

APPENDIX 10 – WHITE PAPER ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

White Paper on Theological Anthropology

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Introduction

This paper is offered as the first step into a careful and care-filled conversation about the nature of the human person in Christian theology and practice. In a time of extraordinary cultural strife and debate about the nature of humanity, we want to begin our own consideration of these issues with a posture of prayerful attention to God's own revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures. This paper is therefore a first attempt to outline the moving parts of an exploration of the human person from a Christian point of view. It takes as its starting point the person of Jesus Christ, whom we consider the origin and destiny of humanity. Additionally, our discussion is grounded deeply in the Scriptures, as God's revelation to us, and in the long tradition of Christian thought about the human person. This paper presents a fairly simple, and we hope compelling, argument about the nature of the human person. First, Jesus Christ is the true human, to whom we look both first and finally to understand what it is to be human. Second, humanity is created in the image of God, which implies vital things both about our responsibility in the world and the essential nature of our being. Third, the human person does have certain essential characteristics, like embodiedness, agency, relationality, and personhood. Fourth, the human person, on account of our origin and our nature, is called to certain ways of living in the world in response to God's call and by means of the Spirit's indwelling power.

The context of this conversation is, as we have just noted, a culture that is deeply entrenched in debates about many questions that relate to the nature of the human person. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a key voice in the German Confessing Church during the Nazi regime, argued in his famous work, *Discipleship*, that

[i]n times of church renewal holy scripture naturally becomes richer in content for us. Behind the daily catchwords and battle cries needed in the Church Struggle, a more intense, questioning search arises for the one who is our sole concern, for Jesus himself. What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help

us to be faithful Christians today? It is not ultimately important to us what this or that church leader wants. *Rather, we want to know what Jesus wants* [emphasis added].¹

This emphasis on knowing the will of Jesus Christ guided Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking in a dire time, and it must also be the starting point for our reflection on anthropology.² As The Alliance Canada seeks to be faithful to God in our time and place, our churches are faced with unique questions about what it means to be human here and now. In this context, the Alliance must consider how it will live out the mission of Christ in a way that is accessible, faithful, and committed to God's self-revelation in the Son and the Scriptures.

Cultural engagement is a vital task for the people of God. Each church is always located in a culture, and churches have responded in varied ways to this reality. One approach has been to stand against the culture. The temptation here is to shrink back in a fearful posture, and, from the "bastion of orthodoxy", guard ourselves from a contaminated world. This approach, however, does not reflect the commission of Jesus or the traditional ethos of the Alliance.

The pull on the opposite side has been to uncritically assimilate the values and commitments of culture and capitulate to the ideas of the day. But God has not called us to mere "relevance"; he has also called us to faithfulness and sanctification for the purpose of holiness. As A.W. Tozer warned, "Secularism, materialism, and the intrusive presence of things have put out the light in our souls and turned us into a generation of zombies."³ As a movement we cannot yield our prophetic voice in exchange for cultural dominance. There must be something distinct about the posture, message, and methods of the church.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Martin Kuske et al., trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 37. Note that throughout this paper we have not adjusted quotations from secondary sources to make them gender inclusive but have followed either the original quotation or the most common translated form of the quotation in standard sources. Consider this footnote as a blanket acknowledgement that the use of man/mankind should not be read in a gender-exclusive way but corresponds to "human / humankind / humanity" in contemporary parlance. We will endeavor to use gender-inclusive language in our own writing.

² We are using the term "anthropology" in its simplest sense, which means the study of the human person. This paper is specifically "theological anthropology" because we seek to know and describe the nature of the human person in the context of Christian theology.

³ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 18.

This is not merely so that we can be distinct or unique for the sake of distinctness or uniqueness, but because we long to hear the voice of Christ and to follow his lead here and now. The goal, therefore, “is to strengthen our powers of discernment” so that our theology and practice “are more consonant with a biblical vision of human flourishing.”⁴ This is our desire as the people of God.

Christians in Canada encounter unique challenges today. Questions about race, gender, sexuality, technology, artificial intelligence, and the sanctity of life, stand at the forefront of philosophical and ethical debates in our society. The last few decades have presented tectonic cultural shifts. The legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005, the introduction of the iPhone in 2007, the rise and proliferation of gender theories, the acceleration of global capitalism, attempts to reconcile with a colonial history, and the recent global pandemic have had, and continue to have, enormous impacts on Canadian culture, and consequently on Canadian churches. Our culture is in a state of continual flux, and it is difficult to keep up with the ways public discourse and theological perspectives are shifting. These issues can be challenging for the church, and in some circumstances drain life from our souls and challenge faithful perseverance. In this paper, the Alliance Canada Theological Commission desires to support our denomination by providing a foundation from which we can think theologically about these complicated matters. The goal then is to assist our lay leaders and licensed workers to navigate the practical challenges of serving local churches.

At the core of these varied cultural issues lies a complex, and often internally contradictory, set of assumptions about the human person. Whether it is the issue of gender identity, sexuality, race, or bioethics, modern Canadians hold a variety of assumptions about the human person. The discipline of theological anthropology seeks to consider the human person from a biblical and theological perspective.

⁴ Justin Ariel Bailey: *Interpreting Your World: Five Lenses for Engaging Theology and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing: 2022), 38-39.

As Christians, “our anthropology is entirely dependent on our theology.”⁵ Therefore, a robust theological anthropology is a necessary area for reflection and discussion in our time.

This paper is organized into three main sections. Section One, “Origin and Destiny,” will consider the beginning and the end of the human being and draw conclusions about what we can know about ourselves by considering where we come from and where we are going. While this entire paper makes intentional and continual reference to the Scriptures, Section One is particularly focused on the biblical story and our place in it. The key insight of Section One is that Jesus Christ, as the firstborn over all creation and the coming King over God’s eternal kingdom, is both our origin and our destiny. Section Two, “Essence and Composition,” will explore the essential features of the human person from a Christian perspective. This section, while still anchored deeply in the Scriptures, is the most technical and theological section of the paper. The key insight of Section Two is that the human person is an embodied soul endowed with personhood, relationality, and agency. Section Three, “Ethics,” will present a framework with which Christians might navigate the ethical challenges of our day, grounded in the conclusions about the human person set forth in Sections One and Two. The key insight of Section Three is that our ethical decision-making must be grounded in the love of God in Jesus Christ, and will require prayerful attunement to the Holy Spirit, careful analysis, and loving application.

It is crucial to understand the scope of this document. It is not meant to and will not provide pragmatic answers to specific ethical questions. Attempting to address all the issues, challenges, worries, and pastoral concerns about the human person that currently confront us is impossible in a paper of this length. However, we believe a robust theological anthropology will be able to guide the reader to discern the good, and to reason well about specific issues in specific situations. Theological discernment in complex matters is a necessary practice for Christian leaders, and we trust that through prayer, community

⁵ Craig Gay, *The Way of the Modern World, Or Why It’s Tempting to Live as if God Doesn’t Exist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 281.

discernment, and resources like this paper, The Alliance Canada will continue to move forward in grace and truth.

Jesus Christ is the true human. It is him in whom “all humanity is patterned” and he thus “typifies what it means to be a flourishing human being.”⁶ Therefore, it is to Christ that we look as we begin our exploration of the human person. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes: “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”⁷ Given this, and beginning with God’s Son, we turn now to the story in which we find ourselves.

Origin and Destiny

Jesus Christ as our Origin and Destiny

The Scriptures tell us that Christ is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being,” and also that he is like us “fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God” (Heb. 1:3; 2:17). Hence Jesus Christ is the ultimate source of divine revelation whereby we can know God and ourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ is both our origin, the pre-existent Word by which all things are made (Jn. 1; Pr. 8), and our destiny, the One who runs the race before us in order to draw us into perfect union with God the Father (Heb. 12). In light of the incarnation of the pre-existent Son, we cannot speak rightly about the origin and destiny of the human person apart from reference to Jesus Christ, the perfect human. Knowing him, we come to know ourselves.

This first section will focus our attention on the way that the Scriptures recount the story of human beings. As Christian interpreters we begin with several presuppositions. First, we assume that the Scriptures are God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), and that they witness to the truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is why all Scripture must be read in light of the Son (Lk. 24:27; Jn. 5:39). The incarnate

⁶ Christa L. McKirland, *God’s Provision, Humanity’s Need: The Gift of our Dependence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 127.

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 216.

Word is the key to a Christian understanding of the word of God. Second, we assume that thoughtful exegesis is necessary when reading the Scriptures. A truly exhaustive exploration of all of the biblical passages that relate to theological anthropology is obviously far beyond the scope of this relatively short paper. As much as possible we will attempt to give considerable attention to the passages explored, explain their meaning in both a historical and literary sense as we move toward theological statements. That said, we will sometimes simply cite relevant passages of Scripture (as in the paragraph above), but even here our opinion is that a careful understanding of the passage(s) cited does, in fact, clearly support the point being made. In other words, we are at all times working to give careful, prayerful, and thoughtful consideration to God's holy Scriptures. This introductory section will be especially focused on exploring some biblical passages that matter deeply to the question we are exploring.

A Little Lower than the Heavenly Beings, the Human Person and the Image of God

Genesis tells us the story of God's creation of all things. These opening chapters of the first book of the Bible are particularly concerned with the question of purpose. What is this world? Where does it come from? What are these creatures? What are we as people? Here we are especially interested in that last question. Genesis 1:27 tells us that "God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

What does it mean to be made in God's image and likeness? Throughout history theologians have suggested various plausible qualities such as rationality (intelligence), relationality, personhood (self-consciousness), or the impulse to create as distinguishing features of the human being. However, Genesis 1-2 does not explicitly tie any of these qualities to image-bearing. Rather, Genesis 1 seems to suggest that image-bearing is to be primarily understood in terms of what human beings have been called to do. This is what has been called the "Functional" or "Regency" view, which is essentially the consensus view among

Old Testament scholars.⁸ In Genesis, God says to Adam, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gn. 1:28) The “Functional” or “Regency” view argues that to bear the image of God is to participate in God’s rule. It is vital to note that this does not give human beings the status of deity or heavenly beings (Heb. 2:7-8). The terminology in Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are made in the image of God but that we are very clearly not of the same essence or nature as God.⁹

Human beings are not God but they share in God’s work. As Iain Provan writes, “Genesis does not have in view ... absolute, unrestrained power, with no moral boundaries, that can be used just as human beings want. Humanity’s responsibility is instead to exercise ‘dominion’ on behalf of God, who created the world in which they live.”¹⁰ In other words, our dominion is defined by God’s dominion, and thus implies a profound responsibility towards creation—to work for the good of God’s world.¹¹ In addition to responsibility, this status as regents or stewards suggests the infinite intrinsic value of the human person. Like all of creation, God calls us good, and in fact, very good (Gn. 1:31).

The distinction between Creator and creation is vital for a proper understanding of humanity, and indeed of creation in its totality. While the habits of modern thought have often led us to think in terms of a basic distinction between humanity and nature, this is somewhat foreign to the Scriptures. Genesis and other passages such as Psalm 8 (explored further below) imply there is a fundamental distinction between Creator and creation.¹² Human beings clearly belong to the latter category, while God belongs to the former. In other words, while we share in God’s work, we do not share in God’s essence or nature. We are not gods. Consequently, our royal authority is a delegated authority that derives from God’s

⁸ J. Richard Middleton, *Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 24-29.

⁹ Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 45.

¹⁰ Iain Provan, *Cuckoos in Our Nest: Truth And Lies About Being Human* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023), 52.

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. W. Moore and H. A. Wilson, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), Question 4, 613.

¹² Ronald Simkins, *Yahweh’s Activity in the Book of Joel: Ancient Near Eastern Texts & Studies* (New York, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 30.

authority as Creator. We live out and enact God’s rule in the world as responsible stewards of all that he has made.

While we have noted that a functional / regency view of the image of God is preferable to other traditional views, many of those other views retain important aspects of a complete understanding of what it means to be image bearers. It is clear, for instance, in the Genesis 2–3 account that human beings are intrinsically relational. Stanley Grenz writes, “The deepest intentions of God in creation are fulfilled in the establishment of community, for indeed human beings have been created for fellowship and community with God, one another, and all of creation.”¹³ This intrinsic relationality is a key aspect of what it is to be human.

A vital subset of this basic relationality is the relationship between woman and man. Genesis 2 devotes most of its attention to the question of relationality, both in the naming of the animals (placing the human being into direct relational contact with other creatures) and in the creation of the distinction between woman and man. Whereas Genesis 1 focuses on the function of procreation as a vital aspect of the differentiation of the sexes, Genesis 2 emphasizes the need for woman and man to have a relational counterpart or partner in their work as God’s stewards in the Garden of Eden. This suggests several important, but somewhat complex and interrelated points about human relationality. First, in the Genesis account human beings are differentiated by sex. Maleness and femaleness are both clearly indexed to the work of bearing God’s image. Consequently, any anthropology that denigrates, demeans, or devalues either of the sexes is inherently in conflict with this account of the human person. For instance, the traditional argument that women are in some sense inferior, which has sadly been pervasive in Christian history, is untenable. Second, the differentiation between woman and man is related to the human

¹³ Stanley Grenz, *Theology For the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 202. See also Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein, (Toronto, ON: Pauline Books & Media, 2006)Address 9, paragraph 3.

vocation to be stewards of creation, and specifically to procreate in order to fulfill this task. Here a complex and dangerous error could easily arise, namely, to suggest that in order to be truly human all people must marry members of the opposite sex and procreate successfully. But what of people who experience various forms of infertility? Is a man with a low sperm count less of a man? Is a woman who cannot conceive less of a woman? Obviously, some in the past have answered “yes” to both of these questions, but that simply cannot be the case. Here we return to the heart of any Christian argument about the nature of the human person: the true human Jesus Christ. The Son of God himself was childless. He did not marry and had no children. Does this imply that God’s own incarnate Word is somehow “less” human; that he in some sense does not share in our essential nature? Impossible! Additionally, Christianity has always had a view of vocational celibacy, grounded in a traditional interpretation of Paul’s words to the church in Corinth (1 Co. 7). If singleness is a way of being in the world that fully honours God, and to which God at times calls his servants, then how could we suggest that procreation is absolutely necessary for a description of the essential nature of human beings?

The answer to this problem lies, we believe, in the understanding that the necessary functions and relationships that are involved in bearing God’s image are held not by individual humans, but by humanity as a whole. Humanity bears a procreative responsibility, and this requires in the aggregate fertility, but it does not follow that individual humans all bear this responsibility. All individual humans, having their common origin in God, are of infinite value and dignity, but it is humanity that bears the responsibility to steward creation, including the call to procreation. This collective responsibility will, of course, be executed by many individual people, but the specific participation of each individual in this responsibility will vary according to many factors, such as nature, ability, disposition, capacity, context, and calling.

Any number of biblical passages could be explored in a conversation about the sad and painful reality of human sin and evil. It is very normal and appropriate, for instance, to explore Genesis 3, or even

all of Genesis 1-11 in such a conversation.¹⁴ Here, however, we would like to consider this through the lens of God’s covenant relationship with Israel, which begins (or begins again) with God’s great act of liberation: the exodus from Egypt.

The story begins with a people enslaved. This people, though they are cared for by midwives who fear God (Ex. 1:17), seems to have forgotten the Lord (Ex. 3). In his “Homily Explaining that God is Not the Cause of Evil,” Basil argues that the ills and evils of this world are a direct result of humanity forgetting God. Basil writes,

The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’ [Ps. 13:1]. Moreover, as this enters into his mind, he then moves freely through every sin. For if there is no overseer, if there is nobody who repays, according to the merit of his actions, what prevents oppression of the poor, murder of orphans, killing of widows and strangers, daring to do every profane practice, wallowing in unclean and abominable passions, and all bestial desires?...For one cannot turn aside from the just path unless one’s soul is ill through forgetting God.¹⁵

Humanity in its state of forgetfulness, in its unwillingness to recognize God as God, falls into suffering and enslavement, and needs liberation from God.¹⁶

The story found in the book of Exodus, in which God sends the prophet Moses to deliver his people from their enslavers, is both an account of the beginning of the nation of Israel and a story that resonates deeply with our personal experiences of life: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” (Ro. 5:6). Each of us, and all of us, have forgotten God and have since been enslaved by sin and evil. Therefore, each of us and all of us long for and need the liberation that comes from God.

God liberates his people and brings them out of Egypt to Mount Sinai where the relationship would be formalized. God creates a covenant, a relationship of dependence, care, and obedience, with

¹⁴ Note that we will lean more heavily on Genesis 3 and the traditional concept of humanity’s fall in the next subsection. Comments there are, we suggest, entirely consistent with the description of our fallen nature as it is explored here by means of the exodus.

¹⁵ Basil, “Homily Explaining That God Is Not the Cause of Evil,” in *On the Human Condition: St. Basil the Great*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (New York, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2005), 66.

¹⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For The Life of the World* (New York, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 18.

his chosen people. At the outset of this covenant, God tells his people that this liberation from slavery is exactly how they will know who God is: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex. 20:2). And yet, Israel violates the covenant relationship with God even as it is being established. With Moses on the mountain, temporarily absent from the people of Israel, Aaron creates an idol out of gold for the people to worship. But even in this act of betrayal, the relationship is not destroyed because of God’s mercy and Moses’ pleading. God alone is the guarantee of the covenant (Ex. 34:6-7).

Exodus not only provides a historical account of the founding of the nation of Israel but also the explanation of the divine-human relationship. God liberates us for joyful responsibility—freedom from sin so we can participate in the life and work of God. The moment we forget God we return to being slaves to sin. In his mercy, however, God does not abandon us. He continues to sanctify us so that we can become who we truly are. The story of the exodus finds its ultimate meaning and fulfillment in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Schmemmann writes, “In this world Christ was rejected. He was the perfect expression of life as God intended it. The fragmentary life of the world was gathered into His life; He was the heartbeat of the world and the world killed Him. But in that murder the world itself died.”¹⁷ Intrinsic to the sinful human condition is the need for salvation, liberation, and re-unification with God. Our sinful natures caused the fragmentation and distortion of relationships in our world, resulting in our true identity being twisted out of shape. We are all marred by sin and evil, but sin and evil are neither our origin nor our destiny.

Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise to God in which we humans learn about our own nature. In the grand scheme of creation, the psalmist asks, why does God pay us any mind? The psalmist assumes what we have argued above: that the true and basic demarcation of being in the cosmos is not human and nature,

¹⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 23.

but Creator and creation. The psalmist knows that we belong to creation and so is curious as to why the Creator would think of and care for him—a lowly created being. However, the psalmist realizes God has made him “a little lower than the heavenly beings” and crowned him “with glory and honor.” (Ps. 8:5) We belong quite clearly to the category “creature,” yet we are something more than the animals. We are not heavenly beings and certainly not gods, but there are striking similarities between God and human beings. C.S. Lewis uses the metaphor of “amphibian,” suggesting that we are “half spirit and half animal...as spirit [we] inhabit the eternal world, but as animals [we] inhabit time.”¹⁸ The “half-and-half” language is not entirely accurate since it implies a Graeco-Roman understanding of a dichotomous, spirit-versus-body being, but the underlying metaphor is still very helpful. We are creatures, but we have both a unique nature and standing in the cosmos.

Genesis 2:7 tells of God breathing life into the first person. When God breathes into Adam, he becomes a living being. The term translated here as “being” is the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which has a range of meanings, but is used especially to refer to the spark of life that is particular and special to human beings; what we would call “the soul.” A human person is simultaneously a physical creature (embodied and mortal) and spiritual (eternal). Jacques Maritain is on point when he writes, “Soul and matter are the two substantial co-principles of the same beings, of one and the same reality, called [humanity].”¹⁹ The term “embodied soul” best encapsulates our distinction from the rest of creation. We are more, but certainly not less, than our bodies. Our bodies are not a curse which we must find ways to escape. John Paul II declares that “the body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1954), letter #8.

¹⁹ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 36.

hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”²⁰ On the other hand, we are not mere physical bodies that engage in the pretense of consciousness, as some arch-materialists would suggest. Our lives are profoundly related to the eternal, spiritual life of God. To some extent, our “soul” or “consciousness” reflects the divine nature. Therefore, we have a “twinned” nature.²¹ As with Genesis 1, Psalm 8 links this “elevated” nature of the human person to responsibility. We may be a little lower than heavenly beings, but we have been crowned. The honour and glory of being crowned entail royal responsibilities. This means humans, bearing the image of God, are to participate in God’s just and loving rule over his creation.

While by no means an exhaustive summary of what the Old Testament tells us about human beings, we have sketched a helpful beginning here. We bear God’s image, which means that we are of infinite worth and value, and that we carry a distinct and specific responsibility to act as God’s regent over creation. Sin, however, distorts our worth and value, and inhibits our ability to fully exercise our divinely ordained responsibility. Basil writes, “[the] beginning and root of sin is in us, and in our self-determination.”²² We need salvation from sin to restore the image of God in us and be enabled to fulfill our responsibility to rule creation as God intended. This can only be accomplished by Jesus Christ—the One who bears the divine image of God and acts responsibly as King of God’s kingdom (Col. 1:15-23; Heb. 1:3, 8).

Jesus Christ: the True Human

As we noted at the outset of this section, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is both truly God and truly human. Jesus is the fullest revelation of God (Jn. 1:18) and of what it is to be truly human (Heb. 12:2).

²⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Address 19 paragraph 4. Note, this does not imply every (or any) individual human body perfectly represents this twinned nature or is free from strife or discord. Such an experience implies no reduction of the essential image bearing nature of all human persons. For instance, a person who experiences a life-long disability is in no sense less of an image bearer than a person who does not have this experience.

²¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Address 66, paragraph 6.

²² Basil, “Homily Explaining That God Is Not the Cause of Evil,” 67.

While Adam is the progenitor of humanity, Jesus Christ is the true Adam, the fulfillment of that which Adam is but a type (Ro. 5:14). Jesus Christ is both the source of the image of God in Adam and of humanity's salvation, justification, and sanctification.²³ The incarnate Word is our source and our destiny.

The innate value and worth of the embodied soul are clearly demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ. From conception to resurrection, the incarnate Son of God needed nourishment, shelter, and clothing. He experienced hunger, tiredness, loneliness, pain and suffering. Jesus is embodied as we are embodied in flesh and blood. Yet he is in constant communion with God the Father, who is Spirit. In other words, Jesus is an embodied soul. Furthermore, Jesus is not only the source of our being but, as the preincarnate Word, our salvation and liberation from evil and sin as well.²⁴ Through the work of Christ on the cross, God reconciles humanity to himself. This reconciliation draws us into a relationship with God which renews and sanctifies us: "Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous" (Ro. 5:19).²⁵

This reconciliation is offered to all people, and by means of this reconciliation all of the extraordinary diversity of humanity is brought into relationship with God. This extraordinary diversity is the product of God's creative activity through the Word.

For he brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.²⁶

²³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (Pickering, OH: Beloved Publishing, 2014), IV.33.4.

²⁴ We will expand this considerably in Section Three "Ethics" below.

²⁵ NASB translation.

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.q47.a1.

It is also through the Word that the diversity of the body is glorified.²⁷ Consider the Apostle Paul's frequent use of the metaphor of the body of Christ. In many of his letters he insists that each believer is a part of the body, and that the diverse and varied abilities, capacities, callings, and vocations of all these parts are necessary for the work of the whole body (Ro. 12; 1 Co. 12-14; Eph. 4). Thus, our destiny is unity with Christ and the glorification of God. "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:22).

Union with God in Christ: The Destiny of the Human Person

To know what it is to be truly human can only be partially answered by knowing where we came from. We must also know where we are going—i.e., our destiny or *telos*. What is the end (which is to say, the goal) of humanity? In other words, our ultimate end as humans is to be in eternal union with God through Christ.

The Apostle Paul articulates this clearly in his expansive opening to the epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:3-14). The many repetitions of "in Christ" in this opening emphasize the purpose of the liberating work of the Son, which is to bring all he has chosen into union with himself. Similarly, the repetitions of "for the praise of his glory" emphasize that the purpose of this union is worship. Much of that letter is taken up with this concern that readers understand that they have been made alive together with Christ and that our destiny is to be raised together and seated together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5-6) The Son does not accomplish his saving work so that individual humans can live forever in a state of myopic self-centeredness, but so that each one will find a place of unity within the body of Christ and will be empowered to walk the good way of God, for which we were created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). This is the sanctifying work of God's Spirit in the Church, to draw us into union with God through Christ. It is for this purpose that the Spirit gives gifts to the Church, so that Christ will be glorified by means

²⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, translated by John Behr (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 46.

of the love-filled lives of his people (1 Co. 12-14). It is by means of the work of the Holy Spirit that believers produce the fruit of Christ-like behaviour, which brings glory to God (Ga. 5:22-23).

The vision of glorification also animates John's vision of the heavenly realm in Revelation. In Revelation 4, the four living creatures worship continually before the throne of God, and the twenty-four elders also bow down and cry out in worship. The image shows us the whole created order, heavenly and earthly beings, and specifically the symbolic representation of the people of God, all bowing down to glorify God. Similarly, in the following chapter the slaughtered Lamb, who is Jesus Christ himself, receives the honour and worship that are his due. It should be noted that here the worshippers are drawn from every varied corner of humanity, and so in the creatures, the elders, and the singers we see the goodness of God's creation.

John's vision in Revelation 4 and 5 and later in the vision of the new kingdom in Revelation 21-22 are symbolic, and do not provide precise details as to what it will mean for us to be glorified and unified with God through Christ. Similarly, Paul's description of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 emphasizes the reality of our hope without expanding in detail on what this will look like. While it is difficult to be certain of the reason for this lack of detail, it seems to suggest that these authors are being led by the Holy Spirit to describe realities that stand in some sense beyond our current comprehension. We do not truly understand what it will look like to be fully glorified, or to be brought into true union with God through Christ. But this is our hope, and consequently the vision that guides our current understanding of what it means to be human (1 Co. 13:12).

This overview of the Scriptures teaches us that we find our identity as humans by means of the revelation of the incarnate God-Man Jesus Christ. We see that we are made in God's image and bear responsibility toward God and creation. We are deeply relational creatures that are complex and diverse, and our relationality is made manifest in diverse ways. We see that we have betrayed our truest nature and have fallen into sin. However, God's work of grace can redeem and renew us. And finally, our true

destiny is to know God, to be known by God, and be united with him in the fullness of the eternal kingdom of the Son, Jesus Christ. From this overview of the biblical story, a variety of specific ideas about the essential nature of the human person follow.

Essence and Composition

Human beings are made of the dust of the earth but, unlike the rest of creation, they alone bear the image of God (Gn. 1-2). In addition to the responsibility of co-regency with God, to be made in the image of God is to be defined by relationship with God; in the words of Alexander Schmemmann, we are, first and foremost, *homo adorens*, or “the worshipping person.”²⁸ Since all human beings, male and female, are made in the image of God, they are all equal in dignity, honour, and virtue, but also face the same existential struggles and divine judgment.²⁹ Moreover, human beings are whole beings and insofar as Scripture presents various “parts” of the human being, they are only aspects of one integrated whole.³⁰ While Christian anthropology recognizes the distinctions between the “parts” and “components” of the human being, it denies any possibility of separability such as the popular imagination of a future existence of “disembodied” souls. Scripture and the creeds teach of bodily resurrection (e.g., Ro. 8:22-24; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Co. 15:51-52; the Apostle’s Creed) and affirm the embodiment of the person where all parts and components are linked together to constitute “the unity and integrity of the human being.”³¹ In other words, the essence and composition of a human being is a person who is made in the image of God (transcendent in the sense of being distinct from the rest of creation) while embodying materiality

²⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

²⁹ Basil offers an interesting commentary on the place of gender in human identity. He affirms that both men and women are created in the image of God, saying, “The natures are alike of equal honour, the virtues are equal, the struggles equal, the judgment alike.” (Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, 18).

³⁰ Iain Provan, *Cuckoos in the Nest*, 37.

³¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 66.6.

(immanent in the sense of being created, contingent, and hungry).³² As we have noted above, he has made us a little lower than the heavenly beings, but crowned us with glory and honour.

As embodied beings who are made in the image of God, human beings are endowed with the gifts of personhood, relationality, and agency. This section highlights these three indelible aspects of the essence and composition of human beings in terms of the Image of God and embodiment. However, because of the consequences of sin, these three aspects have been marred, misused, misunderstood, and abused. Since no human being has ever experienced the primal realities of the image of God or embodiment apart from the fall, the true essence and composition of human beings can only come through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ – the One who is without sin yet became sin to create a new humanity (Ro. 5:12-21; 2 Co. 5:21). Therefore, once again we see that Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the human person.

Personhood: Gift and Task

At the centre of Christian theological anthropology is the idea of personhood. This is because it is rooted in the orthodox understanding of the Trinity of God as one God and three distinct persons.³³ Correspondingly, human beings created by a personal God and bearing his image are essentially persons. As noted above, this personhood, with its necessary relationality, is not at odds with a functional understanding of the Image of God but flows naturally from that perspective. The definition of “person” is and must be derived from God’s personhood as characterized by his communal, trinitarian relationship within himself. John Zizioulas describes this as “otherness in communion and communion in otherness.”³⁴

³² Basil, *On the Origin of Humanity*, 11. See also John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 9, 19, and 66.

³³ It was the earliest theologians who articulated the trinity in terms of personhood. Early creeds such as the Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed, and Chalcedonian Creed all unequivocally attest to the reality of the divine Trinity. For a brief overview, see Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 3rd edition, (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2023), 17-82.

³⁴ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartian, (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 9.

Personhood, understood from the perspective of the Trinity, only emerges through relationship but, in relationship, maintains the unique and unrepeatable existence of the individual person (i.e., otherness). In other words, the unique nature of each individual person is not subsumed into the personhood of God, and belonging to a community does not erase the essential personhood of each member. Yet, a person without community with others is declared by God as “not good” (Gn. 2:18). Zizioulas writes,

The Father cannot be conceived for a single moment without the Son and the Spirit, and the same applies to the other two persons in their relations with the Father and with each other. At the same time, each of these persons is so unique that their hypostatic or personal properties are totally incommunicable from one person to the other.³⁵

Furthermore, the intricate connection between communion and otherness demands that personhood be, in essence, free and creative. Otherness in a person is impossible without freedom and creativity. Yet, simultaneously, a free and creative individual person must be in relationship with others. In other words, the freedom and creativity that mark a person are either constrained for others or they are self-negating.³⁶ Just as God as trinitarian is free and creative but has, in love, bound himself in relationship with himself and others, human beings who bear the image of God are also created and gifted to be in a loving relationship with God and others in creation. Personhood is thus both a gift and a task. In the fallen state, humanity can only see the fullness of personhood in Jesus Christ, revealed in both his relationship with the others of the Godhead and the rest of creation. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit those that are redeemed in Christ are empowered by the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ to pursue the divinely mandated task of living responsibly in their creaturely existence (i.e., to live as relational persons within the scope of God’s mission to humanity to act as stewards or regents in the created world).

The gift and the task of personhood in human beings is expressed in embodiment. Being embodied as a human person demonstrates that one’s existence is finite and limited. One clear example

³⁵ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9.

³⁶ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9-10.

of this is found in the gender distinctions of masculinity and femininity.³⁷ In his first encounter with Eve, Adam recognized Eve is both like and unlike himself (Gen. 2:21-25). As a finite and limited human being, Adam needed Eve (the “other”) to complete his existence. Communion between Adam and Eve—spiritually, emotionally, and physically in the context of a marriage relationship—highlights the fact that as individual persons, they have the gifts of freedom and creativity (e.g., naming the animals) but their existence is bound in relationship to one another (i.e., agency, responsibility). John Paul II writes,

The body, which expresses femininity “for” masculinity and, vice versa, masculinity “for” femininity, manifests the reciprocity and the communion of persons. It expresses it through gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body: a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs. Masculinity-femininity – namely, sex – is the original sign of a creative donation and at the same time the sign of a gift that man, male-female, becomes aware of as a gift lived so to speak in an original way. This is the meaning with which sex enters into the theology of the body.³⁸

In sin, however, the human person has been marred, and we do not express our status as image bearers as we should. The human person no longer looks to God but rather turns inwards (*cor curvum in se*) to define his or her own essence and composition.³⁹ As a result, relationships between human beings and God are destroyed by idolatry, and the embodied relationship between humans are twisted by selfish, egotistical, and abusive desires (Gn. 3; Jam. 1:15). In the fallen state, personhood, relationality, and agency are all distorted. Yet amid fallenness, God has gifted humanity with Jesus Christ, whose redemptive work on the cross has established a new humanity in himself. The Holy Spirit working in and through the church of Jesus Christ offers hope to all humanity—that they can be liberated and once again experience the

³⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 14.4.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 14.4.

³⁹ In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther writes, “our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself [*cor curvum in se*] because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them (as is evident in the case of legalists and hypocrites), indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 25 [Saint Louis, MI: Concordia Publishing House, 1999], 291.)

richness of being persons in relationships, most essentially with God, and that, in community, they can learn to be persons in the image of God.

Relationality: Boundary, Dependency, Community

The Trinitarian God who worked in concert within himself in creation (Gen. 1:2, 26-27; 2:18-25; Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-17) is, in his very essence, love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Created in the image of God, human beings reflect this relational essence of the Creator.⁴⁰ In other words, bearing the image of God, the essence of humanity can only be properly understood in terms of relationality. Relationality as the essence of humanity is expressed in boundary, dependency, and community. This section will look at each of these in turn.

Firstly, to be a person means to be an individual that is distinct from all other individuals. In the Genesis account of creation, there is a clear emphasis on the individuality of Adam that is distinct from God, from his fellow human beings (i.e., Eve), and the rest of creation. This is an embodied reality, as “the body reveals man.”⁴¹ In Martin Buber’s famous work, *I and Thou*, he posits that the essence of human existence is found in relationships with one another. The “I” and “Thou” enter into a relationship by recognizing the boundary between them (i.e., distinction, otherness.⁴²). In other words, to violate the boundary of another individual human being (through unethical actions) is, according to Bonhoeffer,

⁴⁰ Erich Przywara, a Jesuit priest in the 20th century, popularized the concept analogy of being (*analogia entis*). It is the notion that the very being (*entis*) of the created world—especially human beings—offers an analogy by which we can (in a very limited way) comprehend God. (see Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics - Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John Betz and David Hart [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014]) Though this analogy is used by Roman Catholic and some Protestant theologies to infer characteristics of God based on nature, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is wary of this concept since it is vulnerable to the kind of natural theology espoused by theologians who support Nazi ideologies. Though Bonhoeffer agrees with the self-sufficiency and aseity of God, he insists God’s transcendency should never be overemphasized at the expense of his immanency, as most evident in the person of Jesus Christ (DBWE 2: 27, 73-76). Therefore, rather than *analogia entis*, Bonhoeffer posits the term *analogia relationis* instead. Unlike *analogia entis*, which can be construed as an affirmation for human progress, potentials, and advancements, *analogia relationis* views humanity’s personhood, relationality, and agency as a gift that is received “passively” and known only through divine revelation in Jesus Christ.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 9.4

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, ed. Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, vol. 1, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), DBWE 1:54-57.

the point where love for the other is obliterated, a human being can only hate the limit. A person then desires only, in an unbounded way, to possess the other or to destroy the other. For now the human being insists on that human being's own contribution to, and claim upon, the other, insists that the other is derived from oneself; what the human being until now accepted humbly at this point becomes a cause for pride and rebellion. That is our world. The grace of the other person's being our helper who is a partner because he or she helps us to bear our limit, that is, helps us to live before God—and we can live before God only in community [Gemeinschaft] with our helper—this grace becomes a curse. The other becomes the one who makes our hatred of God ever more passionate, the one because of whom we can no longer live before God, and who again and again becomes a judgment against us. As a result marriage and community inevitably receive a new and different meaning. The power of the other which helps me to live before God now becomes the power of the other because of which I must die before God. The power of life becomes the power of destruction, the power of community becomes the power of isolation, the power of love becomes the power of hate.⁴³

Secondly, to bear the image of God within a relational framework means to be a created individual who is dependent on others in creation. The all-sufficient Trinitarian God exists in dependency on one another within the Godhead. Similarly, a human being as an individual is never “complete” without others. Adam's aloneness was the first and only “not good” pronouncement that God made on all his creation (Gn. 2:18). John Paul II writes,

When God-Yahweh says, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gn. 2:18), he affirms that “alone,” the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing *with someone*—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing *for someone*. This norm of existing as a person is demonstrated in Genesis as a characteristic of creation precisely by the meaning of these words, ‘alone’ and ‘help.’ They point out how fundamental and constitutive the relationship and the communion of persons is for man.⁴⁴

Adam, limited and alone, needed a helper who was of the same substance as him while retaining her individuality.

The creation of Eve is both a response to and showcase of these limitations and in gifting Adam and Eve to one another they became the object of one another's love. Jacques Maritain captures this well

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, ed. John W. DeGruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, vol. 3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), DBWE 3:99-100

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 14.2

when he writes, “By the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with other and the others in the order of knowledge and love.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, though human beings have been given the divine mandate to rule over and steward the rest of creation, they must never forget that their sustenance derives from that very creation over which they have dominion. Our physical embodiment showcases this dependency in its needs for sustenance. Alexander Schmemmann argues that humanity’s dependency to the rest of creation ultimately points to our dependency on God:

In the Bible the food man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as communion with God. The world as man’s food is not something “material” and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically “spiritual” functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God’s gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man’s life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God blesses everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good.’ Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him.⁴⁶

In the Fall, dependency is radically and negatively transformed by sin (Gn. 3). The act of eating from the fruit of the tree was humanity’s declaration that they do not need God to be God. They can obtain knowledge of good and evil on their own terms. After the sinful act is committed, the man and the woman needed fig leaves to cover their nakedness—indicative of the lack of healthy transparency and vulnerability between them. They hid from God because they were afraid of God rather than dependent on him. When confronted, the man and the woman did not take responsibility, but rather laid the blame on God, on each other, and on the serpent. The dependent relationships that once existed between human beings with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation become distorted and perverted. As we have noted

⁴⁵ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans John Fitzgerald, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 41.

⁴⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, (New York, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 14-15.

above, this abandoning of dependency, this act of forgetting (or ignoring) God as God, pervades the human story, and the story of the Scriptures.

Lastly, relationality expresses itself in the form of community. Just as the Trinitarian God himself exists in community, all of creation exists in community.⁴⁷ Human beings exist in I-and-Thou relationships where there is a clear boundary between individuals and, yet, simultaneously in mutually dependent relationships as well. This is the basis of community in God's original design: individuality and mutual dependency. The community does not exist without individuals, and the individual is never swallowed up into the community.⁴⁸ According to John Paul, the human being bears the image of God through his or her individuality as a human person, but also through the community of persons.⁴⁹ For Bonhoeffer, the community between the husband and wife found in the Garden of Eden is the primal community of love that is given by God to glorify and worship him as the Creator—it is the primal, original community of the church.⁵⁰ The primal community is collectively humanity-in-Adam. In the Fall, the primal community is shattered and broken. The relationship expressed in proper boundaries, mutual dependency, and loving community is transformed into the violent objectification of one another, the selfish possession of one another, and manipulative abuse of one another.

In Christ, the fallen humanity-in-Adam is put to death on the cross and resurrected to become humanity-in-Christ (Ro. 5:12-21). While the former continues to live and to exist under the dominion of sin, the latter has been redeemed by Christ. The church-community is the eschatological community divinely established by Jesus Christ and his salvific actions in history. Though this community continues to exist in the fallen world, the person and work of the Holy Spirit in this community allows it to witness to the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God through the preaching of the Word of God, administration

⁴⁷ Note that this does need not imply any non-traditional doctrine of the Trinity, such as forms of social trinitarianism that have given birth to obviously heterodox ideas like the "eternal subordination of the Son".

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 34-57.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 9.3.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 100.

of the ordinances, and living as community on earth. Maritain describes the eschaton as the true telos of the human person:

The beatific vision is therefore the supremely personal act by which the soul, transcending absolutely every sort of created common good, enters into the very bliss of God and draws its life from the uncreated Good, the divine essence itself, the uncreated common God of the three Divine Persons.⁵¹

Agency: Freedom, Creativity, Responsibility

As well as being essentially personal and relational, the human person is also gifted with agency. Agency brings together the concepts of freedom, creativity, and responsibility, all of which are inseparable and indispensable to human existence. Oliver O'Donovan offers a helpful starting point in his discussion of authority:

Authority is the objective correlate of freedom. It is what we encounter in the world which makes it meaningful for us to act. An authority, we may say, is something which, by virtue of its kind, constitutes an immediate and sufficient ground for acting.⁵²

God is *the* authoritative agent with freedom. This divine freedom is expressed in his creativity and responsibility. God is free and powerful (i.e., competent) to achieve his purposes of creating out of the overflow of his love and acting responsibly to sustain his creation. Humans, made in his image, have been endowed with the gift of agency. That is, they have been granted freedom to create and to be responsible within the boundaries of operating in the ways of God (this is a key way in which we participate in his rule over creation). Freedom, notes Helmut Thielicke, is “an essential mark of human existence.”⁵³ However, the true concept of freedom can only be properly understood with God’s revelation. Charles Taylor laments that “the modern notion of freedom which develops in the 17th century, portrays this as the independence of the subject, his determining of his own purposes without interference from external

⁵¹ Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 21.

⁵² Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, ed. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 122.

⁵³ Helmut Thielicke, *Being Human, Becoming Human*, (Toronto, ON: Doubleday), 16.

authority.”⁵⁴ This form of freedom is not biblical freedom. Freedom in God’s economy is always, paradoxically, a creative action constrained by love for the ultimate good.

Agency, as an essential aspect of human beings, can be expressed as freedom to create within the constraint of responsibility. The human being is the “regent of God” on earth. Middleton writes, “[The] *imago Dei* designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the earth’s resources and creatures.”⁵⁵ This powerful gift of freedom is meant to flow forth in creative love, reflecting the image of the Creator. Zizioulas writes,

Personhood is creativity. This applies to the human person and is a consequence of the understanding of freedom as love and love as freedom. Freedom is not *from* but *for* someone or something other than ourselves. This makes the person *ec-static*, that is, going outside and beyond the boundaries of the ‘self’. But this *ecstatic* is not to be understood as a movement towards the unknown and the infinite; it is a movement of *affirmation of the other*. The drive of personhood towards the affirmation of the other is so strong that it is not limited to the ‘other’ that already exists, but wants to affirm an ‘other’ which is the totally free grace of the person. Just as God created the world totally as free grace, so the person wants to create its own ‘other’.⁵⁶

The agency of human beings is mediated through their embodiment. It is a delegated authority to be exercised within the created realm (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). Human freedom, expressed in embodiment, is limited temporarily and spatially by the mortal life. Human beings are to make wise use of their time (Eph. 5:15) knowing that every action will be judged (Ec. 12:14) and we will be held responsible for what we do with our bodies (2 Cor. 5:10). In this we are called to commit ourselves to the work God has given us of governing, stewarding, and being fruitful in Christ, knowing that “freedom and commitment are not opposed to one another; they demand one another.”⁵⁷ In this, also, the body is itself part of our responsibility: “the Creator has assigned the body to man as a task, the body in its masculinity and

⁵⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 82.

⁵⁵ Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 27.

⁵⁶ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 10.

⁵⁷ Thielicke, *Being Human, Becoming Human*, 32.

femininity, and that in masculinity and femininity he assigned to him in some ways his own humanity as a task, that is, the dignity of the person and also the transparent sign of interpersonal 'communion' in which man realizes himself through the authentic gift of self."⁵⁸

Agency, properly understood, is always relational. Authorization comes from the persons of the Trinity, and it is for the exercise of goodness towards God, one another, and creation. Sin twists our understanding of agency, and each of its components, away from relationality and towards ourselves. As we have noted above, any attempt to understand freedom in isolation results in *cor corvum in se*, the radical and deadly twisting inward upon oneself. The modern concept of freedom is a particularly fine example of this twisting as it has, embedded within it, that freedom means the authority to create one's self but begs the question of where the authorization for such creation lies.⁵⁹ There is a fundamental denial of responsibility to anyone other than oneself built into this concept of freedom. Further, sin twists our agency away from expression in creative love for other persons and towards treating others as objects for manipulation and control. We witness this even at the level of how we treat our own bodies as objects rather than as one part of a whole person.⁶⁰ The result of sin twisting agency is that actions tend towards the meaningless, power tends towards abuse, and creativity becomes fruitless, all as we act *against* God instead of *with* Him. The answer to the twisting of sin is communion with and commitment to Christ. Human beings only come to their selves in coming to God and are only penultimately free in an ultimate commitment.⁶¹ We seek to say, with Paul, that it is Christ who lives in us (Ga. 2:20).

This section has explored the three indelible aspects of the essence and composition of human beings: personhood, relationality, and agency. Personhood is a gift and a task that is expressed through relationality and agency. Relationality is delineated by boundary, dependency, and community. Agency is

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 59.2.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127-142.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 59.3.

⁶¹ Thielicke, *Being Human, Becoming Human*, 218-29.

a combination of freedom, creativity, and responsibility. Each of these is an expression of the interrelationship between the image of God and humanity's essential embodiment. In each we also see sin's distorting effects and Christ's redemptive and restorative work in bringing about a new humanity in himself. Living in light of this reality is fundamentally a matter of Christian ethics, which is our next section.

Ethics

As personal and relational beings, we live in communities and interact constantly with people from all walks of life, including varied social and cultural backgrounds. Inevitably, cultures, traditions, and modern theories all influence who we are and how we act. Given that, as Christians, we are called to be in the world but not of the world (Jn. 15:19; Ro. 12:2). The question this situation provokes is, how we, the followers of Christ, can be separate from the world while living in the world as we give witness to the truth of Jesus. It is necessary, therefore, to turn from the biblical and theological concepts discussed in this paper toward some consideration of our actions in the world. This is the task of ethics.⁶²

In this paper, we have adopted a Christocentric understanding of humanity with Jesus Christ as our origin and destiny. Jesus, the God-man, shows us how to be truly human before God, living faithfully and obediently according to God's will. Putting this theology into action, we ask: what should we be and do in real-life situations in the secular age? What responses align with who God is, who we are as Christians, and God's purposes for the world?

Ethical issues are inherently complicated, especially when there are a wide variety of cultures, socio-political backgrounds, traditions, and personal beliefs that need to be considered. Therefore, ethical deliberations require a broad understanding of our time and a deep appreciation of the issues at hand as well as the people involved. With the subject matter of this paper being theological anthropology, we will focus on ethics as it relates to the human self. In what follows, we will briefly sketch some ethical

⁶² Stanley Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 28.

challenges of the modern self, describe several ethical principles drawing from the points presented in the previous sections, and provide a framework for decision-making based on Jesus' examples and teachings.

Ethical Challenges of the Modern Self

In his seminal work, *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor delves into a historical analysis to describe the development of the concept of a Modern Self that has three key inclinations: “[I]t prizes autonomy; it gives an important place to self-exploration, in particular of feeling; and its visions of the good life generally involve personal commitment.”⁶³ This means that the identity of the Self is shaped by its subjective experience, desires, and sense of responsibility. The prioritization of the individual’s feelings and personal commitment leads to a morality that is “essentially individual.”⁶⁴ This individualized morality erodes moral consensus, with people becoming doubtful and even resentful of moral guidelines “imposed” on them from the ethical traditions of the Bible (or any other tradition, for that matter). Each of us is adrift in our culture, unmoored from clear external guidance or limitation.

Moreover, many people in the Western world live in a time of extraordinary material wealth, fast-paced technology and medical advancements that falsely increase the sense of self-autonomy. Using abortion as an illustration, Stanley Grenz alludes to the ethical consideration related to the routine use of amniocentesis.⁶⁵ The information available to the parents and the medical community leads to many ethical debates on this issue. We can see similar debates on Medical Assistance in Dying and gender reassignment, or in the advent of so-called Artificial Intelligence in Large Language Models. When people feel that they have the absolute right to determine their own lives and what they want out of life, the idea of a good human life becomes absolutely personal.

⁶³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 305.

⁶⁴ David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (2 vols. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 394.

⁶⁵ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 15, 28.

American psychologist, Barry Schwartz, aptly terms this kind of self-determination a “tyranny of freedom.”⁶⁶ From a psychological perspective, Schwartz demonstrates how self-determination can lead to unrealistic expectations of a “perfect” life that is unattainable. More importantly, the emphasis on individual autonomy and control can undermine one’s deep desire and commitment to the community.⁶⁷ While Schwartz’s concern is psychological and social, he highlights the issue of a freedom that is inward-focused and without any external constraints. This kind of freedom can be experienced as a form of tyranny that is detrimental to the constitution of the self. The excessive belief in unlimited freedom disregards the moral well-being that is essential for maintaining the goodness of others and society.⁶⁸

The ironic corollary to this focus on the self is never ending conflict between diverse individual wills. It is obvious that in any group the will of each individual will, at times, come into conflict with the will of others. If, however, the individual is the arbiter of the good, such conflicts become intractable and eventually un navigable.

Ethical Principles for a Christocentric Vision of Humanity

Against the concept of the self-determined Modern Self, we as Christians understand ourselves as God’s creatures, made of dust and living by God’s breath (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 8). As such, Basil the Great urges us to remember that we are lowly beings who need to live humbly before the Lord, living by God’s desires and not our own.⁶⁹ He goes on to say that humanity cannot look merely to itself for understanding, but needs to rely on the teaching of the Scriptures. Basil writes,

[For] just as our eyes see external things but do not see themselves except where they encounter something smooth and hard [i.e. a mirror]...so also, our mind does not see itself otherwise than, by examining the Scriptures. For the light reflected there becomes the

⁶⁶ Barry Schwartz, “Self-Determination: The Tyranny of Freedom,” *American Psychologist*, 55, no. 1 (2000): 85.

⁶⁷ Schwartz, “Self-Determination,” 86.

⁶⁸ Schwartz, “Self-Determination,” 85-86.

⁶⁹ Basil, “On That Which Is According to the Image,” in *On the Origin of Humanity*, trans. Verna E. F. Harrison, (New York, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 58.

cause of vision for each of us. Since we are without understanding, we do not scrutinize our own structure; we are ignorant of what we are, and why we are.⁷⁰

More than simply teaching us how to understand who we are as human beings, the Scriptures guide us how we should act in the world as faithful people of God.

The clearest biblical examples of how to live faithfully and obediently before God comes from Jesus Christ who came to live an earthly life. He was completely in tune with God the Father, “doing nothing of his own accord, but only what he [saw] the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” (Jn. 5:19) David Kelsey remarks, “Given that normative role of canonical identity descriptions of Jesus in his humanity he serves as the grammatically paradigmatic human being.”⁷¹ In other words, Jesus is not only a good example for us to emulate, like the faithful saints of the tradition, but he is the perfect expression of the essence of what it is to be human. Therefore, the most basic principle of ethics is to strive to imitate Jesus (1 Co. 11:1; Ro. 8:29), “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

As we have noted above in the section on “Origin and Destiny,” it is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to bring us into union with Christ as one body (1 Co. 12:13). In Section Two (“Essence and Composition”), we explored how this body, the church, reflects the relational essence of the Trinity, where individually we are both distinct yet dependent upon one another, transformed into a community living out the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). Moreover, the leaders of the nation of Israel, the prophets in the Old Testament, the apostles, and Jesus himself all received the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers Jesus’ disciples and guides us into all the truth (Jn. 16:13). After Jesus’ ascension, the Spirit empowered the earliest disciples to be Jesus’ witnesses from Jerusalem to the end of earth (Ac. 1:8; 2:4). Therefore, it is essential for us to acknowledge our need for the Spirit to be our helper and our guide for

⁷⁰ Basil, “On That Which Is According to the Image,” 31.

⁷¹ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1008.

ethical living as effective witnesses. Ethical behaviour for the Christian is not conformation to a set of rules, but the natural outworking of life in the Spirit (Gal. 5).

We will now turn our attention to three key principles from Jesus' life and teaching for developing an ethical framework for theological anthropology.

1. Seeking the goodness of all God's creation

When people think about ethics, they think of personal or societal norms of good versus evil or right versus wrong. In the Bible, goodness is first and foremost about God. The psalmist declares, "You are good, and what you do is good" (Ps. 119:68). Out of his own good intention and design, God created all things in heaven and earth and considered them good. Still, God considered the creation very good and established human beings as divine representatives to care for creation (Gen 1:28-31). The implication is that creaturely goodness is expressed in the harmonious co-existence of all of God's creation in God's presence. God has been at work to restore this biblical picture of goodness since the first humans disobeyed God and disrupted the relationships we enjoyed with God and between one another.

God's restorative plan for the goodness of the world involves us, the people of God. The prophet Micah says,

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God (6:8).

Biblical scholar Stephen Dempster explains that God's requirements "contain the most fundamental insights of what it means to be human."⁷² Conforming to God's character of goodness, the people of God are to love mercy, which is to show *hesed* or covenant faithfulness to one another.⁷³ The Lord is delighted

⁷² Stephen G. Dempster, *Micah* (New York, NY: Eerdmans, 2017), 131.

⁷³ While *hesed* is a complex term in Hebrew that does not translate cleanly into English, it carries connotations of deep and abiding love, faithfulness within a covenant framework, and action based on the good character of God.

when God's people are faithful in their relationships with the Divine and each other. He will be pleased to be with us when we seek good, hate evil, and establish justice on earth (Am. 5:14-15).

The practice of goodness is a communal and prophetic practice that Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann describes as prophetic imagination: "Prophetic imagination and ministry are to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there."⁷⁴ As a prophetic community, the people of God make God's goodness visible to the world when we live justly and lovingly with one another.

In Acts 10:38, Peter tells of how Jesus "went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil." Jesus Christ sets a perfect example of kindness and mercy for us. He brings healing to the sick and the disabled. Jesus loves every person he encounters without prejudice and treats the rich, the poor, the sinners, and the distressed with the same love and respect.

We live in a society where people from different backgrounds and beliefs live together. Following Jesus' examples and his teaching, we are to be compassionate as our Father is compassionate, non-judgmental, and forgiving (Lk. 6:36-37). We seek the goodness of all people by recognizing that every person is worthy of our love and respect because all bear the image of God. We also live in a time when injustices and violence are common. As a prophetic community, we project God's vision of harmony and mutual love and respect in our lives together.

As we have noted, our diversity is a necessary means to function together as one body (1 Co. 12). As members of the body of Christ, we seek union with Christ and one another and ask the Spirit of unity to bind us together. In the body of Christ, we encounter members from different ethnicities, social backgrounds, and genders, but we respect these differences and recognize our need for one another, ready to share our joy and suffering with each member.

⁷⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 65.

We depend upon the Spirit to help us live as God's faithful children. In seeking to project God's vision of goodness in our community, Paul teaches us to walk by the Spirit. He warns us that living by the desires of the flesh will only lead to selfishness and conflict. It is when we walk by the Spirit that we can bear the fruit of goodness and live in harmony without provoking and envying each other (Gal. 5:16-26).

2. Following Jesus' commandment of love

Love is central to the Christian faith because God is ontologically love (1 Jn. 4:16). Love is not, therefore, merely an ethical quality or emotional experience. We can love because God first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). God is the primary Lover who loves us to the extent of giving us His Son so that we can be restored to the loving relationship humans enjoyed at the beginning of time and remain in it to eternity (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, human love is a rightful response to God, the primary lover. To love as God loves is to participate in the Divine life and is the ultimate good of human life (see our discussion of human destiny in Section One).

Jesus gave his disciples what he called a "new commandment" during his Last Supper with them: love (Jn. 13:34). While the command to love is not new in biblical history (e.g., Lv. 19:18, Dt. 6:5), what is new is the transformative power of love that Jesus calls forth in the community that will be formed after his death and resurrection. Jesus declares, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." (Jn. 13:34b-35) Jesus states unequivocally that love is the defining characteristic of the Christian community, marking them as his followers.

Yet, the love that Jesus demands of his disciples is not limited to their own community. In his response to the expert in the law who sought to test him, Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate that love is not to be limited towards God and our neighbours (Lk. 10:25-37). Through this parable, Jesus teaches that love should extend to individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those whom society may be prejudiced against. A neighbour can be a stranger and a person in need. In other

examples found in the Gospels, we witness the breadth of people loved by Jesus. From the Canaanite woman to Matthew the tax collector to the washing of Judas' feet, Jesus demonstrates that love knows no bounds. He loves the one who betrays him, the oppressor and the oppressed, all in the same way.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is commonly considered an essential guide for Christian ethics. Stanley Grenz remarks, "The Sermon is an exposition of the deeper implications of the moral laws, and hence a statement of the practical way *agape* [love] is to work itself out in daily conduct here and now."⁷⁵ We may struggle with living out some of the commands in Jesus' Sermon, but Stephen Mott explains that Jesus' commands aim to shape the kind of human society that God desires. For example, in Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mt. 5:44), the emphasis is a love that goes along with mercy and kindness. The requirement to love our neighbour is not limited or modified based on whether the person "deserves" (in our estimation) to be loved or has "earned" our love. Note that Paul's famous definition of love includes no qualifications with respect to the people we are to love, and that love in that passage is the vital guide to all human communion, above even faith and hope (1 Co. 13). By loving our enemies, love transcends justice and requires that we learn to forgive so that reconciliation can happen, and relationships can be restored.⁷⁶

3. Pursuing human flourishing

Against the individualized understanding of flourishing that means the state of optimal functioning and well-being across all aspects of an individual's life,⁷⁷ a Christian understanding of flourishing focuses on God's purposes for humanity and is grounded in an understanding of covenantal relationship with God, neighbour, enemy, and creation. Neil Messer, professor of theological bioethics, explains, "flourishing refers to every aspect of what it means to realize God's good purposes for the kind of creature we are: the

⁷⁵ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 229.

⁷⁶ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44-45.

⁷⁷ This is probably most deeply indebted to various forms of liberal utilitarianism.

fulfillment of our creaturely goals or ends in relationship with God, human relationship and community.”⁷⁸

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals God’s intent for humans to flourish in their relationships with the Divine and all of creation so that we can live in the presence of God and all of God’s creations harmoniously and lovingly.

When it comes to pursuing human flourishing, we don’t have to look far. Jesus, our guide and example, shows us the way. “He lives as one among us not only as one with us or alongside us but as one for us, for our well-being and our flourishing.”⁷⁹ As we discussed earlier, our faith in Christ has set us free to be like him, to live for others, affirming and building them up by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ example of living with others is instructive. Kelsey says, “His interactions are enlivening for others, not violating; generous, not excluding; liberating, not oppressing; respectful of others’ personal identities, not diminishing.”⁸⁰ Growing in likeness to Christ, we can support people in coming into communion with him and the church community, thus overcoming the consequences of their estrangement from God and moving them towards a reconciled relationship with God and fellow humans.⁸¹

Following Jesus’ example of living sacrificially for others in love, we are to seek the well-being of others first. As Paul admonishes us in Philippians 2:3-4, we are not to be selfish and look only to our own interests, “in humility value others above yourselves.” Concretely, Kelsey draws from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to indicate that living for others involves practices of mercy and peacemaking, doing so with purity in heart.⁸² Therefore, as we strive to live for others, we must learn to “respect creaturely particularity and

⁷⁸ Neil G. Messer, “Human Flourishing: A Christian Theological Perspective,” in *Measuring Well Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities*, eds. Matthew T. Lee, Laura D. Kubzansky, and Tyler J. VanderWeele (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2021), 292.

⁷⁹ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 645.

⁸⁰ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 645.

⁸¹ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 719.

⁸² Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 803-4.

finitude of both oneself and the ones being loved” and acknowledge that we respond to God differently.⁸³

In humility, we submit to the Holy Spirit to work in us and others, leading us to love without advancing our agenda and reconciling us to God and one another.

Living for others also means that we cannot ignore injustices. We must not accept, “much less approve of, the injustice and oppression that are generated by unequal access to social, political, economic, and cultural power.”⁸⁴ Christian actions against injustices vary according to the situation, but we always maintain a non-violent stance as we recognize that, ultimately, our struggles are against evil powers and not humans.⁸⁵ Practical examples of the work of justice include ministry to the victims of injustice, participation in remedying and eliminating the causes of that injustice, praying and speaking against it, and advocating for justice to be restored.

To become the people that God intends for us to be, we need to be continually shaped in our encounters with God and one another in and through relationships. The church community, the body of Christ, is where each person learns to give oneself to the other, as God has given Christ to be with and for us. In this community, every member is dependent on God and interdependent of each other (1 Co. 12-14). Through giving and receiving others, we learn to be the community in Christ, moving closer to God’s intent for our flourishing individually and corporately.

Ethical Framework

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks about food sacrificed to idols. He teaches them to consider the effects of their decisions on those with weaker faith. The example of Paul indicates that ethical considerations must aim to build each other up instead of causing people to stumble. Applying this principle to our contemporary world, where ethical issues are inherently complex, we need to assess the

⁸³ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 721.

⁸⁴ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 878.

⁸⁵ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 213.

situations deeply and broadly to examine the possible effects of our actions. As such, Stanley Grenz proposes a threefold framework: attuning, analyzing, and applying.⁸⁶ In what follows, we will test this framework with Jesus' dealing with the adulterous woman in John 8:3-11. and consider the application to our own contexts.

1. Attuning

According to Grenz, attuning means taking the time to learn "the depth of the ethical challenges."⁸⁷ It involves listening to the people involved and the world (e.g., traditions, cultures, and laws) to gain an understanding of the varied dimensions of the issue and its impact on human life. Listening also includes listening to God in prayer and through Scripture. We must be attuned to Christ's heart and mind on the issue.

In Jesus' encounter with the adulterous woman, Jesus was teaching the crowd when the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought before him a woman caught in adultery. To their accusation, Jesus initially said nothing, but he bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger (Jn. 8:1-6). We do not know what Jesus was writing, but he listened to the Pharisees' accusation of the woman and the silence of the woman who offered no defense. We imagine many voices from the group would also be discussing the situation and offering their views. The Pharisees brought up stipulations in the Mosaic Law regarding the situation. Therefore, Jesus could well be pondering the Scripture's teaching. Many speculations on what Jesus was writing have been offered over the history of interpretation. Herman Ridderbos suggests that Jesus was engaged in a "cooling-off 'process.'"⁸⁸

According to the teachers of the Law and Pharisees this was a clear-cut case worthy of stoning. Despite their pressure Jesus demonstrated a form of attuning, spending time to discern the woman's

⁸⁶ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 17.

⁸⁷ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 17.

⁸⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 246.

situation, the accuser's viewpoint, the Law's requirements, and the societal views represented by the people around him. Although they attempted to trap Jesus "in order to have a basis for accusing him" Jesus responded patiently and carefully. We too are invited to respond to ethical dilemmas with care and nuance. We can thus take time to understand the various perspectives, and most importantly, the biblical perspective, to properly appreciate the situation, lest an ethical case be described in a black-and-white manner, failing to properly consider both the human situation and purposes of God's restorative justice.⁸⁹

2. Analyzing

According to Grenz, once we understand the depth of the ethical challenge, we turn to analyzing the moral principle at stake. Doing that, as Grenz says,

involves burrowing beneath the periphery of each situation so as to pierce to its core. When we analyze, we raise the question, What moral principle is at stake here? This requires that we differentiate between the genuine ethical problem that demands our attention and what may merely be our own negative emotional reaction to certain aspects of the situation, a reaction that may be culturally determined.⁹⁰

Jesus was fully aware of the human condition and the cultural brokenness allowing the exclusion of the adulterous man while condemning the woman. As the teachers of the Law and Pharisees pressured him for an answer, Jesus stood up and invited them to examine themselves: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he resumed writing on the sand (Jn. 8:7). Ridderbos comments that Jesus was inviting the group to engage with self-reflection and realize the "full and final seriousness of the law."⁹¹ Jesus' silent act offered the group a time and an opportunity for repentance.⁹²

Similarly, when analyzing a situation, we need to put the perspectives we collected at the stage of attuning together and examine our own hearts and the motivations of the people involved to

⁸⁹ For a similar example of patient attunement, see Gamaliel's response to the new Jesus movement as recounted in Acts 5:34-39.

⁹⁰ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 17.

⁹¹ Ridderbos, *Gospel According to John*, 246.

⁹² Ridderbos, *Gospel According to John*, 246.

understand the situation well. Jesus, by his wisdom, can see people's hearts and respond in an edifying way. For us, discernment is the work of community, wrestling with evidence and personal opinions before God in prayer. We also invite the Spirit to help us understand the Scripture's teaching related to the situation and the cultural-social-political influence on it so that we can fully grasp the situation and discern our actions.

3. Applying

The final step is to apply the knowledge gained in the first two steps and the resources of our faith to the situation at hand.⁹³ This is the point when we apply the principles outlined above to the situation to arrive at actions that bring goodness to it while supporting the flourishing of all involved.

In the example of John 8, after the accusers walked away, thereby admitting their own sinfulness, we see Jesus acquitting the woman of sin while commanding her not to sin again (v. 11). Jesus' forgiveness offers the woman a new life and "establish[es] justice on the foundation of his grace."⁹⁴ Imitating Jesus, our ethical actions apply biblical principles with justice and grace as a means of participation in God's restorative plan for the world. By doing so we contribute to the growth of the whole body as well as the individuals who are involved in the issue. Imitating the early church, we remain committed to extending grace while speaking truth in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

As we've noted, tackling ethical dilemmas is inherently complicated but is a necessary undertaking of the church. Grenz' threefold framework of attuning, analyzing, and applying to modern ethical dilemmas offers a constructive approach for the church to overcome those complications and participate in Jesus' ongoing redemptive work in the world. What is more, this process is consistent with the call to dependence on the indwelling and guiding power of the Holy Spirit for the life of the Church. As Jesus invites us in John 15, we testify to the truth by the Spirit of Truth and, "We demolish arguments and every

⁹³ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 28.

⁹⁴ Ridderbos, *Gospel According to John*, 247.

pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Co. 10:5). Together we discover how to be truly human realizing in actuality Jesus as both our origin and destiny.

As Christians, our ethical decision-making is not based on prevailing cultural moral norms or societal beliefs that change with time. Instead, our understanding of who we are before God and what God wants to do in and to the world orders our lives in every situation. We strive to live out our commitment to be faithful people of God, with the desire to glorify God in both our actions and our lives together.

Jesus’ examples and teachings give us concrete guidance to follow. The Spirit guides us as a discerning community so that we are able to seek God’s will in every situation. In God’s goodness, we understand human life beyond individualistic happiness, comfort, or desires. Christ’s way of life leads to fullness of life and peace that transcends understanding. Following Christ’s examples, we seek to live with and for others, building a fulfilling and flourishing life together as a visible sign of Christ’s coming Kingdom, as we await the final consummation of all things in his return.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to provide a theological point of departure for The Alliance Canada to have Christ-centered and Spirit-empowered conversations with regards to the human person so that we can pursue the Great Commission in a lost and fallen world with proper passion and zeal. Without a robust theology of the human person (i.e., theological anthropology), we become susceptible to either taking on an escapist, otherworldly, protectionist stance against the world or a conforming, assimilating posture that uncritically embraces the world. Either way, the Christian loses its saltiness and is useless for the kingdom of God (Mt. 5:13). It is this Commission’s conviction that Christian holiness and missions are not polemically opposed to nor indistinguishable from one another. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century can navigate the cultural, social, and economic tensions found in issues such as

race, gender, sexuality, justice, equality, technology, and politics. Fundamental to this task is to orient these issues theologically *and* anthropologically. In other words, recognizing that the origin and destiny, the essence and composition, and the ethical actions of the human person must derive solely from God's revelation from without (*ab extra*) in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the first section, we assert that the origin and destiny of the human person can only be properly understood Christologically. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God; it is by him, through him, and for him that all things are created. Being the firstborn over all creation, Christ is before all things and holds them together. Human beings are distinct from the rest of creation in that they bear the image of God. Following the Christological framework, then, to bear the image of God is to be God's viceroy on earth. Genesis is explicitly clear on the "regency" role of human beings: to be rulers who received delegated authority from the Creator to be stewards of creation. Furthermore, to bear the image of God is intrinsically relational, mirroring the trinitarian existence of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This implies the individuality of each person while acknowledging the indispensable need for individuals to exist in communities. The former emphasizes the value and dignity of a person, while the latter focuses on the responsibilities of the collective whole of humanity such as procreation and stewardship. The Fall has marred the human person, essentially distorting both the original concepts of regency and community. However, as witnessed by the Exodus narrative, the enslaved people of God are not forgotten nor abandoned by God. Rather, God liberated them so they will worship him and participate in his redemptive work in the fallen world. Despite God's people repeatedly failing to live up to their covenant promises, God remained faithful. The faithfulness of God displayed in Exodus ultimately finds its fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ being truly God and truly human, fulfils the destiny of humanity: liberated from sin, reconciled to God, and sanctified through and through. This eschatological reality is partially visible in the present through the church, the Body of Christ, marked by diversity and unity, as well as by

fruits of the Holy Spirit. The church waits for the ultimate revelation, where the people of God will be raised to life and seated together with Christ in the heavenly places for eternity.

In the second section, we examined the essence and composition of the human person through the Christological lens. We focused on the categories of personhood, relationality, and agency. Bearing the image of God, a human person is created as a distinct individual, embodying unique personalities, freedom, and creativity. However, individuals do not exist on their own but are created to live in relationship with others (not just other humans but the rest of creation as well). Therefore, to be a human person is both a gift of self and a responsibility for others. The person of Jesus Christ is distinct as the Second Person of the Trinity, yet he exists in the trinitarian community. As a corollary to personhood, relationality is another definitive mark of the essence and composition of a person. God is love. Humans bearing the image of God means relationships are defined by a boundary between I and You, as well as dependency for companionship and sustenance, in the context of community. Finally, the essence and composition of a human person is marked by agency – comprised of freedom, creativity, and responsibility. All these key elements of agency are a reflection of God who is free, who creates, who bears responsibilities for his creation. The gift and responsibility of personhood is marred by sin, resulting in human beings looking inwards instead of to God to define who they are with relationships destroyed by idolatry and selfish, egotistical, and abusive desires. Relationality is distorted, we hide from one another and from God, escaping from responsibility and blaming others. Agency in the fallen world. Restored by Christ's work on the cross. The relationship between the church and Christ reflects the primal state community. The fallen humanity-in-Adam is redeemed by Christ, creating a new humanity-in-Christ. The Holy Spirit working through the church witnesses to the fallen world the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God through Word, sacraments, and community.

In the third section, we explored the implications of a Christocentric anthropology on Christian ethics. Given the intrinsic value, dignity, and responsibility of the human person as God's image bearers,

ethics must account for cultures, traditions, and social contexts. Modern secular ethical concepts revolve around autonomy, self-exploration, and sense of responsibility. Under such framework, ethics is essentially subjective and individualized. Against such a self-determined basis for ethics, the Christian derives ethics from following the way of Jesus Christ. As the Son of God, Jesus lived a perfectly obedient earthly life to God the Father through God the Holy Spirit. God is the Creator and thus also the Revealer of what is good. The first ethical principle of “good” is seeking goodness for all of God’s creation. As the body of Christ, the church witnesses this by pursuing justice, restoration of broken relationships, acting with mercy, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness through the work of the Holy Spirit. The second principle of “good” is to follow Jesus’ command to love one another. Since God is the essence of love, Christian love for God and neighbour is a response to God who is love. To love is to participate in the life of God. This is the heart of the new commandment given by Christ to his disciples. The Christ-community, marked by *agape* love, is shaped by the death and resurrection of Christ, which transcends its own community to love those we prejudice against or do not deserve our love, such as that of our enemies. The third principle of “good” is marked by the pursuit of human flourishing. Christian ethics is a direct affront to individualism because it strives to give witness to the reality of God’s desire for flourishing relationships. Jesus Christ is the ultimate, eschatological reality of human flourishing. For the church, this means to attune to the voices of those who suffer, analyse the context of the suffering in order to identify the root causes, and finally to apply ethical actions for the good and flourishing of others. Christian ethics, therefore, is not an end in itself but rather the means by which the visible sign of the reality of Christ’s kingdom will reach its final consummation at eschaton.