ways of interpreting Kant’s work here, this interpretation is the one which most saliently drives critiques of analytic theology and problematizes human subjectivity and knowledge of God. Whether or not this is the best interpretation of Kant, it is still the one operative in problematic ways. See, Wolterstorff, “Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?,” 8.

<sup>65</sup> Perhaps if Kant had been afforded the opportunity to read Jennings, he might not have thought it necessary to construe this barrier as so absolute.

Second, the constitutive power of such second-personal sharing means not only that the boundaries between persons is permeable, but that this permeability is necessary for persons to even be persons. This thesis has already unpacked the ways in which we rely on social relationships to other persons in structured groups for our identity, agency, and even our being as human creatures created in the image of God. By contrast, as Zagzebski argues, a Kantian model of subjectivity relies on an absolutely autonomous self, one which relies atomistically on the self alone for all cognitive and epistemic capacities. She writes, “the metaphysical study of human beings shifted from a focus on the *person*, a being defined by its place in the world, to a focus on the *self*, the bearer of individual subjective consciousness. The consequence was a dramatic shift from the idea of morality as grounded in autonomy, or self-governance, and the ultimate bearer of authority became the self.”<sup>66</sup> Such a conception of the self is undermined not only by what we know from the sciences about human cognition, but also by theological categories of human belonging and communion. Models reliant on this conception fail precisely because, as Jennings puts it, “they have imagined institutions without reckoning with their deep embeddedness in cultivating white self-sufficient masculinity and binding ideas of efficiency and effectiveness to the performance of that persona.”<sup>67</sup> There is certainly something inevitable about human situatedness that informs particularity, but Kant’s model seems to be trapped in the fractured humanity critiqued in §I.3.2. We may for this reason take there to be a permeability to Kant’s boundary between our experience of reality and reality itself as a theological just-so story (or at least for our purposes, the boundary between personal subjects situated in their particularity).

Finally, Kant’s unassailable barrier quickly became unassailable only for some, as the previous quote by Jennings demonstrates. While pointing us towards the subjectivity of all human knowing, Kant and others who followed him continued to make sweeping, universal assertions about the universe while situated in their own subjective experience while disregarding others who did the same. So much theology today similarly purports to make universal claims about God and the world while disregarding so-called “contextual theology” as not sufficiently serious or moored by bias. While not entailed by Kant’s dualism, the result is that only certain privileged particularities (typically males of western-European descent) are able to pierce that veil and speak beyond their particularity. Amber Griffioen has called this perspective

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<sup>66</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> See Jennings critiques in, *After Whiteness*, 12.

“nowhere men,” asserting that the so-called objective, analytic thinker who has eschewed all their subjective biases for perfect rationality is in fact just as situated and subjective as the rest of us.<sup>68</sup> Those who claim to speak of the universal as if without particularity are just as contextual as the rest of us. Elizabeth Mburu critiques western epistemology on precisely this point, especially as it pertains to the Bible and theology. She argues that “there is a failure to understand that where you are situated in time and space does affect how you view things and how you understand things.”<sup>69</sup> While Kant was perhaps correct about the inevitability of subjectivity, he did not sufficiently measure the extent of its effects on his own thinking.

Rejecting the Kantian absoluteness of subjectivity nevertheless leaves us inevitably subjective beings with a need for a bridge across borders of difference. Zagzebski provides just such a bridge in what she calls the third greatest idea: *intersubjectivity*. Intersubjectivity, according to Zagzebski, is when we treat “the mental states of others as subjects...the objective material world would be [known at] the point of convergence of a *community* of inquirers relating the contents of their minds to each other’s.”<sup>70</sup> In intersubjectivity, two subjects share mental states and observe some object of inquiry together. Intersubjectivity follows in some ways from the priority of the first great idea, in which uniqueness of subjective perspectives was erased (or at least depreciated) by bringing multiple observers together and comparing their perspectives and taking to be objective only those aspects which were commonly observed by all.<sup>71</sup> But rather than reducing the findings to only those commonly experienced aspects, intersubjectivity is also contrastive. This is important, as noted in the previous chapter, because both comparison and contrast are a part of how we form the social identities that contribute to the location of our subjectivity. It isn’t about erasing the uniqueness of our perspectives, but rather embracing what each perspective can bring uniquely to the table. Where the first great idea assumes that objectivity is contained within a subjective perspective (but discovered through comparison with other perspectives), intersubjectivity instead requires that we comprehend reality together to truly understand it. Intersubjectivity, in other words, makes translation essential to our thinking, acting, and knowing as persons in the world.

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<sup>68</sup> Griffioen, “Nowhere Men and Divine I’s.” See also, McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Mburu, “The Church Needs African Hermeneutics,” 5; Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, ch 2.

<sup>70</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 151-152. Emphasis added.

<sup>71</sup> Zagzebski, *Two Greatest Ideas*, 152.

There are three ways in which we might identify translation as a distinctive type of intersubjectivity. Firstly, Jennings' translation is not just about the intersubjectivity of individual persons, but the translation between the categories, language, and cultural artefacts of cognition held by different social groupings.<sup>72</sup> Translation is a *communal* intersubjectivity because it is fundamentally shaped by the social-structural context in which it occurs. Some accounts of intersubjectivity, such as its previously mentioned corollaries in social cognition, readily recognize the ways that social context shapes and determines interpersonal relationships. But Jennings' translation makes these forces *essential* to the kind of joining he has in mind. "A Gospel that is translatable not only shows the beauty of a God who loves and speaks to us in our particularities, it also promises a form of cultural agency for peoples through which they can hear their own voices, know their own thoughts, and see God for themselves."<sup>73</sup> As argued in III.10.1, this is because much of what constitutes our personal identities comes from the various group identities to which we belong. Jesus does not present himself to us outside of these identities, but he comes both as one with such particularity and as one who meets us in our particularity, translating across the gap to transform us. Translation, then, points towards the *telos* of the human capacity for intersubjectivity: we are created with this capacity and with the socio-embodied differences across which intersubjectivity operates so that we might form and belong to communities that are capable of joining together those from disparate backgrounds. Belonging to one another in such communities, for Jennings, is the goal or *telos* of human social existence and intersubjectivity is the potential for the realization of that *telos*. As Jennings puts it, "the belonging I am envisioning here superintends all other forms of belonging, drawing them to healing light and redeeming life. There is a central image in Scripture that illumines the trajectory of this creaturely belonging."<sup>74</sup> Intersubjectivity tells us that it is possible to be shaped by the particularity of our various social identity features but translation tells that our belonging to these differing communities and joining those communities together in the *communio Dei* is fundamental to human flourishing.

Second, because intersubjectivity helps connect our subjective experience to objective reality, intersubjectivity in such communities as the *communio Dei* gives us greater epistemic

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<sup>72</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 29; 66; 80-88. Jennings calls these groupings "social ecologies."

<sup>73</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 15.

access to reality. Translation is further a *communal* intersubjectivity in this way. At the centre of the *communio Dei* is our second-personal knowing and loving God, one another, and creation in Christ. Thus, the kind of intersubjectivity which should shape the *communio Dei* helps us to know God, one another, and creation better. The theological and ethical tasks of the body of Christ, as defined by the commandments to know and love God and to know and love one's neighbor, are best accomplished in translative intersubjectivity. We know and love God more fully when we seek to know and love God in community with those who are different from us. We know and love others better when we do so in the context of diverse community. Another way of putting this is to say that our knowing and loving others is most fully actualized when it is done in joint attention with those who are different from us.

This is the formative power of intersubjectivity, particularly the kind of intersubjectivity that occurs in Jennings' call to second-personally translate across borders of difference in communal belonging. Someone who has a different particularity than me will see the same God with different emphases, nuances, and particular relations to that God. These differences can serve to correct my own understanding, challenge my cultural assumptions, and shed light on aspects of God which I have yet to perceive. This can only be done where the person with whom I am jointly attending to God sees God from a different perspective than I do. These differing aspects of perspective do not become a part of my first-person perspective, but become second-personal artifacts that form (or reform) my first-personal perspective. To see the other in communion with others who are different from us is to see the other from multiple perspectives. This does not flatten our particularity, but instead emphasizes how fundamental our differences are for knowing and relating in this way. We can only know God, one another, and creation truly when we do so in the diverse communion that essentially constitutes the body of Christ.

Finally, because the kind of belonging and relating that we are intended for in *communio Dei* is ontological, my intersubjective relation to the other across borders of difference is essential to my constitution as a relational being. Translation is *ontological* intersubjectivity. The ways that my knowing and loving God change as I receive second-personally from others aspects of their particular relationship with God. This serves to transform who and what I am as a person. Translation, as that kind of intersubjectivity which crosses borders of difference in the human *telos for communio Dei*, is an ontological intersubjectivity. What we are sharing when we are second-personally sharing our own first-person perspectives with others is a piece of our very

being as relational creatures. This is analogous to the kind of *perichoresis* that God has in Godself, wherein the Son shares in all that the Father has (Jhn 17:6-7), but with one key difference. Where the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is so absolute that there is in fact one being with three persons, the *perichoresis* which humans experience in *communio Dei* maintains both the distinction of persons (and their subjectivity) *as well as* the distinctiveness of each being. Human persons retain their subjectivity even as it is changed by relation to others in a way that tracks the ontological distinctions between persons. There is a stability to the individuality of such personal beings, but it also makes the being of personhood dynamic and malleable. Translation points not just to the communal intersubjectivity of our knowing and loving others in *communio Dei*, but to an ontological intersubjectivity in which our very being is transformed in communion with those who are different from us.

### ***§13.2 Unity and Diversity: The Dynamic Instability of Human Nature***

The move from an epistemic intersubjectivity to an ontological intersubjectivity entails that human natures are dynamic.<sup>75</sup> This might make some readers nervous, especially those committed to the sorts of metaphysical distinctions between the one and the many, objective and subjective, and personhood and selfhood which this thesis has argued should be a bit more blurred. This is likely because of the emphasis on the unity-in-commonality of things in the first great idea. The unity between things is easier to explain when we can explain it as all things having the same essential properties. While this sort of unity which flattens the distinctions of particularity may be helpful for some purposes, it is insufficient for explaining the kind of unity that human persons are intended to have in *communio Dei*. Union with Christ and union with others in Christ is not about uniting over what we have in common but learning from the ways that we are different. This diversity is essential to the transformative work of Christ in uniting all of humanity in himself. The unity of human nature, therefore, cannot be grounded in overstated claims of commonness.

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<sup>75</sup> In what follows, I attempt to give some explanation of how we can conceive of nature dynamically. I recognize that this is an odd metaphysical claim and that, given the history of metaphysics, more work will need to be done to defend and explain this position than what can adequately be presented in this thesis. What follows should hopefully serve as sufficient provision to explore how a dynamic construal of what it means to have a nature can be helpful for explaining the role of particularity in human nature.

We may perhaps make commonality claims of the universality of Christ's humanity for all human persons or the universality of the call on human life to participate in the *communio Dei*, but this commonality cannot be utilized to denigrate or flatten human particularity. Rather, this kind of unity relies on and emphasizes human particularity. The *telos* of human existence is a resistance to the impulse for homogeneity in our communities: a unity that breeds particularity and particularity that constitutes our unity. This requires a dynamic, rather than entirely stable, account of human ontology; human nature (whether thought of in concrete or abstract terms) can change over time.

While this may seem metaphysically odd at first blush, *theologically*, it is not as shocking. Human nature must transform from its ontology under the first Adam into the New Humanity revealed and healed in the person and work of Christ. Persons are sanctified in Christ, changing and transforming as they are continuously conformed to Christ's Image. Human beings, moreover, are contingent beings. To whatever degree we require stability in our account of human ontology, that stability will never rise to the level of necessity which we see in the being of the Godhead.

Our creatureliness implies some degree of instability in our being; our ontological dependence on God, other persons, and the created order makes our existence a dynamic and contingent reality. Jennings critiques the essentialist grounding of unity-in-commonality as idolatrous, arguing from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that "there is a fundamental instability to all things... All things are contingent and held together by God. Rather than rendered through a godlike stability, the world *ex nihilo* means that all things carry inherent possibilities of continuity or discontinuity. Indeed, the fragility of human existence marks humans' inherent instability."<sup>76</sup> This call for instability in thinking about human being and identity is rooted in our contingent creatureliness. Our contingent dependence on our relations to God and others to be who and what we are means that everything about us except for that fundamental dependence is changeable. We change who and what we are as those fundamental, person-constituting relationships change over time. This may undermine accounts of the *imago Dei* grounded in particular human capacities, such as rationality or our ability to exercise dominion over creation, because our capacities can be changed over time (or in extreme cases be removed) by our relations to others. Rather than being problematic, however, the assertion that human ontology is

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<sup>76</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 28.



dynamic and unstable *coinheres* with creatureliness, supporting the idea that we are contingent in a way that is qualitatively different from the being of God.

The logical costs of our dynamic ontology, therefore, are consistent with theological claims about human creatureliness. As Jennings puts it, “when viewed through this hermeneutical horizon, peoples exist without a necessary permanence of either place or of identity. This kind of antiessentialist vision facilitates a different way of viewing human communities. The essential characteristic of people is their need—for pardon and life, that is, for salvation from God.”<sup>77</sup> I would add to this need for life with God, on the basis of the *communio Dei*, the need for life with one another in and with the created order. It is a unity and stability that “presses toward a different kind of communalism. It presses toward a gathering that breaks boundaries and crosses borders.”<sup>78</sup> We can have some stability or common grounding in our human nature, but it must be a commonality that grows and deepens our particularity as a necessary condition of the common *telos* we have for *communio Dei*.

What is universal about humanity, then, is not our capacities, our features, or a list of particular properties, but our *telos* for communion that is revealed and received in our union with the particular human person, Jesus Christ. Defining human nature by its *telos* is not quite the same as the western trend of defining human nature by a list of properties or capacities both because it is more minimal and because it is dispositional. McKirland, for instance, argues that humanity is defined not by its capacity for relationship to Christ nor certain properties that are often used to relate to Christ but by its *need* for communion with God. She writes, “because this need is both dispositional and relational, it is a permanent feature while also being dynamic, as in any relationship, with the potential to expand and deepen.”<sup>79</sup> While offering stability, as any other account of the *imago Dei* grounded in human capacities might, McKirland’s account uniquely offers a minimal kind of stability that itself necessitates a dynamism in human nature. There are many different capacities or properties that we can have which might aid the fulfilling of this *telos*, but none of them need to be universal. This sort of need is relational and thus necessitates particularity rather than particularity being an accidental feature of human nature. So while her account does offer stability to human nature, it is grounded in “a universal human need

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<sup>77</sup> Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 28

<sup>78</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 105.

<sup>79</sup> McKirland, *God’s Provision, Humanity’s Need*, 167.

that maintains the value of particularities...this is not a liability to overcome but a dignity to be embraced.”<sup>80</sup> McKirland’s account offers a *telos* of human nature that is unitive while necessitating our being particular beings. “Given that this fundamental human need is relational and dynamic, flourishing is decreed based on the capacity to grow in this dependence relation. Thus, the need remains constant across all expressions of humanness, even eschatologically, but *how* it is met can evolve and grow over time.”<sup>81</sup> Her account of what unities human nature doesn’t just allow for particularity, it makes particularity essential a way that allows for human beings to change over time without compromising their humanness or their identities. Human nature is defined by its unique *telos* for participation in the *communio Dei* that Christ instantiates in his assumption of human nature. Human nature is not an abstract object that defines particulars or a set of particulars from which we derive an abstract definition; it is a growing and changing community structured and defined by its destiny for union and communion in Christ.

Humanity defined by its *telos* can change over time. We are created with the various particularities we have, whether they be racial, gendered, or otherwise, for the purpose of growing and transforming as a species in relationships across borders. This implicates both the corporate and individual aspects of our identities in our existence as socio-embodied creatures. Our relating to one another in ways that translate our experience of God across borders of difference transforms how our particularities relate to one another in socio-embodied ways. I raised above several examples of how particular features of our bodies *rely* on social constructions as well as some examples of how social categories result somewhat unconsciously in bodily changes. Jesus’ socially-embodied maleness, for instance, challenged the social norms of his culture regarding how women were treated, leading to changes in the social construction around female bodies. But this implies also that we could take a more active role in shaping our embodiment.

Because human nature is at least partially defined by its potential for changeability, our great capacity for community building and social shaping implies that we also have a great ability to shape our bodies. We can change brain chemistry through food we eat and medicines we take, as well as surgical intervention. We can remove limbs and organs and replace them with synthetic parts. We can change the structures of our communities to allow or restrict access to

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<sup>80</sup> McKirland, *God’s Provision, Humanity’s Need*, 4-5.

<sup>81</sup> McKirland, *God’s Provision, Humanity’s Need*, 156.

certain spaces by those whose bodies and minds function differently than the perceived norm. Including embodiment in the potential for change in human nature points towards what Christ promises in his humanity eschatologically: resurrected and glorified bodies given in his own resurrection and glorification by the Father. But the transformation that comes in Christ making our bodies new does not promise to remove the socio-embodied marks of our particularity. As Jones argues, “both now and at the eschaton, the salvation of psychosomatic human creatures will be distinctive because it includes the materially particular body.”<sup>82</sup> She concludes that our transformation into the Image of Christ is inclusive of our “concrete embodied particularity. In the particular body of Christ, the particular bodies of all are transformed but never destroyed.”<sup>83</sup> How Christ embodies his particularity and its transformation of our particularity points to a virtually limitless potential for our embodied relations and relational bodies.

Everything about what we are as human creatures is changeable because the one thing that is common to every human creature is our *telos* for translation across borders of socio-embodied difference that transforms us in *communio Dei*. So while this virtually limitless potential may seem theologically worrisome (and indeed it should), what I am describing is not meant to endorse all difference-creating and social construction around our bodies as inherently good. There are very clear examples of things that we *can* do with our bodies and the socially constructed elements of them which the scriptures expressly prohibit. Violence against bodies which look different from ours, socio-economic systems of oppression, and creating rules of church government that shield sexual abusers from accountability are all clear examples of the socio-embodied potential of human nature at its worst. Such possibilities are within the scope of our relational capacity for community building, but are contrary to the purpose for which we are created with those possibilities. This speaks to Jennings’ warning about the power of translation: it is given to us because it serves our ultimate end of being in communion but it can do great harm if used contrary to this purpose. This will be addressed in greater detail in §V, but it bears raising for the purpose of illustrating the relationship between what humanity is capable of in its relational embodiment and its ontology as a community of creatures created for the *telos* of *communio Dei*.

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<sup>82</sup> Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 113.

### ***§13.3 Dynamic Human Nature and the Temporal Problem of Numerical Identity***

One possible objection to this dynamic or malleable construal of human nature is that it undermines identity, particularly numerical identity across time. The importance of stability in defining human nature often has to do with maintaining a stable sense of identity, construed not in the social psychological sense of the previous chapter but in the philosophical sense of numerical identity across time. What is meant by numerical identity is the idea that I am identical with myself as a subject even as moments pass and change occurs. While I argued that this sense of identity is assumed to an extent by the identity categories of relational ontology (but not some key aspect which we can track by identifying a set of essential capacities or properties) we still need to track the continuity and stability of personal identity across time to rightly establish the stability of that personal being. In III.10, I argued for a solution against what I called the ontological problem of numerical identity, namely that certain radical apocalyptic interpreters of Paul collapse the psychological understanding of personal identity into the ontological understanding of numerical identity. Because I have argued that personal identity is indeed ontological but not in a way that compromises the ontological distinctions between beings preserved in numerical identity, it will be helpful to also demonstrate how changes in my personal being do not constitute a cessation of my existence and the creation of an entirely new being. This I call the temporal problem of numerical identity, as it raises the concern of change over time.

The temporal problem of numerical identity is raised by J. T. Turner in a recent paper on moral sanctification in the eschaton. Turner argues that numerical identity would be compromised if a being were to undergo so significant or sudden of a change in their moral being (abrupt purgation) because it would undermine the continuity of their being.<sup>84</sup> In other words, if a being changes enough, they are no longer identical with their past selves because there is no reasonable way of tracking the continuity from one side of the change to the other. Turner's argument in this regard relies in part on assumptions about identity which this thesis has already rejected, but also on somewhat vague notions of what constitutes a significant enough change for a being's numerical identity to be compromised. This criticism is raised by Jonathan Rutledge, who argues that there are different kinds of abruptness which might constitute a change in a person, but that Turner is vague about what constitutes the kind of abruptness which

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<sup>84</sup> Turner, "Purgatory Puzzles."

undermines continuity.<sup>85</sup> Despite this criticism and the assumptions the argument comes with, Turner's argument raises a valid concern. If any aspect of a human being changes except for its *telos*, at what point have we changed that person so much that they are no longer themselves? Rutledge's critique of Turner only works up until a point if we are willing to grant the dynamic view of nature argued for above. In essence, we are looking at the classical philosophical problem: the Ship of Theseus. For this philosophical exercise, the philosopher imagines a ship with rotting planks and tattered sails in need of repair. As the philosopher imagines the various decrepit pieces being replaced with new ones, the philosopher asks themselves at what point the Ship of Theseus stops being the Ship of Theseus and becomes an entirely new ship. How much of that which constitutes a thing can we replace before the thing is no longer identical with itself? How much can a person change before they are no longer identical with their past self, but are instead a distinct being entirely? This is particularly relevant if we want to make the claim that particularities, those things about us which do in fact change in relationship with others, are ontological and essential to human nature.

The concept of narrative identity can help us to address this objection because it allows for a single sense of identity which changes and develops across time while the whole of the narrative captures the continuity and stability of that identity throughout these changes. Narrative, according to Mike Rea, refers to, "a representation whose content is unified by an interpretation (tacit or explicit) that orders the various components of the representation in such a way as to highlight their significance in relation to some particular collection of interests...or to identify causal or explanatory relations among those components that are salient in relation to some collection of interests, or both."<sup>86</sup> The strongest sorts of claims about narrative identity are metaphysical ones. These accounts claim that a person or self is identical to their narrative.<sup>87</sup> While we do not need to take this strong of a claim, it is helpful all the same to draw on metaphysical accounts of narrative identity because we need them to track our ontology in a meaningful way. Arguing that narratives constitute persons would be difficult to maintain when we have already argued that it is relations with God, fellow-humans, and creation that constitute persons; what is easier is to say that narrative is a helpful tool for describing how our dynamic

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<sup>85</sup> Rutledge, "Purgatory, Hypertime, and Temporal Experience," 154-155.

<sup>86</sup> Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 2.

<sup>87</sup> See, Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, 151; McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 101; Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 94; Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 1.

being changes over time through intersubjective relationship with others. Narratives can provide an interpretive structure or organized form for understanding the complex of relationships and their changes over time which constitute persons.

Rea presents a view of selves in which a person can have more than one self. A person can have an autobiographical self, public and private selves, selves derived from the collectives in which they participate, superficial and real selves, selves who belong to various social groupings, and so on.<sup>88</sup> This seems fairly consonant with the various parts of one's socially-constituted personal identity in SIA. One's categorization of one's self and one's categorization by others in various social groupings could be examples of Rea's conception of selves. Most notably, for Rea, there can be past, present, and future selves. He writes, "we naturally associate these different selves with representations of who we have been, are now, will be in the future, or might have been in other circumstances."<sup>89</sup> Narratives can be structural frameworks for understanding the various aspects of who we are, coordinating and providing context for how various roles, attributes, events, and relationships contribute to who we are and who we will be. Cone gives several examples of this, emphasizing how story telling has been a vital tool for grounding black identity in the United States.<sup>90</sup> By sharing stories about one's experience, Cone argues, we can come to fuller understanding of ourselves and of others.<sup>91</sup> We do this intuitively all the time. For instance, when sharing photos with someone, we often will tell the story of how that photo came to be. Or when someone learns a new fact about us, they will often request narrative to explain or fill out how that fact contributes to who we are. When people find out that I am a black belt in Tae-Kwon-Do, they often ask for stories about how I got into that particular activity or why it was important to me. Stories help us connect and fill out the relationship between these "selves," such as offering temporal relationships (I studied martial arts from the age of four through highschool) or causal (because of my training, I survived an attempted mugging). Stories can describe how these various elements that constitute who we are relate to one another, helping us to make sense of ourselves and helping others to better understand us.

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<sup>88</sup> Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 5. This is not consistent with how self has been referred to thus far in this thesis. Self has been used in a way identical with personhood, whereas Rea uses it to refer to the various elements constitutive of one's personal identity. This section will use the term in reference to Rea's work and return to its normal usage thereafter.

<sup>89</sup> Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 6.

<sup>90</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 99.

<sup>91</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 86.

What is most important for our purposes is how a story can connect a past self with a more recent self, grounding the continuity of that person and their identity as they change over time. For instance, there are certain causal relationships between my past selves and my current self; much of who I am relies on who I have been up until this moment. In Rea's words, "a person's narratively constituted selves and identities include or imply truths about who they are or have been...or about who they can or cannot become downstream of the circumstances in which they are presently situated."<sup>92</sup> Because there is a causal relationship between the various selves that I am over time, there is an inherent continuity to who I am even as I change. These changes cannot be made sense of unless I have my past self to compare my current self with. Let's take another example. Part of my narrative is that I lived in Chicago from 2012 to 2019. Insofar as that became a part of my narrative identity about myself, my narrative of my 2012 to 2019 self precludes me from existing in certain other circumstances. I could not have been living in Scotland for the foundation of the Logos Institute, for instance, because I was living somewhere else. This also means that part of my narrative in coming to Scotland includes my coming from Chicago in 2019; the part of my narrative about me traveling relies on the part about me living in Chicago. Narratives, at least when constructed well, offer a continuity to the identity as it changes over time. It offers a stable relationship between different stages in a person's life, allowing for the dynamic account of human nature offered above without compromising numerical identity. One can still be oneself across time and change because that time and change is trackable.

What is interesting about Cone's use of narrative is that he emphasizes our participation in the narratives of others, including both the narrative identities of other individuals and of the collective narratives of the various social identities to which we belong. Rea notes how, "the stories we tell ourselves are not the only stories that are told about us. Others have partial stories to tell about us."<sup>93</sup> For Rea, part of what shapes our truest narrational understanding of ourselves is the interaction between our own autobiographical narratives and the narratives others tell about us: "our stories and others' stories about us interact, sometimes stand in tension with one another, sometimes compete with one another for acceptance, and typically help shape one

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<sup>92</sup> Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 8.

<sup>93</sup> Rea, "Metaphysics of the Narrative Self," 17.

another.”<sup>94</sup> So there is something like an intersubjectivity of narrative identities, persons learning to perceive themselves through the eyes of others and *visa versa*. This includes, too, an interaction with the collective narratives to which we belong, such as racial or gendered identities. One can add to their own narrative identity the role that being black or being a woman plays in events in their lives. In other words, who we are is captured in narratives about “who we are *to other individuals*, and who we are *in the various social communities we inhabit*,” as well as “who we are *to ourselves*.”<sup>95</sup> This should not be surprising for us if narrative is a way of describing the interactions of our various identity features as they change and shift over time. Social relationship to others, social identities of the groups to which we belong, and others’ perceptions and categorizations of us all play key roles in the formation of our being as relational creatures.

But Cone takes this a step further. He not only permits that others can have a narrative about my identity, but that their narratives about their own identity can have a salient influence on my narrative about my identity. This is especially demonstrated in how he uses narrative as a way of describing the Christian’s participation in Christ. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Christ’s narrative of life, death, and resurrection comes to reshape the story of the oppressed so that they see themselves as loved by God in contradiction to the story told about them by white slave masters. He writes, “Christ crucified manifested God’s loving and liberating presence in the contradictions of black life—that transcendent presence in the lives of black Christians that empowered them to believe that ultimately, in God’s eschatological future, they would not be defeated by the ‘troubles of this world,’ no matter how great and painful their suffering.”<sup>96</sup> Rutledge summarizes Cone’s narrational account of atonement like this:

it is through such transcendent narratives grounded in the Christian story of the cross and subsequent resurrection that positive meaning-making and hope were made available to many members of the black community, members looking not so much to escape suffering, but rather, to face it without fear of losing

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<sup>94</sup> Rea, “Metaphysics of the Narrative Self,” 17.

<sup>95</sup> Rea, “Metaphysics of the Narrative Self,” 17.

<sup>96</sup> Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 1-2. Christ’s narrative gave them “an identity far more meaningful than the harm that white supremacy could do to them.” *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 22.



themselves. This is what it means to participate in the ministry of reconciliation and to participate in the work of Christ's atonement ordered towards the new creation.<sup>97</sup>

This kind of participation, for Cone, extends to our participation in one another's narratives. This is particularly noted in his idea of white persons who "become black."<sup>98</sup> While Cone is primarily focused on the salvation and liberation of the oppressed, his theology nevertheless demands white participation in what he takes to be ontological blackness: a resistance to our own white oppressiveness and solidarity with the oppressed.<sup>99</sup> For Cone, the white oppressor cannot know God apart from communion with the oppressed.<sup>100</sup> White repentance to and communion with black community "involves a change in one's whole being...It means that [white churches] will identify utterly with the oppressed, thus inevitably tasting the sting of oppression themselves."<sup>101</sup> Cone's emphasis on community draws together narrative identity as a tool for describing change in a persons' relational being and the relational constitution of human persons created for communion.

Cone's proposal is interesting because, while he allows a much closer contact between identities than perhaps Rea wants to permit, it is the tracking of an identity over time that allows Cone to maintain the distinctions between persons; white people don't become black and cease to be white people, but they embody their socially constructed whiteness in a way that is informed by black identity and the ways that black Christians know God. Because our truest narrative of our identity includes past selves and their relation to our current self, who we are always includes to some degree who we have been. To illustrate, consider the blind man who was healed by Jesus in John 9. Jesus heals the man of his blindness and then the man is for the rest of the chapter identified by family and friends as "the one who had his eyes opened" and "the one who used to sit and beg." This man had the particularity, blindness, which defined many of his social interactions (begging at the temple and relying on others for his livelihood), his role

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<sup>97</sup> Rutledge, "Narrative and Atonement," 11.

<sup>98</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 124. What this means for Cone is not the same as the trans-racial identity of Dolezal, as will be explained below.

<sup>99</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 160-161.

<sup>100</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 91. I am particularly indebted to Christopher Whyte on this point. His work on Bonhoeffer's theology of suffering and standpoint theory elucidates this theological idea: we cannot claim another's particularity or to have subsumed the perspective of their particularity into our own. We can only be in community with the other and learn from their perspective in a way that shapes our own and in a way that ontologically depends on our being in communion with them. See, Whyte, *When We Survey*.

<sup>101</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 92.

and standing in the community (he was a beggar about whom others speculated whether his own or his parents' sin made him blind), and his spatio-temporal location (he begged at the temple each day). When Jesus healed him, he ceased to have the particularity, blind. And yet, what replaces that identity is not just that he is now sighted. Rather, he is a sighted person *who was once blind*. His blindness still plays a significant role in his particularity, even though that particularity is no longer attributable to him. The particularity he takes on isn't simply that he is sighted, but it becomes essential to his witness to Christ that he was blind but now can see. Narrative allows us to capture the way in which our particular identity is preserved across time and change. No matter what aspect of our particularity is changed, removed, or added, we remain numerically identical with our socially-constructed, embodied selves; change is not a problem for numerical identity as narrative tracks change over time while remaining whole.

Returning to the Dolezal case, we now have better tools for addressing why the concept of a white person deciding to identify socially as black feels so odd to us. Certainly the case points us toward the embodied aspect of particularity, namely that our identities as relationally-constituted persons are not solely socially constructed but include also embodied elements. But we have also noted how bodies can be shaped and changed by social constructions, just as we socially construct around the particular features of our bodies. And Dolezal did precisely this, she began to wear her hair in more African-inspired styles, she underwent processes to change the pigment of her skin, and she presented for all bodily purposes as a black woman. Under this presentation, her body was treated as that of a black woman. Racist groups and individuals treated her as they would treat a person of African descent and she occupied spaces reserved for black individuals, such as her position with the NAACP. So, for all intents and purposes, she commandeered the social identity feature, black, in all its relational and embodied elements. Why this might strike us as odd is that her whiteness is also included in (at the least the truest form of) her narrative identity. Even if we want to grant that she became black, we would have to also grant that she is a white person who became black in a way that is still distinct from the socio-embodied experience of a person born into the experience of blackness in the United States. This became the core of several criticisms against Dolezal coming from the black community. Growing up white gave Dolezal choices and opportunities she would not have had if she had been black. Moreover, the choice to "become black" was a choice she had as a white person that has no parallel in black experience. Black people in the United States have been

historically restricted from certain spaces, positions of power, and opportunities reserved for white persons. Dolezal's actions constitute a "white theft" of blackness; she took spaces and opportunities from black people in a way which could never be reciprocated. Particularity, while socially constructed and rooted in malleable bodies, is not so disposable that our identities are without of any kind of stable continuity.

The virtually limitless possibilities of dynamic human nature are limited to a degree by our being embodied and our being spatio-temporally located. The ways in which our natures change and transform as we translate our experience along with others in community change in continuity with who we have been and rely on our being embodied in particular ways. We cannot leave behind our particularity in a way that negates its shaping of who we are, even problematic particularities like "oppressor." But we can be transformed in relation to Christ and others in *communio Dei*. This can include, as demonstrated by Cone, an oppressor learning to resist the impulses for homogeneity and hegemony by becoming "one who used to oppress, but now stands in solidarity with the oppressed." The forgiveness and transformation that white oppressors experience at the hands of their former victims continues to shape who and what they are in community.

## §14

### **The *Imago Dei* as Resistance to Ontological Homogeneity and Hegemony**

Human beings are created with socio-embodied features of particularity for a very specific purpose. God creates human beings as such diversely socio-embodied creatures because our diversity creates the possibility of communion with the other. Communion with those who are different from us is foundational to the kind of communion we are more broadly intended to have in our union with Christ, a communion that includes God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. In this *communio Dei* to which all of humanity is called in Christ, humanity is defined not by those features and capacities shared by every human being, but by the sheer diversity of the human species. Human flourishing is found not in our all being fit into a particular mould, but by each person being formed by belonging to others and knowing Christ in community with those who come from different perspectives than us. Human nature is therefore not best described as an abstract object that defines all concrete expressions of humanity nor as a set of concrete particulars from which we derive an abstract definition of what it is to be human. Instead, human

nature is the collective, humanity, defined by its relation to Christ, the Image of God, who calls all humanity into a *teleological* communion that reflects the kind of communion God has in Godself.

Such a communion is only possible when we belong to others who are different from us, offering aspects of who we are freely to those with whom we have communion. Belonging to the other undermines the twin dispositions of homogeneity and hegemony that have plagued humanity since the fall. The *Imago Dei*, Christ's becoming human in a way that transforms our humanity, resists these impulses in the very being of humanity. Instead, Christ affirms our particularity, transforming our humanity in and through our particular ways of being. This is accomplished through our belonging to one another in community because what Christ does in becoming human. Christ gives us his Spirit, forming us into that *communio Dei* to which all humanity is intended to belong. Jennings thus argues that hegemony and homogeneity can only be overcome in communities of authentic belonging to the other. He writes, "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, most crucial for this work, the educational... The cultivation of belonging should be the goal of education—not just any kind of belonging, but a profoundly creaturely belonging that performs the returning of the creature to the creator."<sup>102</sup> Belonging to one another resists hegemony because there is no master who holds the sole ownership of others. Belonging resists homogeneity because the formative influence of others is decisively mutual.

For Jennings, then, educational institutions are at their most distorted when their formation results in hegemony and homogeneity and at their best when there is a kind of mutuality of learning and growing together. Jennings is not arguing for an abolition of institutional formation. Rather, he sees it as inevitable: "building... is a gift given to us by God... that speaks our destiny, and it is inescapable. We build either toward life or toward death."<sup>103</sup> This universal impulse for building and constructing socially around our relational bodies is indicative of our *telos* for belonging to one another in *communio Dei*. We see that humanity has a vast formative power over its own nature because it is created to be formed by the human (and divine) Jesus Christ into a life-giving community. The human capacity for

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<sup>102</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 14-15.

<sup>103</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 76.

community building is not identical to its *telos*, but it is a result of this *telos* and it points to the fulfilment of that *telos* in the Spirit-wrought community, the body of Christ. The way forward in educational formation, according to Jennings, is not to eradicate every form of belonging, but to belong in ways which are positively formative and support the diversity and freedom of individuals within our institutions. He writes, “it takes a discernment that can see when institutional operations are moving in the right direction, spiraling up toward life and away from death...toward either captivity or freedom, and of encouraging the motions that aim to form a place of life together.”<sup>104</sup> When communities are formed in accordance with our *telos* in Christ, they form a place of life together; when they distort our intended end, they form a place of death ruled by hegemony and homogeneity.

At this point, it should be noted again that *After Whiteness* stands in the middle of a much larger project on the theological imagination of racial categories. Jennings’ diagnosis and subsequent prescription for institutions of theological education is rooted in “the struggle for peoplehood,” yet in a way that hopes “to show that the deepest struggle for us all is the struggle for communion.”<sup>105</sup> The distortions of racial imagination in theology are not limited to educational institutions only; these institutions are a microcosm of the world through which “old white men” carry out their designs on broader western society. Hegemony and homogeneity, therefore, are not merely distortions of educational institutions, but of human social nature more broadly as we carry out our inescapable socializing and institution-building that “speaks to our destiny.” The point is not to rid ourselves of all social building, to eradicate all social regularity, but rather to enact social formation in particular ways. For Jennings, the heart of positive social formation is the gathering of all peoples in Christ. As Jennings puts it, “Jesus created the condition for the crowd, reflecting God’s desire for the gathering. The crowd was not his disciples, but it was the condition for discipleship.”<sup>106</sup> In Christ’s giving himself up for the Church, he establishes a new way of institution-building, one which is neither ignorant of racial and gendered borders nor committed to concretizing those borders in hegemonic and homogeneous ways. Being in Christ does not erase our racial or gendered particularity, it gives it new meaning.

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<sup>104</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 76.

<sup>105</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 16.



V

The Otherness of Jesus Christ

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*Jesus teaches a motley crew,  
a vagabond feast of people who  
will be caught together under his word  
like holy smoke covering them all,  
the smell on their clothes,  
on their skin*

- *Willie James Jennings*

§I laid out a relational Christological anthropology and the particularity problem posed to it. This problem supposes that the particularity of Christ's humanity is either accidental to his human nature, undermining its significance, or so essential to his human nature that it is an insurmountable barrier to salvific union with him. §II's analysis of Christ's atoning work demonstrated that the Hebraic mindset of the Christian scriptures sees no competition between the ontological oneness and many-ness of the priestly relationship, undermining a key assumption about the metaphysics of human nature which grounds the particularity problem. Rather, as I argue in §III, humanity's *telos* for *communio Dei*, that is the communion with God, fellow-humanity, and creation, is a social ontology in which persons can second-personally share with others aspects of that which makes them particular. Our particularity, therefore, is bound up in our construction of social groups and embodied activity within those groups. For this reason, I argued in §IV that human particularity is socio-embodied otherness and that human beings are created with particularity so that we can have diverse community rather than homogenous community; diversity is essential to the kind of communion we are intended to have in *communio Dei*. Because we socially construct around our embodied existence in ways that change and transform that existence, I argued that human natures can change over time through the sharing of personal being with others. Because natures are transformed and changeable in socio-embodied ways, the persistence of numerical identity over time is assumed and tracked, not through one universal stable feature or faculty of human nature, but through inter-dependent narrative identities.

This poses a number of potential problems for classical conceptions of human ontology. Such conceptions typically centre around the stability of nature, eschewing all dynamic features to the non-essential category of "accidental." Rather, human ontology begins with the essential otherness of human particularity and the dynamic existence of being related to that which is other than one's self. However, as noted in previous sections, the goal is not to abandon stability entirely. Stability ought to be thought of in ways that cultivate diversity and dynamism in human nature. At the end of §IV, I opened up the possibility that, given the malleability of human natures, we could potentially become anything we desire given the proper social construction around relational embodiment. These features place some limits on our capacity to shape and form our natures, but it still leaves rather open-ended what humanity is (or can become). It is this potential that sparks the questions of §V.

The answer to the question "what is humanity?" seems meaningless in the face of the claim that humanity could theoretically become anything within the bounds of its social construction and relational embodiment. This becomes particularly problematic when we



think about human persons taking on social identities that may be sinful, such as “slave master” or “superior,” or harmful, such as “slave” or “subordinate.” Do we really want to essentialize problematic particularities in this way? I begin with an assessment of a recent account of human nature that is absolutely fluid. In critical engagement with Lin Tonstad’s *God and Difference*, I will demonstrate both that (1) human nature on the view this thesis forwards is capable of the fluid anthropological vision painted by Tonstad but that (2) her account of particularity and difference lacks a distinctive *telos*, rendering it open to the possibility of fluidity without the necessary stability to answer the aforementioned question. I thus counter-offer a *teleological* picture of the construction of the social group, humanity, and the role that its socio-embodied differences play in that construction. In recognizing the transformative potential of ontological human particularity, we must also recognize the responsibility we have to construct our human natures in certain ways towards the ultimate end of not simply our own discreet selves, but of communal humanity united in Christ. This is not something that we can do on our own terms, but only something that can be accomplished in Christ’s reconciling of all things in himself. In Christ’s reconciling work, therefore, we will find not just what it means for our particularity to change and be transformed, but the purpose for which we must be transformed. In reconciling humanity, Christ reconciles the relationship between particularities, creating the possibility of diverse communion. Our eschatological transformation into this *teleological*, diverse communion is the purpose for which God creates human beings with particularities.

## §15

### **The Potential Problem of Dynamic Human Nature**

Already, this thesis has raised the ontological and temporal problems facing dynamic human nature. But if the answer to the question, “what are we?” could potentially be anything within the scope of our social constructions and limits of our medical, biological, and cybernetic technologies, it seems impossible to say what humanity is as a whole. We can only say what a particular human person is at any given moment. I call this the *potential* problem of dynamic human nature, as it raises the concern that the hypothetical limits of what could be considered human nature are virtually non-existent and thus humanity could elect as a collective to construct itself in practically any way that our medical, biological, and cybernetic capabilities allow under the right socially-constructed conditions. This is a problem because the minimal limitations on this constructive power set by our embodiment and our social construction do not rule out all harmful or sinful social identities. Humanity

can (and has) constructed harmful and dehumanizing social identities within hegemonic structures, such as “slave” for persons of colour and “subordinate gender” for women. These identities and their content are socially structured, but have a powerful formative effect on the relational embodiment of those who bear them. Yet it would be odd for us to affirm that these socio-embodied differences, however real or possible, are somehow good or an intended part of the *teleological* vision of humanity’s creation in the *imago Dei*. There is a danger to conceiving of not only our ability to shape our own natures but of our ability to shape others’ in harmful ways through our contribution to the social ontology of humanity.

Even beyond the moral considerations of the potential ways we can change humanity, it would seem that human nature is so changeable, so malleable, that we cannot say anything concrete about it which could not be undermined under a different potential construction. Is human nature so fluid, on the conception that I have offered, that we cannot in fact say anything meaningful about it as a collective whole? Even grounded in its particular *telos* for *communio Dei*, there are still so many particular ways in which we can be in loving relationship with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order; what unity can we give to these particular ways that does not collapse them into homogeneity or hegemony? To answer these questions, I will assess a recent account of the fluidity of human nature, that is to say of a conception that is so dynamic that it lacks the capacity for stability, of human particularity.

### ***§15.1 God and Difference: A Critical Assessment***

Perhaps the most compelling account of human nature that gives us the kind of fluidity found in emphasizing difference is Tonstad’s *God and Difference*. Therein, Tonstad combines queer theory and systematic theology to argue for a Trinitarian vision of the kind of differences which this thesis calls particularity. Tonstad is particularly interested in gendered and sexual particularity and the practical applications of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to understanding such embodied differences. Throughout the volume, Tonstad moves between her two disciplinary interests, both raising important themes from the tradition of Christian systematic theology and Trinitarian dogma and critiquing their practical outputs as overreaching “corrective projection” of human categories onto God.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on queer theory to expand upon the absolute otherness of the Triune God, Tonstad critiques the application of a Trinitarian understanding of personhood to human existence, focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 13.

“gift-circulation” rather than “personhood” as the fundamental category of understanding divine three-ness.<sup>2</sup> Throughout, Tonstad is highly suspicious of Trinitarian language which comes in anyway close to speaking of divine and human personhood on the same terms.

By the end of the volume, we are offered an absolutely apophatic vision of divine transcendence that demands a dissolution of all borders of inclusion and exclusion, of self and other. Tonstad instead proffers a vision of humanity that essentializes non-competitive “difference beyond difference,” an existence defined by absolute “differentiation without instituting contrastive relationality.”<sup>3</sup> Humanity flourishes when it overcomes its competitive differentiation, instead proliferating human difference within “the nature of the unrestricted community that God establishes...with humans.”<sup>4</sup> Humanity is created, in other words, for diversity in a way that has no meaningful borders between differences across which we must translate.

Therefore, humanity is eschatologically destined for an existence that “contains multitudes and entails the translation of the self and its identity into newly *unstable* cases and places. These multiplicities of witness and representation challenge theological or epistemological continuity in predication, imagination, and forward projection of the self.”<sup>5</sup> The self is fluid for Tonstad, capable of transformation and difference to a degree that makes the continuity of the self untenable and which renders the particularity of the self unsharable. To share something of myself with another would be for me to be in them and for them to be in me, for me to change who they are and how they identify themselves in virtue of something particular about myself. This violates Tonstad’s emphasis on gift-giving over personhood in which our differences are non-contrastive. I cannot share a part of myself with another without that part of me being contrasted with the other. Humanity is not perichoretic on her view. Instead, “one need not move aside to make room for the other, for there is enough space for all. Connecting trinitarian relationality to materiality and the body, we discover the possibility of bodies that do not crowd each other out, make room for each other, or penetrate each other in order to be in relation and to be in the same place at the same time.”<sup>6</sup> Difference, in other words, is something we have but is not something which has contact with the other. It is entirely self-contained and self-determined. This set of “non-

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<sup>2</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 225-238.

<sup>3</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 169-170.

<sup>4</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 238.

<sup>5</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 269. Emphasis added. Note also that Tonstad is not using translation as we are in this thesis. Translation here refers to the spaces in which the self has this “clitoral” encounter with the other, not a translation across a border of difference.

<sup>6</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 239.

ordered logics of difference, grounded in resurrection as transformative nonrepetition” is absolutely fluid at the individual level: I am whoever I choose to be in no way defined or determined by who others choose to be.

This works out, for Tonstad, in two ways relevant to the aims of this thesis. First, Tonstad is principally concerned with sexual and gendered differences as the subject matter of Trinitarian speculation. Gender, for Tonstad is a gift from God. But it does not provide the basis for boundary-crossing communion, nor does it point to difference in the Godhead as the foundation of authentic communion. Instead, it is given to humanity to confound our understanding of our differences or their meaning. Gender is not a particularity which is a part of our being transformed into the Image of God. Instead, as Tonstad writes, “one such alien gift is the fulfilment of gender in its overcoming. There is no reason to figure the resurrected Christ as masculine or male. The end of gender also means the end of marriage.”<sup>7</sup> Because our particularity needs to be fluid and cannot be defined by the other, gender is eradicated in favour of a mere difference-beyond-difference. Maleness and femaleness define one another contrastively, but queerness has no equal.

It is interesting, as well, that Tonstad thinks the eradication of marriage is entailed by the eradication of gender. The relation between the two becoming one, the “I” and “Thou” perichoretically becoming a “we” threatens her borderless difference-beyond-difference. Where a relationship is defined by its borders of difference and where that difference becomes constitutive of changes to the particular self, what Tonstad calls a penetrative kind of union has occurred between self-hoods. Tonstad’s difference-beyond-difference cannot abide such a relation as it challenges the autonomy of self-created difference and goes beyond the “clitoral” kind of union which stops at two selves occupying space next to one another. Because of the absolute fluidity of personhood and particularity on Tonstad’s account, difference-beyond-difference must be self-contained and a particularity like gender, in which I am defined in relation to another, must be overcome.

Second, because particularity on this model is self-contained so as to maintain its absolute fluidity, not only is my self-constituting and self-defining relation to the other lost but such relations also cannot be defined by the groups in which the relations occur. This thesis has defended the idea that participation in the body of Christ is the *telos* of human flourishing, that all humanity is called to and flourishes in participation in *communio Dei* in Christ. But an absolutely fluid account of human particularity seems to undermine this *telos*,

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<sup>7</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 275.

for if nothing ought to define our identities except for ourselves, then what place do we have for a *teleological* communion of persons, divine and human, in and with the created order? Such a *telos* cannot define human personhood if we are to maintain the fluidity of difference. For this reason, Tonstad argues that difference-beyond-difference calls for the “abortion of the church . . . a fundamental refusal of the logic of reproduction in both its biological and socio-symbolic senses.”<sup>8</sup> Belonging to socialized and sacralized structures of relationship has no place in human flourishing for Tonstad. We cannot know ourselves or others truly in such belonging.

This is the principle problem with extending the dynamic nature of humanity to the point of absolute fluidity. While it allows human nature to be defined principally by its diversity and allows for humanity to change what it is over time, in doing so it undermines the very social structures that undergird its diversity and malleability. The ways in which our shared identities are formed in social structures is undercut by a desire for absolute self-determination, but this would seem to undermine the salience and sharability of particularity which makes dynamic human nature possible.

I presented this problem at the beginning of this chapter by raising how it works out at the level of particularity. If humanity can become nearly anything under the right socially-constructed conditions and with the right resources at its disposal, what is to prevent humanity from becoming something horrific or from constructing itself in problematic ways. While Tonstad’s account appears to avoid the worry of our determining others in harmful ways because transformation is limited to self-determination, it has no control for preventing our construction of the self in harmful ways. Because who I am can be whoever I choose to be, there is nothing to prevent me from forming myself into an identity that is ultimately harmful to others, such as the identity of slave master. Moreover, that the constitution of the self for Tonstad relies in no way on others is problematic for the vision of particularity thus far painted by this thesis. Tonstad undermines the significance of particularity by undermining the importance of belonging to others in community, the importance of inclusion with the other. As Coakley puts it, Tonstad’s account of difference “does not seek to ‘include’ but to enact its own prophetic shattering of the ecclesiastical and dogmatic status quo.”<sup>9</sup> Tonstad’s abortion of the community in which identity in Christ is formed undermines the possibility of our particularity being related to the other, both divine and human, in a

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<sup>8</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 273.

<sup>9</sup> Coakley, “Voices in ‘God and Difference.’”

meaningful and formative way. This undercuts both the Christian hope for boundary-crossing life and freedom as well as denying the reality of a fallen world in which we observe our socio-embodied particularity utilized to construct boundary-violating death and slavery.

To abandon boundaries entirely, even sinful ones, as having a salient and stable influence on the constitution of the self thus makes it impossible to promise the eschatological end of humanity in diverse *communio Dei* and incomprehensible to depict the distortion of our communal *telos* in our oppression of fellow-human being. While Tonstad is perhaps correct to resist harmful boundaries like that which is drawn between slave and master, her evisceration of all boundary in human particularity in favour of fluidity undercuts our ability to tell meaningful narratives about our identities. This criticism is raised by Eboni Marshall Turman who takes to task Tonstad's repudiation of death and slavery as defining human identity in any way. She critiques, "as Sandra Bland's driving while black, Alton Sterling and India Beaty's standing while black, Tamir Rice's playing in the park while black, and Korryn Gaines' sitting at home while black suggest, death is constitutive of black life, oft performing as the end of *always* trouble for black lives... Yet if there is no death in God could it be that this death-denying, *coming*, and clitoral God is merely the drag of a white racist?"<sup>10</sup> To the mind of Turman, the picture of God and difference painted by Tonstad cannot account for the suffering and oppression of persons of colour, nor the salient influence it has on their identity before God. Tonstad's transformation of human lives "from slaves and servants to friends and children of God"<sup>11</sup> fails to grasp the way in which the struggle for liberation comes to define the witness of the oppressed and, by extension, the epistemic priority that the oppressed have in knowing and loving God. Tonstad's God erases the significance of "*both* Cone's cross *and* his lynching tree."<sup>12</sup> This is the result of emphasizing the dynamic nature of human ontology to the extent that all borders and belonging are erased. We require belonging to others in community because this provides a context in which we can have contrastive and stable difference which need not be hierarchical (as Tonstad hopes to avoid) and can be translated across borders of difference.

### **§15.2 Fluidity and Telos: Moving Beyond Mere Difference**

So what might ground the dynamic nature of human ontology in a way that can allow it to still be malleable and changeable but does not eviscerate all borders of difference and

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<sup>10</sup> Turman, "Trouble Don't Always Last."

<sup>11</sup> Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 235.

<sup>12</sup> Turman, "Trouble Don't Always Last."

belonging to others? In previous chapters, what has grounded our understanding of human nature is the *telos* of humanity as it is in Christ. It is from this stable, universal calling on all human life that the significance of transformation and diversity in human nature arises. Tonstad's account, in contrast, lacks a distinctive and universal *telos* for humanity. This arises from the fact that there is a discernible lack of *telos* for human particularity. Because each individual can be whoever they determine themselves to be regardless of who they are to others, what makes us particular serves no specific purpose in the end of humanity. I can be whoever and whatever I am and this makes no difference to who or what you will be eschatologically. *Telos*, then, is the basis for stability in a conception of human nature. Because humanity shares the same *telos* in Christ's assumption and fulfilment of humanity, we can describe the unity and continuity of this thing, humanity, even as that thing grows and changes over time. Because this *telos* calls us to a participation in community with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order, we need not erase the borders of difference between individuals that make us particular. We can participate in community with those who are different from us and those socially-constructed and embodied differences can change over time without being erased.

What I have shown here is that being committed to a malleable and changeable account of human nature does not commit us to the problems of an absolutely fluid understanding of human nature. If it were the case that human natures are so fluid that nothing can be meaningfully said about the collective whole, the very idea of theological anthropology would come apart at the seams. Yet we are not committed to such absolute fluidity simply because we recognize the transformative powers of sociality, biology, and technology. These things tell us that we *can* become anything. But we only know that we *can* become anything in light of our relational and dynamic *telos* for communion: that which we *ought* to become as the end of our being malleable and particular.

What we *ought* to become, moreover, is not something which can be accomplished by these human powers. While they may evidence the potential of human nature to change over time and might even count as forces which God might use to transform humanity into what it is intended to be, it is a relatively uncontroversial theological claim to say that it is God who transforms humanity into its intended end. While there are many humanly-wrought social identities which play a significant role in our lives and in the ways that we express our faith, it is ultimately the *communio Dei*, the Spirit-wrought community grounded in the communal life of Father, Son, and Spirit, that defines human *telos*. This need not supersede or eradicate

these other identity features, but it does transform them and re-order them towards their intended *telos* for participation in divine communion.

The stability of humanity comes not from what we are capable of in a hypothetical sense, nor even the ways that we form our own evolutionary, technological, and cultural development as a species, but from the *telos* of our humanity; of what we *ought* to become in Christ. If theological anthropology begins in the particularity of humanity in Christ, it ends in its *telos* for *communio Dei* in Christ. The sufficient stability to define what it is to be human is found, then, in what humanity is universally called to be: *communio Dei*. We must therefore look to the concrete expression of *communio Dei* in the unique kind of community that is defined by the work of the Spirit: the body of Christ. It is only in such a community that we see our *telos* realized because it is in such a community that human community is brought into participation in the divine life that is its foundation.

## §16

### **Ecclesiology: The Communal *Telos* of Humanity in Christ**

What humanity is as a whole is not defined purely by what it is or can be in any given moment; it is defined by the *telos* for which it was created and which is achieved in Christ's particular humanity. This *telos* has already been identified as the *communio Dei*, that Spirit-wrought community which participates in the communion that God has in Godself and which human persons are intended to have with other human persons, divine persons, and the created order. Because this *teleological* communion is established in Christ, I have already identified this communion with the body of Christ. Because Christ's particular humanity is the ontological basis for all humanity, the being of every human person (whether they know it or not) finds its fulfilment in this particular kind of Spirit-wrought community. Thus, it is the particular group, the Church, which constitutes the *telos* for which all humanity is created and to which all humanity is called. It stands in a particular place of primacy in defining human nature *as it is intended to be* among the many social identifications which we may carry without needing to necessarily supersede or undermine these other social identifications (rather, the other identifications play an important role in the diverse formation of *communio Dei*). At first blush, the Church seems, like any other group, to be dynamic in nature, with new members being added over time, members changing how they categorize or understand their identification with the body of Christ, and with those outside of the Church continuously changing how they understand the identity of the Church in relation to its members. This



alone does not rule out absolute fluidity regarding the being of humanity as a whole or in its particularity.

However, groups as conceived of by SIA also have some stability despite being dynamic, which in §IV was described in terms of narrative in a way that assumed numerical identity over time. By identifying a narrative of the body of Christ, we can identify the stability of this particular group in a way consistent with human psychology and the ways that we are created to form groups. Yet, there are also some unique elements of this particular group beyond its status as the *teleological* human group which forms the primary identification of human ontology. For one, this group includes divine beings in a way that no other human group does. In the body of Christ, and nowhere else, humans have a full communion with the Father and Spirit via participation in Christ's sonship. This relation establishes the identity of the group in unique ways.

Moreover, most human groups will persist beyond the life or membership of individual members. Certain members can be added or taken away; leadership roles will change hands across time; some members die and are replaced by other members. The body of Christ, however, is a communion of saints (νέφος μαρτύρων), in which we are still united in some way to those who have gone to rest with the faithful with Abraham (τὸν κόλπον Ἀβραάμ) (Heb 12:1; Lk 16:22).<sup>13</sup> More important for our purposes here, the divine persons with whom we have communion persist in their participation in this group across generations in a way that no other human group can claim. Christ's headship over the Church and the Spirit's establishing activity of gathering and uniting the Church not only play significant roles in the social identity of this group, but their influence persists in a unique way. If stability is to be found in the identity of this group which constitutes the *telos* of being human, it will be found in the particular roles within that communion of Christ's lordship over the Church and the Spirit's unifying work.

### **§16.1 Roles in Collective Groups: Lordship and Unity**

Recall briefly the model of groups offered by Collins in §II and §III. In her taxonomy of groups, I identified the body of Christ as a collective, that is a group which is coordinated in such a way as to allow for group agency. Because this particular collective is one which

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<sup>13</sup> This need not rest on any particular view of the intermediate state or lack thereof. Even if we hold to a gap theory of intermediate existence, there is a promise of an eschatological community in which believers, past, present, and future, all participate together. This a stronger sense of relationship to past generation than other groups.

every human being is created to be a member of, there is some sense in which being human (or at least recognizing oneself as human) is sufficient for the conditions to be a member of a collective in which the unanimity rule is, “to reflect the image of God,” even when the rule is consistently disobeyed.<sup>14</sup> Humanity, therefore, is a collective with the group duty that it is supposed to coordinate to be a part of the particular collective: the body of Christ. Within collectives like humanity, generally, and the body of Christ, particularly, individual members are distinguished by the role which they play in that particular group.<sup>15</sup> With regard to SIA, it has already been argued that an individual’s role determines what and to what extent they can contribute to the identity of a group. On this model, you can have stronger roles within the group, such as dictators or monarchs, so long as each member is committed to the unanimity of the dictator’s or monarch’s rule in a way that they could also potentially oppose or contradict that rule (even if done unsuccessfully).<sup>16</sup> Simply because other members of such a collective contribute less to the shared identity of the group does not mean that the group is reducible to the personal identity of its leader.

Christ holds, at least intuitively, a stronger role within the body of Christ. He is identified as the head of the Church, the Lord of the Church, and the ruler or authority of the Church at various points in the Pauline corpus (Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 1:2; Col 2:10). In Hebrews he is also the High Priest of humanity, representing all of humanity to God in a way that transforms our humanity in relation to his perfected humanity.<sup>17</sup> As demonstrated in §III, Paul’s vision for the identity of the Church is bound up in our personal identities being

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<sup>14</sup> Many thanks to Stephanie Collins for helping me to think through this point in conversation with her work. See also: Rutledge, *Forgiveness and Atonement*, ch 4.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, *Group Duties*, 199. One might be forgiven for thinking that treating a group as broad as humanity as a collective would undermine the distinction between collectives, combinations, and coalitions. If all of humanity can be treated as an agential group, shouldn’t any group within humanity be treated as agential too? But this is not the case, for we might think of combinations or coalitions that exist within other collectives that ought not to be treated as agential. We can imagine a combination, “brown-haired politicians,” within the collective of the US federal government. But simply because all the brown-haired individuals exist within a coordinated, agential group does not mean that there is any decision-making process that coordinates specifically the brown-haired politicians, nor any group actions which might occur in virtue of this specific combination. Any agency or coordination we see would be occurring in virtue of the broader collective’s coordination, even if it might correspond to these brown-haired members because the only social power these individuals carry in this context is derived from their roles structured within the collective, not the combination within the collective.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, *Group Duties*, 162; Reicher, et al. “Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology,” 50. One could respond to this claim that, as Collins claims, tyrannical rulerships still count as collectives because individuals can (at least in theory) leave or resist the tyrannical leader. But humans do not really have the option to choose not to be made in the image of God. We can either claim that resistance to our calling to be in *communio Dei* is sufficient to overcome this objection or we can weaken our claim by saying that humanity is a combination with a group duty to form into a collective, the body of Christ, in which Christ takes on the primary role in defining that collective as the new head of humanity. While slightly weaker, this gets us much the same result, and so I will not explore this distinction further.

<sup>17</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 197.

transformed primarily by Christ's personal identity, so that it is features of Christ's personal identity and being which are second-personally shared with the group, the body of Christ. Torrance, drawing on early patristic sources, argues that it is Christ's life and work which primarily shape the mission and identity of the Church.<sup>18</sup> This becomes the basis for Christ's authority over the Church. Christ is not a ruler in the traditional fashion, where he demands obedience in a contractual sense, but is more akin to a High Priest who identifies with the people and shares his identity, agency, and activity with them.<sup>19</sup> Thus, we might think of the body of Christ not as reducibly equivalent to the personal identity and being of Christ, but as having a shared identity which is primarily informed by Christ's personal identity as its head and High Priest.

We see this play out in each member's personal identity being transformed by the particular identity of Christ. Recalling, also, that this is described over time through narrative identity so as to assume a sense of numerical identity through time and change, we might conceive of members of the body of Christ as sharing in a group narrative which is primarily informed by Christ's personal narrative. It is primarily this that Torrance identifies with Christ's rule of the Church. In the body of Christ, we are "brought under the sovereign rule of God's grace in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ."<sup>20</sup> The human journey of Christ in the incarnation, from cradle to cross to empty grave to right hand of the Father is what primarily determines the being and identity of the Spirit-wrought community.<sup>21</sup> Christ's role within this particular group results in his personal identity and relational being serving as the primary contributor to the salient identity features of the body of Christ, particularly, and humanity, generally.

Individuals who are brought into the body of Christ do so through an encounter with the risen Christ, often through the mediating power of the Spirit. This points once again to the relational nature of humanity and its *telos*. Christ's narrative is not reducible to Christ only. Rather, like all human beings, Christ's life is filled with personal relationships that are an essential part of his narrative, just as Christ becomes a part of others narratives. Joshua Cockayne observes in his recent ecclesiological work that, in the Gospel of John,

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<sup>18</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 161.

repeatedly, we see characters emerge from John's narrative who encounter Christ in their particularity—whether that be Nicodemus, a member of the religious elite who seeks Christ out alone in the middle of the night (3:1-21), an anonymous Samaritan woman drawing water by herself at the hottest point in the day (4:1-42), or his friend Lazarus raised from the grave (11:1-44)—for John, it is clear that individuals are changed by their encounters, leading them to testify to the astounding transformation that they have received.<sup>22</sup>

Christ's particular narrative provides a stable *telos* towards which human relationality is intended to strive; while we can shape the sociality of humanity in many ways, we are intended to become a part of and be transformed by Christ's narrative in the body of Christ. This is precisely how Cone makes use of narrative identity in his work on atonement as discussed in §IV.12.3. The stability here does not undermine the ontological significance of particularity. Encounter with Christ is dynamic and, as Cockayne notes, each person comes to Christ in their own particularity and leaves transformed but nevertheless particular. The stability of human *telos* for a communion primarily shaped by Christ's narrative identity is one grounded in our being particular participants in that narrative, and not in our being subsumed into a singular, stable identity.

The Spirit, too, plays a unique role in this group. The Spirit, as argued previously, unites members of the body (including Christ) with one another second-personally. The Spirit does this not as an abstract and impersonal force, the sort of thing which Pettit would call collectivist,<sup>23</sup> but as a divine person who plays a specific and potent role in establishing the being of this group, the Church, across space and time. As Cockayne puts it, “whatever the causal power of divine agents in social explanations is, it seems strange to think of their status as akin to aggregate social regularities. The agency of the Holy Spirit is not akin to the agency of an impersonal and elusive social *geist*. The persons of the Trinity are persons and agents, capable of acting within social groups and causally affecting individuals.”<sup>24</sup> Like Christ, we must think of the third person of the Trinity as a personal agent with a significant and unique role in the *communio Dei*.

The Spirit establishes the *a priori* “we” of being in communion with one another and calls all of humanity into that particular communion. I have argued this elsewhere,

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<sup>22</sup> Cockayne, *Analytic Ecclesiology*, 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Pettit, *The Common Mind*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> Cockayne, *Analytic Ecclesiology*, 18

demonstrating that Paul's Spirit-Christology understands the united body of believers as the dwelling place for the Spirit wherein we encounter Christ.<sup>25</sup> In yet another article, I argue that because this is a group relation between Christ and his Church that the Spirit establishes, "that union [with Christ] occurs in *communio Dei*, and thus includes both our sharing in the mind of Christ *together* and sharing in one another as members of Christ."<sup>26</sup> This tells us two things: first, our union with and second-personal knowing of Christ is stably assumed (even if actively resisted) by the union which the Spirit establishes and to which the Spirit calls us. In this sense, we may speak of the *telos* for *communio Dei* in the body of Christ as universal to all humanity, even where that calling on humanity is actively resisted. It nevertheless provides a stable *telos* for each and every human person. Second, this union established with Christ also necessarily establishes a similar kind of union with one another. Our union with and second-personal knowing of Christ cannot be separated from our union and communion with one another. The particularity which each member of the body brings to this stable unity in the Spirit is no threat to that unity. Rather, we must work out how particularity behaves under the conditions of this unity because that unity is assumed *a priori* to any relation to the other. On the model thus far offered, this means that the unity of humanity in the body of Christ is assumed stably prior to any divisions or rogue members of the group. The universality of humanity's being called to participate in this particular group offers a stability to the *telos* for which we are created.

The body of Christ is certainly dynamic to an extent. This can be observed, on the approach to social identity which this model draws upon, in the various expressions of Christianity apparent throughout the course of history. We might think of the unique witness to Christ at the Azusa Street Revival, the African Methodist Episcopal church founded by Richard Allen as a place for black Christians to escape from the segregation of the Methodist Episcopal church, and the resistance to Nazi takeover of the German state church by the Confessing church as being rooted in particularity that has been transformed by Christ. These expressions speak to particular contexts or speak about God's revelation in that particular context to the rest of the Church from their particular social-situatedness. Cone argues that our knowing of God must take place "in the context of [our own] experience."<sup>27</sup> Knowledge, Cone argues, is always experiential. Knowledge of the God who is himself perfect communion cannot be known outside of our concrete experiences of relating to God in

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<sup>25</sup> Everhart, "Communal Reconciliation."

<sup>26</sup> Everhart, "*Communio Dei* and the Mind of Christ," 65.

<sup>27</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 16; 32.

communion. This experience, Cone argues, is always socialized because even in our broken social structures, we exist in distorted forms of the communion for which we were created.<sup>28</sup> We cannot, therefore, flatten particularity in the centrality of Christ's narrative identity to the shared identity and being of the body of Christ. Reddie refers to this idea as complex subjectivity, the idea that we can belong to multiple shared identities and that these various subjective standpoints can inform and challenge one another, transforming what makes each of us particular *in relation to* these borders of difference.<sup>29</sup> While our belonging to *communio Dei* may in fact be the most important social identity to our being human, it relies on the inclusion and transformation of our other identity features. On such an account, particularity is not lost in the stability of the body's *telos* in Christ, nor in its stability as the universal *telos* of humanity.

But this dynamic identity and being of the body of Christ is always guided by the particular narrative, and thus the particularity, of Christ. Particularity in the body of Christ, and especially where this particularity forms internal borders of otherness, is not flattened by this stabilizing narrative. Rather, it is essential for the kind of stability at play here. Zizioulas and Gunton have both stressed the essential nature of the other to the kind of relations which can be ontology constituting.<sup>30</sup> We cannot, as argued in §IV, have being-constituting communion apart from having such communion with that which is other than ourselves at various levels of abstraction, and such otherness is the purpose of our being created with such diverse particularity. We are not looking for an absolutely static model of the social identity of the body of Christ, one which is entirely reducible to Christ's personal (and on certain readings, numerical) identity. Rather, the stability comes from centring the narrative of the body on the narrative identity of Christ in which particular individuals now include and reshape their own narratives. It is in relation to Christ in the context of Spirit-wrought unity that our particular narratives (and thus our particularities) are revealed and transformed into what they should be. The Spirit unites us with Christ and one another, in this way, to provide the basis for particularity and not to eviscerate it. It is in this context, the stability of "we" established by the Spirit and aimed at the *telos* of particular relation to the particular humanity of Christ, that the nature of our otherness and of otherness generally is revealed. This points, also, away from absolute fluidity to an interplay of dynamic and stable identity in

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<sup>28</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 94-95.

<sup>30</sup> Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology, and Anthropology," 53; John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 32.

Christ. It is being related in our various particularities to Christ, that is in being a particular part of his narrative as members of his body, that the hypothetically limitless potential of changing human nature is actually limited. It moves us away from only what humanity *can* become towards a vision of what humanity *should* (and eschatologically *will*) become given its vast ontological potential.

### ***§16.2 The Transformative Otherness of Christ and Problematic Particularity***

The otherness of Christ is the primary otherness which constitutes that transformative communion for which all humanity was created and to which all humanity is called by the Spirit. So what is it that this actually does to our particularity? In other words, what does it mean for my particularity to be changed and transformed in union with Christ rather than for my particularity to be changed and transformed into something harmful or dangerous? This goes back to the initial questions driving this chapter. Not only is it important to ascertain what Christ's transformation of our particularity looks like so that we remain particular even in our being brought into his narrative, but why it is that we cannot simply create harmful particularities, like slave master, and usher them into the eschatological kingdom of God with some minor changes. Have we inadvertently snuck harmful particularities in through the back door?

To answer this, let us look, once again, at how Christ encounters the other. I have already demonstrated how Christ, in his maleness, encounters the other, femaleness, in a way that both transforms the socio-embodied content of femaleness and doesn't eradicate the difference between himself and the other. When Christ encounters the other, he shares a part of himself and brings that person into communion with himself, transforming their socio-embodied particularity in ways that makes loving communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order possible. It is not about making every single person identical in every particular way to Christ, but making the differences between persons a salient basis for loving, self-giving communion.

But what about instances where an encounter with Christ causes someone to abandon a harmful particularity? Jesus calls individuals out of the oppressive and often dishonest tax collection business into a life of discipleship. Jesus calls prostitutes and thieves to repent of these socialized identities and sin no more. In the Reconstruction Era of the United States following on the abolition of slavery, many a pastor preached a Christ who called slave

masters to repent of their sinfulness and set their slaves free.<sup>31</sup> Have these individuals had their particularity in their being conformed to Christ?

It may look, if we are to take the identity of a person at any given moment, as if some particularity can and should be abandoned. There is clearly a sense in which Christ does demand that we set aside our sinful identities in favour of pursuing holiness; we cannot remain slave masters and violent oppressors when entering into a communion constituted by our loving, self-giving relation to those that we would oppress. Christ must transform us away from these harmful identities. But in another sense, construed as a narrative identity, these sinful identities remain a part of our story. What we are saved from is important for our witness to the transformative work of Christ in us and in our particularity. The song “Amazing Grace” was written by John Newton as an autobiographical witness to the conversion that God had enacted in his life.<sup>32</sup> A notable part of this story was Newton’s conversion away from the slave trading business as a result of a spiritual experience (which Newton himself calls an encounter with God) while on a seafaring journey for the Atlantic Slave Trade. Newton’s witness to the transformative and reconciling work of Christ in his life includes his identity as slave trader. This does not baptize slave trading as something which God can redeem, but includes the socialized identity, “slave trader” as a part of Newton’s narrative. It demonstrates the reconciliatory power of God in Christ to save us from our harmful and distorted ways of socially constructing around our embodiment.

Particularity, even when it is harmful, is not eviscerated, but neither is it perfectly preserved. What it means to be particular in union with the particular Christ, and for Christ’s particularity to be the foundation of our transformation into the New Humanity, is for our particularity must be transformed. This transformation leaves our particularity intact, so to speak, in a way that it remains identifiable. Let us take the most radical example of transformation from the previous part of this thesis. The blind man who is healed by Christ is neither a completely different individual (ceasing to be numerically identical with his formerly blind self), nor does he cease to be identified according to that particularity. He is identified by the Sadducees as “the one who was blind.” When addressed to identify himself by his own parents, he also identifies himself as one who has been healed of his blindness by Christ. The particularity of blindness still plays a role in his personal identity. However, that particularity is now transformed by relation to Christ in such a way that it can no longer be

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<sup>31</sup> Nelson, “Charles Finney and John Nevin on Selfhood and Sin,” 294.

<sup>32</sup> “Amazing Grace How Sweet the Sound,” in *Dictionary of American Hymnology*.



accurately identified without relation to Christ's identity as healer. Moreover, the role that the man's blindness plays in his personal identity, and therefore his personal relational being, is not reduced or diminished. He can praise God all the more because he "was once blind, but can now see." The once-blind-man is brought into transformative relation to Christ, becoming a part of Christ's narrative identity as Christ is thus identified as healer. This changes the once-blind-man's personal identity without eviscerating that which makes him particular.

What, we therefore must ask, does transformed particularity look like in relation to Christ? If it doesn't leave particularity unchanged and it does not erase it, what does Christ's transformation of particularity do? Transformed particularity, and particularity in general, is rooted in relationship, not being self-stable. What it means for a particularity to be transformed through second-personal relationship to Christ, therefore, is for that particularity to be changed so that it can fit into the *telos* of relationship in *communio Dei*. What Christ does formatively to our particularity through relationship is to restore and redeem it for the kind of communion we were always intended to have with God, fellow-humanity, and creation. He changes and challenges our particularity and the relations between particularities so that they can fit into loving, self-giving communion with others whom Christ unites himself with. The slave master and the slave must be transformed in relation to one another so that the slave master becomes the former slave master now freed in Christ from their oppressive ways and the slave must become the liberated, loved by God in solidarity with Christ. Christ's transformation of our particularity effects the restoration of relationships between particularities. This is demonstrated in the above example of the woman at the well. Through her transformative encounter with Jesus, her established relationship with her neighbours is transformed from scorned harlot to their first witness to Christ. She is still herself in this respect; she is still multiple times divorced by the end of the passage. But what that particularity means to her and to her new-found reconciliation with her community is changed as she is affirmed and transformed in Christ. The transformed community is the reconciled community, and so our vision for the *telos* of humanity in Christ must be one in which reconciliation occurs across borders of difference in a way that does not flatten, but rather affirms particularity.

## §17

### **The Reconciled *Communio Dei***

In looking at how Christ reconciles others to himself, to God, to one another, and to creation, we might paint a picture of how particularity is preserved in being united to and

transformed by Christ's own particularity. By analysing these aspects of reconciliation and their relationship to one another, we can have a clearer picture of what it means for persons to have their particularity transformed so that they can have *communio Dei* with God, other human persons, and creation. But we can only know what this should look like by showing how particularity is both included and changed in Christ's reconciling of all things.

### **§17.1 The Unity and Diversity of Christ's Reconciling Work**

Christ's reconciling work is firstly a reconciliation of God and all of humanity within the unity of Christ's divine and human natures. This was demonstrated in §I.1.2 and §II.6.1 in the unity of Christ's person (*enhypostasia*) and work (*anhypostasia*). This is consistent with what has been said so far about the corporate nature of humanity's union with Christ. The incarnation instantiates a new relation (that is to say a new covenant) not simply between Christ and particular believing individuals, but between Christ and all of humanity.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Torrance writes, "atoning reconciliation has achieved its end in the new creation in which God and man [generally] are brought into such communion with one another that the relations of man [generally] with God in being and knowing are healed and fully established."<sup>34</sup> The relation here which is restored is not a set of discreet relationships between Christ and many (or even all) individuals. Rather, there is some entity "humanity" which is brought into a new relationship with God through Christ's atoning incarnation.

To wit, Christ's reconciling work also affects a peace among fellow-human persons. As Paul says, Christ "himself is our peace, who has made the two groups into one and has destroyed the barrier, the wall of division of hostility...in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, on which he put their hostility to death" (Eph 2:15-17).<sup>35</sup> In being reconciled to Christ, women and men who are in Christ are also reconciled to one another. As Torrance puts it:

through union and communion with Christ human society may be transmuted into a Christian community in which inter-personal relations are healed and restored in the Person of the Mediator, and in which interrelations between human beings are constantly renewed and sustained through the humanizing

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<sup>33</sup> Woznicki, "The One and the Many," 112.

<sup>34</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 233.

<sup>35</sup> Τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίση ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην, καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ. Καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσαστο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς·

activity of Christ Jesus, the one Man in whom and through whom as Mediator between God and man they may be reconciled to one another within the ontological and social structures of their existence.<sup>36</sup>

We ought to note two things in considering this aspect of Christ's reconciling work. First, the reconciliation of one to another in Christ is bound up in our being reconciled to God in Christ. I have argued elsewhere that our being reconciled to God in Christ entails our being reconciled to one another.<sup>37</sup> However, as Cone notes, restored communion with God, who is himself perfect communion, is the basis for restored communion with fellow-human beings. He writes, "this vertical sense of personal relationship with the God of Jesus is logically prior to the other components of human liberation. For without the knowledge of God that comes through divine fellowship, the oppressed would not know that what the world says about them is a lie."<sup>38</sup> To be reconciled with God is to enter into that kind of communion which can, and indeed does, re-establish communion with fellow-human beings. While there are many individuals who are in Christ, there can be no *mere* individuals in union with Christ; to be in Christ is to be reconciled into the body of Christ.

Third, Christ is reconciling all things to himself (Col 1:20). The whole of creation is being restored to right relationship with God and itself through Christ's reconciling and atoning work. Eschatologically, we are promised a harmonious vision of *shalom* in creation where the predator and the prey are in harmony with one another, animals do not lash out at humans, and humanity ceases to harm the created order (Isa 11:6-9). The curse of the garden, in which creation rebels against humanity's priestly care of it and humanity strives to subjugate creation, is undone. Humanity and creation are both transformed so that they may be restored to harmonious communion with one another and with God.

Throughout Christ's reconciling work, we ought to note that the borders of difference are not eviscerated in order for things that are at odds with one another to be brought into communion. Humanity does not become divine in order to have communion with the divine, nor must it lose its distinctive role as priests of creation in order to be restored to harmony with the created order. Things can remain different even as they are restored to loving, self-giving communion. This is true of the various parties implicated in *communio Dei*, but it is also true of the relations within those groupings. The lion need not become a lamb in order to

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<sup>36</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Everhart, "Communal Reconciliation," 19.

<sup>38</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 91.

be in harmony with the lamb just as, according to Paul, Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be in worshipful communion with them. In Christ's reconciling work, he does not transform our humanity in such a way as to eradicate our particularity nor does he need us all to have one kind of particularity in order to be restored to loving, self-giving communion. This is true principally because the kind of union to which Christ restores us is rooted in the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the Son does not need to become Father in order to be one with the Father.

### **§17.2 Particularity in the Reconciled Community**

Despite the fact that these differences remain within the framework of Christ's reconciling of all things, the relationship between these differences changes, including sometimes changing or reordering the relational content of the identities in question. While the lion remains a lion, its diet changes, according to Isaiah, so that it consumes straw rather than ox (Isaiah 11:7). While the Jewish people retain their identity, the covenant and law which have grounded this identity are reordered to refer to Christ (e.g. Rom 11). While the Gentiles need not become Jews in order to enter into life with Jesus, they must abandon their old gods and take up worship of YHWH through Jesus Christ. The content of one's social identity can change within the social structures that already exist through which Jesus Christ relates to us as a human being. This means that one way in which particularity can be transformed is for its content to change to be reordered towards the Christological *telos* of all humanity.

So what is it that determines what content needs to change and what should remain stable? Within the examples we have above and throughout §IV.11, one might notice a consistent theme whenever a particularity is transformed. Particularity, as argued thus far, is a gift given to humanity for the purpose of fulfilling its *telos* in Christ to have communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. Particularity is transformed in Christ so that it might serve the end for which it is created. This means that, when we see a given particularity change, it is changed for the purpose of making such a *communio Dei* possible. Jews and Gentiles alike must transform their cultural notions of human relation to the divine, reordering these notions and all the social and embodied practices that go with them towards their proper *telos* in Christ. In encounter with Christ, women are affirmed and empowered to bear witness to Christ as equals alongside men rather than as their subordinates. The transformation of particularity, and specifically what makes it so that one aspect ought to change while another remains similar, depends on what role that particularity can play in the

*telos* of humanity in *communio Dei*. In Christ, all things are reordered for this communion, remaining distinct from one another but changed so that they may be in harmonious, right relation to one another.

Caught up in the middle of this reconciling work is humanity, in whom Christ enters into creation in order to reconcile everything, human and non-human. All our particularity is transformed in relation to Christ so that we, as particular beings, may have loving and self-giving communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. For some socially-embodied identity features, this means Christ rescuing us from our oppressive or oppressed identities wherein these features become an historical part of our narrative. In participating in Christ's narrative, the slave knows that they are loved by God and created for freedom while the slave owner comes to repent of their history and be transformed into an instrument of God's freedom and justice. Other socially-embodied identity features remain more similar to what they are, such as femaleness, in which Christ simply affirms women and empowers them to lead his Church alongside men as co-priests. What determines the nature of this transformation of humanity *as it ought to be transformed* is not our fluid, self-determination, but our determination by God to be who we are in Christ. It is Christ, in all his particularity, who sets the standard for what this transformation looks like and embodies what particularity is supposed to do in human ways of being.

This is primarily done, at least from the examples raised above, by transforming the relations between particularities. Christ changes the social-meaning of femaleness when he calls the three women at the tomb to be the first to bear witness to his resurrection; he changes the socio-embodied experience of the woman at the well when he appoints her as his witness to her town. Even the Jews and Gentiles under Paul's leadership are changed through the transformation of Jewish-Gentile relations. It is through loving and self-giving communion with the Jews that Gentiles are grafted into covenant relation to God and it is in communion with the Gentiles that Paul is able to call Jewish believers to reorient their understanding of their covenant identity towards its *telos* in Christ. Particularity is transformed primarily in how it relates to that which is other, orienting all human particularity towards the human *telos*. In Christ, particularity is not erased but instead transformed so that we may have both Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, united in communion with God.

Because this *telos* to which Christ reconciles all particularities and the relations between them is the *communio Dei*, the communion of God, human beings, and all of creation united in Christ, it is in this communion that particularity is transformed properly

towards its *telos*. This is consistent with §III's reflection on how groups change in their shared identity and how this transforms other social identities held by the groups' members. It is in community with others, specifically those who are different from us, that we encounter Christ in this particularity-transforming way. It is Christ's reconciling work, but we may participate in what he is doing when we participate in his Spirit-wrought community. This means that it is in diverse community that the relations between particularities can change and that it is in Spirit-wrought diverse community that Christ transforms these particularities towards their intended end of loving, self-giving communion with the other. This entails not just a transformation of the relationship between particularities in a vacuum, but a transformation of the social structures in which those particularities (and the persons who bear them) relate to one another. It is through community, Cone argues, that the oppressed are able to transform societal structures and created communities in which freedom and self-giving love can be experienced by all peoples.<sup>39</sup> Christ's reconciling work (and by extension our participation in it as *communio Dei*) must include "chang[ing] the structures of injustice... This means fighting for the inauguration of liberation in our social existence, creating new levels of human relationship in society."<sup>40</sup> When Christ reconciles all things, he challenges and transforms the social structures of our communities in which division, homogeneity, and hegemony have been instantiated. In doing so, he fundamentally changes how the particularities of persons in those communities relate to one another, making loving and self-giving communion possible. Reconciled particularity looks like particularity that is changed in relation to Christ in order that we might love and have communion with God, other human beings, and the created order.

Finally, I raised at the beginning of this section the problem posed to the account of Christological anthropology and human particularity thus far offered; namely that a dynamic account of human nature without sufficient stability leaves us with an inability to define humanity in any meaningful sense and makes it possible for humanity (or particular human beings) to define and determine their particularity in harmful or sinful ways. The stability of human nature, I have argued, is not found in what it is capable of becoming but instead in what it is *supposed* to become in Christ. This does not, in one sense, rule out the formation of human particularity in harmful ways. In this respect, Tonstad's account may be correct: human beings can self-determine and proliferate difference-beyond-difference in whatever

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<sup>39</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 99.

<sup>40</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 93-94.

way we might imagine. And while she is incorrect that this is done via aborting the communal aspect, her vision for human particularity is nevertheless possible. So how does grounding the stability (against Tonstad's account of fluidity) of human nature in the *telos* of humanity in Christ help us to address the problem of harmful socio-embodied construction of our particularity?

In one sense, it doesn't. Humanity, on the account I have offered, is *capable* of constructing itself in harmful ways, such as constructing racial and gendered hierarchies or commanding communal homogeneity through these hierarchies. I have not, in my account of human particularity, ruled this out. But in another sense, I am not sure that we should rule it out, for we have seen throughout history the potency and power of human social construction to dehumanize and denigrate the value of our fellow-human beings. Human sinfulness and the distortion of our nature is something that we do; it only makes sense that our account of human nature should include it as a possibility. What this account does do, however, is to rule dehumanizing social identities out as contrary to the *telos* for which we have this great capacity for transformation in our own socio-embodied natures. This is perhaps the next question that needs to be asked in Christological anthropology: if this is what humanity is supposed to be, what have we become in our fallenness? For our purposes here, however, we can say that such harmful social construction is a part of the potential of human nature but is contrary to the *telos* of that nature, the purpose for which we are created as communal beings with particularity.

## §18

### **Christ, the Heart of Communion**

Christ reveals and reconciles everything that it means to be human. In doing so, he tells us that we are creatures uniquely created in the image of God to have communion with God, fellow-humanity, and the created order. The kind of communion we are intended to have is the one that Christ has himself with the Father and Spirit: a loving, self-giving, and perichoretic kind of communion in which we share ourselves with one another. Because we are created for this kind of communion in socio-embodied ways, God creates us in the image of Christ to be particular beings. We are created intentionally with socio-embodied differences so that we might share with others that which they do not have and they might likewise share with us that which we do not have. Essential to our being human in the image of Christ, therefore, is our having particularity in socio-embodied ways. We are truly human in Christ when we are in Christ together, belonging in community alongside those who are

different from us. In such a diverse communion, we come to know God in Christ most truly and fully, for we can second-personally know God through the eyes of another.

At the heart of this communion is Christ, the God-man who comes to humanity as a particular human being who encounters us and transforms all that makes us particular. He reshapes and reconciles all that it means to be particular, transforming us and our particularity into that which can be in loving, self-giving communion with those who are different from us. We do not cease to be particular; we become particular as we were intended to be. Christ, then, is the *telos* of all humanity, fulfilling and revealing what it means to be human. Jesus doesn't just demonstrate what particular humanity should look like, he encounters and transforms the collective, humanity, into a diverse community united by the loving and self-giving of Father, Son, and Spirit. Christ is the heart of the communion for which humanity was created and in him, humanity finds the fulfilment of all that it means to be particular. Particularity is not a problem for Christological anthropology, it is the possibility of such a diverse communion in which humanity can flourish in Christ.



## VI

## Concluding, Unscientific Postscript to *Communio Dei*

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I began this thesis with Reuther's question: can a male saviour save women? I took this question to be indicative of a larger question: can a *particular* saviour save those who are different from him? In what followed, I demonstrated that humanity is created to have union with the particular humanity of Christ, such that Christ's particular humanity determines what it means for us to be human. What Christ reveals humanity to be in his atoning work is that species created for *communio Dei*: that loving, self-giving communion with God, fellow-humanity, and creation which reflects the intra-Trinitarian communion. Essential to this communion is our relation to those who are different from us. Our communion with them does not require that we are particularly identical to them, nor that we must become exactly like one another to have true communion. Instead, our socio-embodied differences make possible a communion in which we can change and grow into a Spirit-wrought community that reflects the communion of the divine life. Particularity is not a barrier to Christ's saving work; it is the condition for it. A male saviour, therefore, can indeed save women because his particular maleness transforms what it means for them to be female and empowers them to challenge and transform harmful, socio-embodied instantiations of maleness in the body of Christ. A Palestinian-Jewish saviour can indeed save Gentiles by transforming their relationship to God's people and appointing them to call God's chosen people to repentance and relationship with Christ. We are created in the Image of Christ to be particular *so that* we can have diverse communion with others who are different from us in the body of Christ.

Diversity, then, is essential to the Christological *telos* of human nature. We should seek to shape our particularity in community with others not in ways that homogenize us or create hegemonic structures based on our differences, but in ways that our particularity can be shared second-personally with across borders of difference. All humanity, whether they know it or not, is called to realize this destiny in Spirit-wrought community. All humanity is called into union with Christ in which Christ affirms and transforms the things that make us particular. In doing so, he forms humanity into a community of restored loving and self-giving relationships with God, fellow-humanity, and creation. This diverse and Spirit-wrought *communio Dei* defines all human nature, but it is only in participating in the

reconciled community brought about through Christ's person and work that this particular social identity transforms our lives.

Particularity, therefore, is not a problem for Christological anthropology. Particularity is a gift of our createdness whereby we can know and love God more fully together as the Spirit-wrought community. In *communio Dei*, humanity comes to realize, albeit partially, its eschatological destiny to be a community of "every tribe, tongue, and nation" united in worship of YHWH. When humanity lives according to this destiny, it affirms its diversity by proclaiming God in Christ in translatable ways that can be proclaimed by and received in every tongue, culture, and social location. Particularity is not a threat to Christological anthropology because it is translatable; we can share second-personally that which makes us particular in community with others. While this kind of translation makes us unfathomably powerful, being capable of changing our nature by calling into existence social constructions that can form our embodiment, it is a power that only realizes its *telos* when it participates in Christ's reconciling work. He is the heart of communion for which humanity is created, transforming our particularity in life-giving and boundary-crossing ways. In Christ, humanity is gathered into a diverse communion with the Father and Spirit to participate in the reconciliation of all things to God. This gives meaning to our unfathomable power for translation, directing us towards life and freedom.

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