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Christological Anthropology

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Theologians have long maintained that Christology is vital for a properly theological understanding of the human person. Patristic theology maintained an intrinsic link between the humanity revealed in Christ and that which we ought to believe about humanity in general (Beeley 2016), an emphasis that was maintained by many in the medieval and Reformation eras as well (Cortez 2016). However, modern theology has witnessed a notable increase in the number of theologians arguing for more explicitly christological anthropologies (e.g. Rahner, Barth, and Balthasar), raising questions about what distinguishes a christological anthropology from a general theological approach to humanity, what reasons these theologians have for making this move, and what criticisms or challenges a christological anthropology needs to address if it is going to make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of humanity.

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1 Definition

Quite a number of theologians have been identified as offering either 'christological' or 'christocentric' anthropologies, including such diverse figures as Irenaeus (Reeves 2004), Augustine (Studer 1997), Cyril of Alexandria (Tierney 2018), Maximus (Thunberg 1985), Bonaventure (Delio 2001), Julian of Norwich (Cortez 2016), Friedrich Schleiermacher (Mariña 2005), Søren Kierkegaard (Marrs 2015), Hans Urs von Balthasar (Harrison 1999), Karl Barth (Chan 1999), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Price-Linnartz 2016), T. F. Torrance (Kim 2021), and Colin Gunton (Mair 2021). This alone suggests that it will be difficult to offer any simple explanation that will cover all of these diverse ways of relating Christology and anthropology, a task that is complicated by the fact that terms like 'christological' and 'christocentric' are frequently used in such descriptions without any real explanation. This creates the distinct possibility that figures like these actually represent decidedly different ways of relating Christology and anthropology. Yet we can begin to develop more clarity, by distinguishing between three different ways of relating Christology to anthropology.

First, in one sense, all Christian anthropology is christological. Since all orthodox theologians affirm the full humanity of Christ, his centrality for the salvation of human persons, and his status as the true *imago Dei*, Christian anthropology has always affirmed that Christology will be significant in some way for understanding humanity in general. However, when an approach to anthropology is described as 'christological' or 'christocentric', something more than this is typically in view.

Second, many theologians affirm a much more robust connection between Christology and anthropology, maintaining both that Christology has some kind of primacy for understanding human persons and that Christology contributes meaningfully in some sense to our understanding a wide range of issues in theological anthropology. In other words, such anthropologies are more decidedly christological in both *method* and *scope*. Building on his understanding of what it means for humanity to exist in the image of God, for example, Irenaeus proposes a strong connection between Christology and anthropology, maintaining that human persons were fashioned after the image of the archetype, Jesus Christ (*Against Heresies*, see 1907: 5.6.1). This offers a clear starting point for a robustly christological understanding of the human person grounded in the *imago Dei*. Augustine affirmed a similarly christological approach to anthropology. For Augustine, the human creature must be theologically understood, finding its completion and fulfilment in God (*The Confessions*, 1.2.2). Yet, it is precisely Christology that serves as the grounds for understanding intelligible things in their truest sense, human beings included, since Jesus Christ is the very wisdom of God and contains the forms of all created things (*Letter 218*, see 2021: 238; *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, see 1991: 5.1.1). Modern theologians have also emphasized that 'we learn from Jesus what it is to be human' (Watson 1997: 300), and that Jesus is the

'focal point' and 'key' for unlocking the mystery of the human person (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965: part 10). Although there are important theological and methodological differences between the various approaches to christological anthropology (see section 4 below), this approach is united in affirming that our anthropologies should be more extensively grounded in or warranted by Christology than is characteristic of other approaches to Christian anthropology (e.g. Grenz 2001; O'Callaghan 2016; Farris 2020).

Third, other theologians differ further by embedding their christological anthropologies in a more comprehensive commitment to christocentrism in theology as a whole. In other words, such theologians maintain the centrality of Christ for understanding humanity, but they typically ground that conviction in a broader commitment to the idea that Christ is in some way central to *all* of theology. Consider, for example, the approach taken by Karl Barth who famously argued that Jesus Christ stands at the centre of the theological task such that Christology should serve as the starting point and orienting centre of every doctrine. Given this thoroughgoing christocentrism, it comes as no surprise that Barth grounds his entire discussion of the human person in Christology, moving consistently from theological truths about Jesus to conclusions about humanity in general (Barth 1960a). Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar serves as another example of a christocentric anthropology (Chau 2021; Robinson 2011). For Balthasar, the kenotic 'self-surrender' of the Incarnation, as outlined in Phil 2:7, serves as the interpretive key for understanding the divine essence, the Triune relations, the nature of creation, and Being itself (Balthasar 1990: 428; Balthasar 1993: 33–34). Consequently, Balthasar's christological approach to anthropology — in which concepts such as human freedom, finitude, personhood, vocation, and identity all become christologically grounded and determined as creaturely existence is taken up and given wholeness in Christ — is itself founded on the conviction that Christology provides the key for understanding Christian theology as a whole (Balthasar 2009; 1990).

Accordingly, while it remains true that all of Christian theology is christological in some sense, most reserve the descriptors 'christological' or 'christocentric' for anthropologies that have a more robust commitment to the centrality of Christology in both the method and scope of Christian anthropology, and an important distinction exists between theologians who ground their christological anthropologies in a more thoroughgoing christocentrism and those that do not.

2 Biblical warrant

The question of whether or not there is sufficient biblical warrant for christological anthropology as well as the question of which texts and themes are foundational will, in large part, depend upon the kind of christological (or theological) anthropology employed. For example, Barth places a large emphasis on texts that engage the concept of election

(e.g. Eph 1:4) since it is in election that God both includes and ontologically grounds humanity in Christ (Barth 1957). Others, like Augustine with his emphasis on Christ as the wisdom of God and the epistemological key for understanding the intelligible and creaturely realm, focus more on texts that emphasize Christ as the divine logos (cf. 1 Cor 1:24; John 1:1–4). In any case, advocates of christological anthropology can find ample warrant within the canon of scripture for their approach and perspective. For heuristic purposes, we can say that arguments in support of a christological anthropology can be grounded in three kinds of biblical texts: those that focus on Christ as the image of God or archetypal human, those that focus on Christ as the ideal human or way of being human, and those that indicate that Christ is the eschatological *telos* of humanity.

First, there is general agreement throughout the history of Christian theology that the *imago Dei* is a foundational concept for thinking about the human creature. The specific language of the *imago* appears only sparsely in the Old Testament, describing humanity as made 'in the image of God' (cf. Gen 1:26, 5:3, 9:6). Still, divine prohibitions against forming images, warnings about the temptation and allure of idols, and prophetic critiques of idolatry are littered throughout the Old Testament, indicating the importance of the concept (cf. Exod 20:4; Jer 10:1–10). The implication undergirding these prohibitions seems to be that God *already* has fashioned an image in his likeness: the human creature. The New Testament not only affirms humanity's formation in the image (cf. 1 Cor 11:7), but explicitly states that Jesus Christ 'is the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4) and is the 'exact imprint of [God's] nature' (Heb 1:3). Furthermore, while many Old Testament scholars note the parallel between Gen 1:26 and Ps 8:4–8 as it relates to a functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*, Heb 2:5–15 bolsters support for a christological approach to understanding the image by explicitly tying Psalm 8's description of human dominion to Christ's triumph over death (Watson 1997). This leads some to conclude that Christ is the image of God *par excellence* and that he provides the image with its positive content (Watson 1997; Tanner 2009; McFarland 2005). This would, then, provide significant warrant for grounding anthropology in Christology since Christ establishes and elucidates the *imago Dei*, serving as the key to understanding what it means to be made according to that image.

A second way scripture could be said to warrant a christological anthropology can be found in the many places where Christ is depicted as the ethical standard to which humanity is called to conform; a call made all the more important in light of the pervasive influence of human sin (Burridge 2007). In many ways, sin refers not only to individual actions, but the warping of human creatures, their desires, and their communities. As all human beings are thrown into a world of sin, sin's haze obscures our understandings of what it means to be human, both individually and collectively (cf. Rom 1:18–32; Eph 4:17–24). However, in the incarnation, Christ reveals what it means to 'live humanly' and insofar as he does this, he reveals the *telos* of humanity (Bonhoeffer 2008; Wong 2021; Bantum

2010). There are passages in the New Testament that describe the redeemed as being renewed in the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18), call them 'to be renewed […] and to clothe yourself with the new self, created according to the likeness of God' (Eph 4:23–24), and portray them as having been clothed in a new self in Christ (Col 3:10). These texts seem to indicate that Christ's way of life is a pattern and paradigm for a life lived in accordance with God's intentions. Christa McKirland, for example, proposes that Christ's dependence upon the Spirit and divine presence illustrates the fundamental need that is common to all human beings (cf. Luke 4:1–15). Christ shows us that we need God's presence and that it is only in God's presence that we are able to flourish as the kinds of creatures he has created us to be (McKirland 2022). Christ, then, shows humanity as it is supposed to be and models the nature of human flourishing. Further biblical warrant can be found in texts that call the redeemed to a form of *imitatio Christi*, in passages such as Ephesians 4–5 and Phil 2:3–11 where scripture calls its readers to pattern their lives after Christ's humility and his sacrificial loving-kindness. The gospel narratives might also be of particular import here. For instance, Mark Strauss argues that in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus represents both the 'ideal disciple' and 'ideal humanity'; that is, Jesus is the illustration of 'humanity as it was created to be – living in complete trust and dependence on God' (Strauss 2018: 95).

The scriptures provide warrant not only for grounding the ethical shape of an individual human life in Christ, but provides a collective and communal vision of what it means to be human. Some would argue that Genesis 1–2 portrays humanity as intrinsically relational and existing peaceably together, living for and with one another. However, this harmony of relationality was destroyed in the Fall. Christ then reveals what a life that is being-for-others looks like, as he radically gives himself so that others might flourish (cf. Luke 22:24–27; John 15:13). Christology would then be epistemologically fundamental for our understanding of humanity as it ought to be. For example, Christ reveals a radically reoriented family and social structure, one ordered according to his person and work. In a passage like Luke 8:21, Jesus restructures familiar relations around himself, stating 'my mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.' Similarly, Gal 3:25–29, Col 3:11, and Ephesians all depict an overturning of social disorder and division in the light of a new reality grounded in Christ. Paul describes being 'in Christ' as the condition for the possibility of unity across ethnic, social, and relational divisions. These texts and others like them demonstrate how Christ has reoriented the paterfamilias family structure of the Graeco-Roman world and centred it on himself (cf. Matt 10:35–37; Eph 5:22–6:9). The scriptural claim regarding the redeemed's 'citizenship in <u>heaven</u>' (Phil 3:20) and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 could also be viewed as warranting a new kind of sociality that Christ's work grounds and inaugurates; one that is radically different from the way human life would be ordered otherwise (cf. John 18:38; Mark 10:42). In light of these kinds of texts, we can say that scripture depicts Jesus Christ as providing the grounds for realizing a new sociality that enables human beings to live for and on behalf of one

another (Richter 2018; Maston 2018; Wong 2021). This would provide significant warrant for a christological anthropology insofar as Christ both grounds and reveals God's design for human community.

Third, scripture indicates that Christ's resurrected body is both the paragon and eschatological *telos* of the human creature (Maston 2018; Zizioulas 2006). Further evidence of humanity's christological *telos* can be found in passages like 1 John 3:3 which state, 'what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.' While the resurrected life remains something of a mystery (cf. 1 Cor 15:50–51), John indicates that the eschatological body will be transfigured and transformed, remade in the image and after the likeness of Christ. Similarly, other passages in scripture speak explicitly of the eschatological hope of human conformation to Christ's image and bearing his 'glory' in the resurrection (cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:40, 49; 2 Cor 3:18). It is important to remember that a thing's *telos* reveals not only its future but its present orientation (Davison 2019). If the human creature's eschatological destiny is summed up in conformation to Christ's image, Christology would provide central insights into how human creatures were created to function (Crisp 2016). Christ then would serve as the ideal and true human, the final form towards which humanity is destined to conform (Peeler 2018; Wright 2003; Hayes 1997; Soskice 2007). In a similar vein, Erin Heim finds sufficient biblical warrant for a christological anthropology in the biblical-theological concepts of adoption. Heim proposes that certain adoption texts in Paul's corpus, specifically Rom 8:15–23 and Eph 1:5, serve as support for a christocentric approach to anthropology insofar as they demonstrate that humanity's *telos* is adoption and conformation to the firstborn Son in the *familia Dei* (Heim 2018). Some scholars will extend the implications of these passages to argue that the resurrected body of Christ is emblematic of humanity's future resurrection, providing resources for revisioning our understanding of how disability, scars, and disfigurement perdure in the eschatological life. So, on this reading, since Christ's body retains its wounds in his resurrection (cf. John 20:24–27), so too will the bodies of those who are disabled and/or racially stigmatized retain their distinctive markings in their subsequent resurrections (Copeland 2010; Eiesland 1994). If Christ is the eschatological *telos* of humanity and reveals humanity's destiny, this would provide significant support for beginning with Christology when theologically investigating the human creature.

Another biblical argument in favour of christological anthropology can be found in the Adam-Christ typologies of Rom 5:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:42–49 as well as the biblical-theological notion of covenant. Both Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 depict Christ as the 'New Adam', a designation that connects him to the creation accounts in Genesis 1–3. Yet, elsewhere in scripture the Incarnation is described as a plan of God that precedes even the creation of the first Adam (cf. Rev 13:8). While the primary point of emphasis in each of these passages appears to be primarily soteriological, apocalyptic, and eschatological

instead of strictly anthropological (Fee 1987; Thiselton 2000), it leads some argue that these passages and others like them (e.g. Gal 4:4) indicate that 'God was thinking of the humanity of Christ when he formed Adam' (Murphy-O'Connor 1982). If this is the case, then there is biblical support for viewing Christ as archetypal for humanity in general. In other words, while Adam has a kind of chronological priority, even his humanity is fashioned after the humanity Christ will assume in the Incarnation (Cortez 2018b). References to the Adamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants stretch across the canon in texts like Genesis 9, 15, Exodus 19–24, and Luke 22:20 would be of particular import here, as they underscore the centrality of this concept. This emphasis on covenant as a broader biblical-theological theme could be used as support for Barth's notion of Christ as the 'covenant-partner' and 'archetypal man' (Barth 1956: 151; Barth 1960a: 48).

Numerous other biblical passages and texts might be brought to bear here, ranging from soteriological themes like adoption (Heim 2018) to eschatological concepts like *theosis* (Zizioulas 2006). To a large degree, the particular approach to christological anthropology a theologian chooses will determine the kind of evidence and warrant that is pursued. For example, Christ's status as a perennial outsider throughout the gospels might be resourced by some (cf. Matt 2:13–15; 8:20; cf. Elizondo 2000), while others might appeal to the union of deity and humanity in the theanthropic person (cf. John 1:1–3; 1 Tim 2:5; Bantum 2010). In any case, insofar as the scriptures portray Christ as the true human and image of God, the one who shows us how to live humanly, and humanity's eschatological *telos*, there is substantial warrant for viewing Christ as epistemologically and ontologically foundational in our theological study of the human person.

3 The ground and scope of christological anthropology

Christological anthropologies are united in their commitment to approaching theological anthropology through the lens of Christology, which means they affirm that Jesus is epistemologically central for our understanding of humanity. However, they can differ considerably in various ways, most fundamentally with respect to their particular christologies. If someone claims that Christology is central for understanding anthropology, then the specific way in which Christology is understood will have significant bearing on the corresponding anthropology. Consider, for example, someone who affirms a relatively 'low' Christology that places particular emphasis on the humanity of Christ. The corresponding christological anthropology will inevitably end up focusing on Christ's historic existence as the starting point for theological anthropology, likely drawing on the *imitatio* tradition to emphasize that Jesus is the exemplar of human flourishing (e.g. Ritschl 1900). This not only affects the *scope* of christological anthropology, primarily emphasizing the moral and agential aspects of human existence, but it also shapes the way in which Christology provides the *ground* for claiming his epistemological centrality. In

this case, the ground will likely be an appeal to Christ as the one who uniquely exemplifies perfect human living. From the reverse perspective, someone who affirms a very 'high' Christology, maybe one in which Christ is the cosmic centre of the universe and through whom all created things find their true meaning, may well ground their anthropological claims in the eternal Son and his triune relations with the Father and the Spirit (e.g. Zizioulas 1985). In such a case, Christ's cosmic centrality serves as the ground for claiming an anthropological significance that encompasses every sphere of human existence.

This is not to suggest, however, that there is a direct correspondence between so-called 'high' or 'low' christologies and particular ways of approaching anthropology christologically. Schleiermacher, for example, is often associated more with low christologies, though this is contested by some (Hector 2006), and yet the scope of his christological anthropology is quite broad. Schleiermacher contends that 'God consciousness' lies at the heart of being human, and Jesus is uniquely the one in and through whom God consciousness is fully realized and mediated to other human persons (*Christian Faith*, see 2016: 4.3; 62.3). Since God consciousness ought to shape every aspect of human existence, the result is a thoroughly christological approach to understanding humanity. Similarly, one could affirm christological anthropology on the basis of a high Christology and still end up with a christological anthropology of relatively limited scope. Some versions of Spirit Christology might reasonably be located here. Although many operate out of a low Christology, others seek to be fully in line with conciliar affirmations and maintain the full humanity and deity of the incarnate Christ. Nonetheless, these 'high' Spirit Christologies also emphasize the full humanity of Christ in all of his earthly actions, thus maintaining that all of Christ's incarnate actions were performed through his pneumatologically-empowered human nature (Lampe 1977; Haight 1992; Pinnock 2013; see also The Natures, Minds, and Wills of Christ in Christian Philosophy). This creates space for a christological anthropology insofar as Christ is presented as the preeminent example of the human life lived through the empowering work of the Spirit. It can also lend itself to a christological anthropology that remains relatively limited in its focus on the particular actions and activities of Jesus's earthly existence (e.g. Coffey 2011).

The point here is not that certain Christologies inevitably lead to certain forms of christological anthropology, but rather to demonstrate the significance of the particular details of a theologian's Christology for discerning the shape and scope of the corresponding anthropology. These differences not only constitute differences in the christological content that will be used for understanding what it means to be human, but they also affect the way that a theologian will explain the scope and ground for their christological anthropology.

4 Material and/or methodological centrality

Another important difference pertains to what it means to say that Jesus is 'central' to our understanding of humanity. This can be understood with respect to content, method, or both.

4.1 The material centrality of Christology

The very image of Christology standing at the centre of the circle that comprises our knowledge of humanity suggests to many that such language entails that Christology will play a central role in the actual content of a theological anthropology. One could easily envision, then, an approach which affirms that all of the content of a christological anthropology must be derived directly from Christology. That the language of centrality can be heard in this way leads to the worry that christological anthropology inevitably results in a kind of anthropological christomonism in which anthropology is simply reduced to Christology. However, while it might be possible to develop a christological anthropology in this way, it is questionable whether any particular example of christological anthropology can rightly be described as exemplifying this kind of anthropological christomonism. Although the worry is most often associated with Barth's anthropology (Cortez 2007), even a cursory reading of the relevant volumes of the *Dogmatics* shows that he does draw from non-christological sources in reflecting on the human person (e.g. Barth 1960a: 71–130). Instead, the language of centrality itself suggests a difference between that which is central to an anthropology and that which must be understood in relation to that centre. Christological anthropology does not entail that Christology comprises the entire circle of our knowledge of humanity, in which case Christology would simply be central to itself. Instead, it affirms that Christology will have logical and/or theological primacy in shaping, orienting, and assessing that content.

Nonetheless, christological anthropologies will still differ significantly in the extent to which they think that Christology contributes to the actual content of our knowledge of humanity. Some offer rather expansively christological anthropologies in which much of the content is directly produced through christological reflection (e.g. Barth 1960a). On the opposite end of the spectrum are those who contend that Christology plays little or no role in developing the actual content of a theological anthropology (e.g. McFarland 2005). This could be for one of two reasons. First, as will be addressed in the next section, some view the centrality of Christology in an exclusively methodological sense. Consequently, they will not place much emphasis on Christology's material contribution to anthropology. Second, others argue that christological anthropology itself points in the direction of Christology playing a very limited role in developing the content of an anthropology. The true *telos* of humanity is only achieved in the resurrection of Christ, and our limited knowledge about the humanity of Christ suggests that it has been transformed in significant ways. This should lead

towards a kind of anthropological apophaticism in which Christology will play a limited role in shaping the content of anthropology (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa; see Ojell 2007). Most theologians fall between these two extremes. Rather than optimistically developing much of the content of their anthropologies from Christology, or apophatically contending that we can know relatively little about humanity on the basis of Christology, these approaches will instead affirm that Christology can provide at least some portion of the actual content of our understanding of humanity, often allowing for non-christological and non-theological sources to play a fairly robust role in making material contributions as well.

4.2 The methodological centrality of Christology

Although christological anthropologies can differ on the extent to which Christology contributes to the content of our understanding of humanity, most discussions of christological anthropology focus instead on Christology's methodological centrality. He is the 'focal point' and 'key' for unlocking the mystery of the human person (*Gaudium et Spes*, see 1965: part 10). While this will certainly have an impact on the resulting content, the emphasis here is mainly on establishing the proper way in which to approach knowledge of humanity.

Even among those who affirm Christology's methodological centrality, however, there are at least three different ways of understanding how Christology shapes anthropology. For some, affirming that Jesus is the starting point means that theologically adequate discussions of any particular topic should begin with Christology in a rather literal sense. Barth is probably the most famous representative of this position. Throughout *Church Dogmatics III/2: The Doctrine of Creation*, whenever he addresses a new topic in anthropology, he begins with an explicit reflection on the person and work of Jesus (Krötke 2000). This approach often draws support from the conviction that where one starts a theological discussion has decisive implications for the eventual result. Consequently, if Jesus is the key for understanding anthropology, then to begin theological discussions of humanity anywhere else will inevitably result in an 'abstraction' that misses the real truth of humanity (Barth 1960a: 132).

Other theologians affirm instead that Christology's centrality is more logical than material. In other words, they are less troubled by whether theological reflection on the human person begins with explicit reflection on Jesus Christ, focusing instead on the extent to which all anthropological truths are understood christologically. One could argue that this is the approach exemplified by Martin Luther. While his emphasis on justification and faith as the defining characteristics of being human clearly locates Christology at the heart of his anthropology (Theißen 2021), he routinely discusses anthropological issues without 'starting' with Christology in a material sense (e.g. 'The Disputation Concerning Man'). This approach will affirm that Christology ought to make a material difference for how

we understand specific issues in anthropology, but it will focus more on how Christology serves as the theological ground for anthropological claims. The difference between these two approaches might thus be viewed as a disagreement about whether Christology must be central both for the order of knowing and for the order of presentation. Each will affirm Jesus' epistemological centrality, but only the first of these two approaches maintains that Christology should also be central in the sense of shaping the order in which material is presented in theological discussions.

A third approach presents Christology's centrality in a more negative sense. Here the focus is on Christology as the fundamental criterion by which we must assess all anthropological claims. In other words, on this approach the material content of an anthropology is derived from largely or even entirely non-christological sources and Christology's methodological centrality arises from its uniqueness as the one firm criterion against which we can evaluate the anthropological claims and concepts we derive from these other sources. Hence, such a Christology will be 'far better at describing what human being is *not* than what it is' (McFarland 2005: 8).

5 Key criticisms of christological anthropology

Although modern theology has witnessed a notable increase in various kinds of christological anthropology, several important concerns have also been raised about this approach.

5.1 Trinitarian and pneumatological concerns

Among the more common concerns raised against any form of christocentrism in theology is that such an approach inevitably downplays the significance of trinitarian and/or pneumatological concerns. However, it is important to recall here that christological anthropology does not necessarily depend on these more thoroughgoing forms of christocentrism. Consequently, even if one were able to establish that there are trinitarian or pneumatological concerns about christocentrism as an approach to theology as a whole, this would not necessarily comprise a legitimate objection to christological anthropology as a whole.

Additionally, while christological anthropologies as a whole present Christology as the necessary starting point for anthropology, most make a point of emphasizing that this christological starting point immediately directs attention to the vital significance of the Father and the Spirit in any adequately theological understanding of humanity (e.g. Cortez 2016). Many thus argue that it is impossible to understand the humanity revealed in Christ without recognizing his continual dependence upon the Father and the empowering work of the Spirit (e.g. Habets 2010; McKirland 2021). Consequently, the christological focus of such an anthropology stems from the idea that the incarnate Son is the one in whom true

humanity is revealed and not from any sense that the Trinity and/or the Holy Spirit are less significant for understanding human existence.

5.2 Biblical criticisms

The first set of concerns deals with whether a christocentric approach to anthropology adequately accounts for the way the biblical texts themselves talk about the human person. While we have already seen that advocates of christological anthropology appeal to a broad range of texts in support of their position, others argue that the biblical texts point in a different direction.

G. C. Berkouwer offered a clear form of this objection. Referring specifically to Barth's christological anthropology, Berkouwer notes the apparent oddity of saying that our humanity is grounded in Christ's human nature when Scripture explicitly states that 'Jesus *became like* us' (1962: 95). For Berkouwer, then, the logic of texts like Heb 2:17 and Rom 8:3 suggests that the order of knowing should move from humanity in general to the humanity of Christ. However, Irenaeus offers at least one possible way of affirming the logic of these texts while still maintaining the primacy of Jesus' human nature for understanding humanity as a whole. For Irenaeus, any adequately Christian view of the human person needs to take seriously the fact that Jesus is the true image of God (Col 1:15) and the eternal paradigm for all other images (Rom 8:29) (*Against Heresies*, see 1907: 4.6.6). He thus maintained that even Adam was 'moulded after the image' that we see in Christ (*Against Heresies*, see 1907: 5.6.1). Consequently, we can affirm *both* that Jesus is the eternal paradigm for humanity *and* that he became like us in <u>time</u> by receiving the very same humanity that characterizes all those descended from Adam (*Against Heresies*, see 1907: 3.23.2).

Others argue that theological anthropology should follow the logic implicit in the canonical narrative of humanity, beginning with creation and the history of Israel before turning to that which is revealed in Christ (e.g. Allen 2017; Middleton 2005). Here it is worth recalling the earlier distinction between different ways in which a christological anthropology might claim to be 'starting' with Christology. Those who view Christology more as the logical starting point for theology might well agree that one's presentation can begin elsewhere as long as the formal centrality of Christology is maintained. Those affirming material centrality, on the other hand, will likely be inclined to reject the idea that the systematic presentation of a Christian anthropology needs to be canonically shaped in the way this critique suggests. Although a christological anthropology is not necessarily driven by the same commitments that are involved in discussions about christocentric readings of the Old Testament, one could follow a similar pattern here, contending that it is perfectly appropriate for a distinctively Christian anthropology to begin its anthropological reflections with the pre-eminent revelation of true humanity that we see in Jesus Christ. This should

not cause us to downplay the significance of the robust anthropology of the Old Testament, but it will challenge the necessity of following the canonical order when discussing anthropology.

A third critique flows likewise from canonical concerns, but here the focus lies with differentiating the various strands of the biblical material. David Kelsey argues that we need to recognize three distinct forms of canonical narratives – those dealing with creation, redemption, and consummation – each of which is driven by a distinct kind of logic (Kelsey 2009). This problem emerges when we fail to recognize these distinct narratives, instead imposing the logic of one strand onto another, which is precisely the mistake Kelsey thinks at least some forms of christological anthropology have made. He is particularly critical of those that focus on consummation, allowing the eschatological vision of Christ's consummated humanity to subsume the distinct voice of the creation narratives in our understanding of humanity (e.g. Grenz 2001). This differs from the prior critique in that Kelsey's primary concern is not where one 'starts' their anthropological reflections. Indeed, he maintains that the three strands are inseparably interrelated, and he sees elements of all three even in Genesis. His concern is much more about Christology's *formal* centrality. Any attempt at making Christology epistemologically central for anthropology necessarily involves subsuming the creational material into the logic of either or both of the other two narrative strands. As with the prior canonical concern, a christological anthropology could respond simply by surrendering the relevant kind of centrality, here the formal centrality of Christology. Whether such an anthropology would remain christological in the relevant sense would then need to be addressed. A second response would be to reject Kelsey's contention that the canonical material requires maintaining the distinctiveness of the three narrative logics. Indeed, while Kelsey's proposal has gained widespread appreciation for its renewed emphasis on neglected creational material, this aspect of his work has received significant criticism from other scholars (see esp. Ford 2011; Pickstock 2011; Greggs 2012).

5.3 The reductionism worry

A third key criticism is that christological anthropology *reduces* everything to Christology such that other important perspectives are silenced. Here again the concern occasionally involves conflating Christological anthropology with a christocentric approach to theology in general. The concern here is that a christocentric theology entails certain commitments regarding God's absolute transcendence, the corresponding necessity of special revelation for any true knowledge of God, and a commitment to the idea that only the incarnate Christ is the true revelation of God. This not only necessitates a christocentric approach to theology, but it calls into question any attempt to derive theological knowledge from any other source. In contrast, many theologians have argued that since human persons are natural things, they should be accessible to natural reason. Accordingly, Christology

is presented as supplemental to a knowledge of humanity derived elsewhere. In the manualist tradition, for example, Catholic theologians frequently divided their treatments into two parts, the first of which addressed human persons considered on their own as part of creation (*De Deo creante et elevante*) and the second dealing with human persons viewed through the lens of grace (*De gratia*) (O'Callaghan 2016). Such theologians worry that christological anthropologies ultimately reduce theology to Christology (i.e. christomonism) and isolate it from all other sources of knowledge (e.g. the sciences) (Riches 1972).

Once again, regardless of whether christocentric theology in general has these implications, they would not affect all forms of christological anthropology. This is because christological anthropology does not necessarily depend on any particular commitments regarding the necessity of special revelation for knowing God. Consequently, it is entirely possible to affirm at least some forms of natural theology and still maintain the centrality of Christology in anthropology. Balthasar, for example, believed that christocentrism could be partnered with what many identify as 'natural theology' precisely because all of nature is 'graced' and imprinted with the form (*Gestalt*) of Christ. Accordingly, all human beings desire transcendence and integrity, which can be understood and studied theologically (Balthasar 1990: 325). Christological anthropology does not entail any particular view on revelation in general, but only about the specific revelation of what it means to be human. Consequently, even if one could establish that christocentrism in general results in a problematic rejection of natural theology, this would not suffice as an objection to christological anthropology.

Nonetheless, legitimate questions remain here. Even if we focus just on the idea that Jesus reveals true humanity, it seems that this would result in a similar christological restriction, albeit on a more limited scale. Since the claim is that Christology *alone* reveals true humanity, would this not inevitably marginalize the contributions of any other perspectives? This concern was prominent in discussions about whether the Christological emphases in the Catholic Church's publication of *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), following the Second Vatican Council (1965), would undermine the public and apologetic aspects of theology (López 2018; Nebel 2018). However, few (if any) Christological anthropologies entail the claim that Christology is the only legitimate source from which we can derive information about humanity. For example, Christological anthropologies might well draw on evolutionary biology to understand the history of human development, sociology to discern the ways in which communities shape human behaviour, and cognitive neuropsychology to explore the significance of the brain for human experience. Moreover, it is conceivable that Christological anthropologies can be supplemented by other theological approaches to anthropology that accentuate, say, the work of the Spirit and church in shaping human creatures rightly (e.g. Hill 2020; 2021). None of this would violate the basic parameters of even the most rigorous forms

of christological anthropology so long as they maintain the unique primacy of Christology in how that material is integrated into a comprehensively theological understanding of humanity (Barth 1960a).

5.4 The difference problem

A final set of concerns derives primarily from the fact that Jesus differs from other humans in important ways. Three stand out in particular. First, given the hypostatic union, Jesus differs in his divine identity (see <u>Divine Simplicity</u>). He alone is the one in whom 'the whole fulness of deity dwells in bodily form' (Col 2:9). Second, although Jesus is 'like his brothers and sisters in every respect' (Heb 2:17), he is also 'without sin' (Heb 4:15). However we understand the impact of sin on human nature and what it means to say that Jesus was 'sinless', his perfect faithfulness demarcates him from all other humans. These two have dominated discussions about the relationship between Christology and anthropology, and Barth refers to them as the 'irremovable differences between Him and us' (Barth 1960a: 71). Modern theology, though, has focused more attention on the particularities of his human existence – for example, the fact that he was Jewish, male, and was shaped by a particular socio-historical context – which has been a particularly influential concern for theologians examining the significance of Jesus' maleness (e.g. Johnson 1991; Green 1999; Baudzej 2008). These are the things that make him a distinguishable human person, yet they also differentiate him from other humans in such a way that it becomes difficult to imagine how such a historically discrete individual could be paradigmatic for understanding humanity in general.

Christological anthropologies respond to this concern in several ways. First, the christological focus of some anthropologies lies primarily on the eternal Son or Logos; he is the true and perfect image of God (e.g. Zizioulas 1985). Such an approach will be less troubled by the difference problem since the epistemological significance of Jesus' human existence is that it reveals the truth of the triune God, and this is the basis for understanding humanity. However, since theologians like Irenaeus and Barth maintain that the incarnate Christ is the true image of God and the paradigm for humanity, such a response is not available to them. A second approach thus seeks to solve the problem by distinguishing between the particular and the universal aspects of Jesus' human existence, viewing only the universal aspects as normative for understanding humanity in general (e.g. Watson 1997). Barth offered a complex form of this kind of theological abstraction, albeit while arguing that all such moves must be indirect (1960a). In other words, while we cannot move directly from a particular detail of Christ's humanity (e.g. his maleness) to a universal and abstract truth about humanity in general (e.g. all humans are sexual beings), we can identify the anthropological truths revealed in Christ's human existence and extrapolate to things that are true of all other humans (see Cortez 2015). Although some form of abstraction has been the most common way of addressing the difference problem,

there is a legitimate concern that such approaches have not adequately addressed the challenges involved in distinguishing the particular from the universal in Christ. A third way of responding to the difference problem is available to those who view Christology as playing a primarily critical function in anthropology (e.g. McFarland 2005). Since this kind of christological anthropology does not focus on developing material claims about humanity on the basis of Christology, it will be correspondingly less troubled by how Christ's particularities make such a universalizing move difficult.

6 Specific issues in christological anthropology

Although christological anthropologies generally operate from the vision that Christology ought to orient one's understanding of the human person as a whole, certain topics in theological anthropology have received notably more attention.

6.1 The image of God

Theologians have long recognized the importance Paul's almost exclusive focus on Jesus Christ as the true image of God. For many theologians, while the *imago Dei* is something that can be adequately understood apart from Christology, the NT texts clearly portray Jesus as the most perfect instantiation of this anthropological reality (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). This has been particularly prominent among theologians who define the image in terms of humanity's dominion over creation (Clines 1968; Garr 2003; Hall 1986). While these theologians typically ground their definition of the image in the Old Testament, they frequently appeal to Jesus as providing the only proper lens through which to understand how this dominion ought to be expressed (e.g. Hall 1986).

More rigorously christological approaches seek to orient their understanding of the *imago Dei* christologically in some way, most often by seeing in Christ something that transcends or transforms what we know about the image from the OT texts alone. This is particularly the case among theologians who contend that the NT perspective requires us to affirm that Jesus *alone* is the image of God; all other humans are only *imago Dei* creatures insofar as they are images of Christ (i.e. images of the image). Such a view was influential in patristic theology (e.g. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*) and has remained a prominent feature of many modern discussions (e.g. Kelsey 2009; Kilner 2015; Cortez 2018b). Those affirming relational views of the image also frequently ground their arguments in Christology. While some relational views ground their position through an appeal to the divine plurals in Gen 1:26 or the 'male and female' of Gen 1:27, others argue for this view primarily from the new humanity that we see in Christ and his people (e.g. Grenz 2001).

6.2 Personhood and disability

The nature of human personhood has also played a prominent role in discussions about Christology and anthropology. Indeed, as many have pointed out, the term itself derives from the trinitarian and christological debates of the early Church (Williams 2019), clearly suggesting that Christology has played a vital role in the development of this central anthropological concept. More recently, though, some have argued that modern discussions of personhood lost this christological grounding with their emphasis on human persons as unique creatures (substances) with a distinct set of capacities that renders them different from non-human animals (e.g. Zizioulas 1985). According to this argument, a more consistently christological understanding of personhood will privilege relations over substances and capacities, a move that has been particularly influential among Eastern Orthodox theologians (Boingeanu 2006). Although there is an important sense in which this is an explicitly trinitarian argument, these arguments are often developed in such a way that Christology provides the window through which we see that both the triune God and human persons should be understood according to this fundamental relationality.

This christological view of personhood has also been prominent in theological discussions about humanity and disability. Here theologians emphasize that the humanity we see revealed in Christ is one that privileges relationality and interdependence instead of the autonomous and empowered person that has dominated attention in Western thought (e.g. Reinders 2008; Reynolds 2008; Brock 2019). Additionally, although many christological anthropologies have focused on Christ's resurrected body, disability theologians have paid particular attention to the fact that his resurrected body bears the scars of the crucifixion, using this to critique notions of ideal humanity that privilege perfection and power (e.g. Eiesland 1994; Jacober 2017).

6.3 Gender and sexuality

Among the more important and contentious issues addressed in christological anthropology have been those surrounding gender and sexuality. Theologians have historically focused primarily on Christ's maleness as it relates to male-only ordination (e.g. Gaine 2002), his singleness as it informs notions of sexual purity, virginity, and asceticism (Brown 2008), and the significance of his sexed body for affirming the inherent goodness of the sexed body and the created order established in male-female sexuality (Jones 2007). Both of these have also played a role in discussions about gender essentialism. Theologians have often maintained a link between male-only ordination and the idea that there are qualitative and divinely-intended differences not only between male and female bodies but between the characteristics and roles that rightly correspond to masculinity and femininity (Piper and Grudem 2021).

Although these remain prominent in contemporary theology, modern discussions have drawn on Christology in a variety of other ways. As noted above, some contemporary

theologians have paid particular attention to the maleness of Christ (e.g. Johnson 1991; Green 1999; Baudzej 2008). While some have argued that Christ's maleness renders him a problematic norm for understanding humanity in general (e.g. Daly 1973), others have argued that we have resources for affirming both the particular maleness of his sexed body and his normativity for a Christian understanding of humanity (e.g. Ruether 1983; Johnson 1991). This is often done by pointing out ways in which Jesus is both subversive, undermining cultural expectations of masculinity, and inclusive, incorporating all kinds of humans into the new humanity (Green 1999; Baudzej 2008). This latter move has been particularly important for those questioning gender essentialism. If the humanity we see in Jesus actually undermines the idea that we can associate particular roles and qualities with either masculinity or femininity, then a christological anthropology will affirm a more constructivist notion of gender (Schüssler Fiorenza 2015).

Given the importance of sex for modern notions of human flourishing, it is unsurprising that christological arguments have been especially prominent in contemporary discussions about human sexuality. Some have argued for a christological reorientation of sexual activity and even biological sexuality itself. Particularly important here have been Paul's contention that 'there is no longer male and female' (Gal 3:28) alongside Jesus' statement that in the resurrection 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven' (Matt 22:30). Texts like these suggest that however we understand human sexuality in creation, we need to account for the fact that Christ brings about some kind of radical reorientation of human sexuality. Some have argued that this requires us to rethink traditional sexual ethics (e.g. Song 2014), while others have argued that a christological vision of humanity subverts the male/female binary itself (Copeland 2010; Cornwall 2014; DeFranza 2015; Thatcher 2021).

6.4 Race and ethnicity

Contemporary theology has paid special attention to the relationship between Christology and race. Traditionally this has been done primarily through the lens of the gospel. Since the salvation offered by Jesus is one that breaks down barriers between people groups (Eph 2:14) and unites all kinds of human persons into one new body (1 Cor 12:12–31), a diverse unity that climaxes in the resurrected state (Rev 7:9), a christologically informed understanding of humanity is one that ought to celebrate difference while resisting any attempt to turn those differences into things that alienate and divide human persons (e.g. Williams 2010; Piper 2011).

More recently, a number of theologians have argued for an even more direct link between Christology and race (e.g. Cone 1986; Rodríguez 2008). In his landmark *The Christian Imagination*, Willie Jennings located the root of modern racism in a whitewashed, disembodied, and displaced vision of Jesus. According to Jennings, this vision of Jesus

is one perfectly suited to support the diseased imagination of modern anthropology (Jennings 2010). In other words, he contends that christological anthropology is directly responsible for modern racism, albeit a christological anthropology that has been shaped by a diseased understanding of Jesus. Consequently, he argues for a renewed christological anthropology, one that takes seriously the importance of Jesus' embodied, Jewish identity grounded in a particular place and time.

Other theologians have focused instead on the ways in which Jesus embodies *liminality* or life lived in 'the between' (e.g. Lee 2010) This has been particularly important for Latinx theologians, who often maintain that Jesus' humanity exemplifies *mestizaje*, an existence shaped by the combination of ethnic and cultural identities (e.g. Bañuelas 2004; Medina 2009). As a Galilean, Jesus lived at the intersection of Jewish, Greek, and Roman identities, thus revealing that true humanity transcends notions of racial or cultural 'purity' (Elizondo 2000). Brian Bantum similarly argues that Jesus reveals a *mulatto* humanity, but he does so on the basis of the hypostatic union itself (Bantum 2010). The union of deity and humanity in a single person is a fundamental expression of liminal identity, one that validates the fundamental significance of all other 'mixed' forms of human existence.

6.5 The body

Christology has long played a key role in affirming the goodness and importance of the body for understanding humanity. Theologians have consistently appealed to the incarnation and Christ's resurrected body in their arguments against any attempt to devalue the embodied nature of human existence. Nonetheless, modern theology has witnessed increased interest in the theology of the body, often developed in response to a perceived neglect of the body in Western thought, and these theologies make frequent appeal to Christology in developing their understanding of the human body (e.g. Nelson 1992; Prokes 1996; Griffiths 2018; Allison 2021). These theologians not only affirm the importance of the body in general terms, but they typically appeal to Christology as a way of maintaining the intrinsic goodness of everyday human life, leading to increased reflection on the theological importance of things like eating, playing, working, and having sex. Additionally, since the resurrected body renders it fundamentally problematic to think that material creation is a temporary condition that needs to be overcome in salvation, these theologians often argue that the very conditions of embodiment (finitude, spatiality, temporality, etc.) must themselves be viewed as fundamental to human existence (Moltmann-Wendel 1995; Bartholomew 2011). Viewing the body as gift rather than obstacle, they thus view the body as intrinsic to revelation, spirituality, relationality, and vocation (e.g. Johnson 2015).

Christology has also influenced discussions about the transhumanist vision of the body as something that can and should be reshaped or even replaced technologically (see Theology and Technology; Johnson 2014; Cole-Turner 2011). For many theologians, this transhumanist vision must be explicitly rejected on christological grounds (e.g. Shatzer 2019). Any christologically adequate understanding of humanity must be able to affirm that the body is intrinsically good (*contra* Gnosticism) and that true human flourishing is a gift from God that cannot be achieved through human effort (*contra* Pelagianism). Yet other theologians have argued that since development and evolution are intrinsic to God's purposes for humanity, it is possible to incorporate transhumanism into a broader vision of God moving his people toward their ultimate *telos* (e.g. Chardin 1959; Tipler 1994; Redding 2019). Finally, some have argued for more of a *via media*, contending that the transhumanist vision resonates with at least certain aspects of the redeemed humanity we see in Christ, while still expressing significant reservations about the transhumanist project as a whole (Mosser 2018; Peters 2019).

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