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The Doctrine of Humankind



WHO DOES GOD SAY I AM?: Theological Anthropology for Doctrinal Disciple-Making

Rhyne R. Putman*

“Who am I?” When strung together in this sequence, these three simple, monosyllabic words form one of the most perplexing questions known to man, a question that each of us must wrestle with at some point or another in our lifetimes. All of us struggle with what it means to be a human, who or what defines us, and how we relate to others in this world. Crises like global pandemics, racial tensions, and heated political rivalries bring these weighty philosophical questions down to earth and remind us that the human struggle for self-definition colors everything we do.

Disciples of Jesus are always in need of a robust theological anthropology that will help them see themselves and their neighbors through the lens of God’s Word. This was true in the era in which chattel slavery was a regular part of American life; it was true in the Jim Crow South; and it is true in a time when thousands of unborn children are terminated daily in the name of “convenience.” The critical study of the Christian doctrine of humanity is crucial for the life and ministry of the church. After all, the study of Christian theology is more than an academic exercise intended to maintain universities, seminaries, and divinity schools. Theologians who live under the lordship of Jesus Christ are ultimately concerned with building God’s kingdom by fulfilling the Great Commission. This conviction influences the way I define systematic theology as a critical academic discipline and doctrine as the biblical teaching of the local church:

systematic theology is critical and organized reflection
on God’s self-revelation for the purposes of growing in

*Rhyne R. Putman is associate vice president of academic affairs and director of worldview formation at Williams Baptist University.

Christ and making disciples.

and

Christian doctrines are faithful and true teachings derived from Scripture and used to grow God's people in knowledge, spiritual maturity, and obedience¹

Done well, the academic study of Christian theology always serves discipleship ministries in the local church, even if indirectly. Christian doctrine in the local church is about forming the whole disciple, "teaching them to observe everything" Jesus has commanded us (Matt. 28:20a). Doctrine not only provides the *cognitive content* of our beliefs; it also provides *practical* and *affective content* which guides what we should do and how we should feel.

Effective doctrinal teaching can alter every aspect of our worldviews: (1) the grand narrative we tell, (2) the way we come to terms with existential questions about ourselves and our world, (3) our practices, and (4) our feelings.² Theological anthropology plays an important formative role in the self-understanding of the disciple, the development of his practices and ethics, and the shaping of his affections and attitudes toward fellow image bearers. With this understanding of the Christian theological task in mind, I see four primary purposes in the study of theological anthropology. Our doctrine of humanity:

1. rehearses the *grand narrative* of Scripture and helps us as human beings understand our place in it;
2. helps answer our existential questions about our origin, our meaning, and our destiny with theological *truth* derived from Scripture;
3. provides wisdom for how we *practice* our faith or live in the world as image-bearers, especially our ethics; and

¹Rhyne R. Putman, *The Method of Christian Theology: A Basic Introduction* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 44.

²The four worldview elements I use in my *Method of Christian Theology* build on the respective projects of N. T. Wright and James K. A. Smith. The categories of story, ultimate questions, and praxis can be found in Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 122–26. Smith highlights the affective dimension of worldviews in his *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009) and *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

4. stirs our *affections*, forming in us a deeper love for God and other image-bearers.

Disciples of Jesus do not look to themselves, the culture, or the academy for their true identity. Our ultimate identity does not come from our politics, our sexual preferences and behaviors, our nationality, or the color of our skin. Instead, we are defined by who God created us to be and what God in Christ has done to bring us back to himself. These four worldview elements relate to one another symbiotically: our stories shape the way we understand existential truths, which in turn shape our affections and practices. But these worldview elements do not relate to one another in a singular direction; our affections and practices can give rise to our beliefs about reality just as much as our beliefs about reality can give rise to our practices and affections.

I. HUMANITY IN THE GRAND NARRATIVE: THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL TASK

Every worldview has a grand narrative that forms the beliefs, practices, and affections of its adherents. Every grand narrative, also known as a “metanarrative” or “controlling story,” addresses questions about human origins or human destiny. For example, in the atheistic metanarrative often ironically called “secular humanism,” human beings are merely highly evolved animals who emerged from the long and chaotic process of natural evolution. In the secular story, humans are not special in the universe. They exist for a moment and without objective meaning. Humanity will eventually be extinct, regardless of whether they bring about their own destruction or whether it happens by natural means outside of their control. Other worldviews present alternate accounts of human existence; in many Eastern religions, human beings are one-and-the-same with creation around them (i.e., pantheistic monism) and stuck in an endless cycle of death and rebirth (i.e., reincarnation).

As N. T. Wright has observed, “human writing is... *the telling of stories which bring worldviews into articulation.*”³ Christians under biblical authority look to the Bible to provide the framework for their understanding of the grand narrative and humanity’s place in it. Organizing the theological content of the Bible along the contours

³Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 65.

of the canonical narrative is one of the key tasks of biblical theology as evangelical theologians have practiced it. This storying task of biblical theology is a necessary first step for framing the doctrines of Scripture because it keeps doctrines like our doctrine of humanity from being reduced to abstract propositions disconnected from Scripture or human history.

The overarching story revealed in Scripture is ultimately God's story, but those who are made in his image are more than minor players in this divine drama. Human beings play a pivotal role in every "act" of the unfolding story: the creation and the fall of humanity (act 1), the election and mission of Israel (act 2), the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ (act 3), the church age (act 4), and the future consummation of God's kingdom in the renewal of creation (act 5). In act 1, God created human beings in his image, but misusing their God-given freedom, these image bearers rebelled against the Creator and brought all creation under a curse. In act 2, God chose and made covenants with the people of Israel, who would act as his representatives in the world. In act 3, God took on true humanity in order to rescue humanity from sin and judgment. In act 4, the act of the story in which we presently find ourselves, God created a new "chosen race" of humanity in the church who acts on his behalf in the world, carrying out the ministry of reconciliation. In the fifth and final act, God will renew and restore humanity to his original design for them, forever bringing them out of their sin and misery and into his glorious presence.⁴

1. *The creation and fall of humanity in act 1—mankind's beginning.* The account of creation in Genesis ends with the creation of human beings (Gen 1:1–2:3; 2:4–25). The more detailed account of the creation of man in Genesis 2:4–25 describes the Lord God as the giver of human life, breathing "the breath of life into his nostrils" (2:7). Humans are created on the final day in the six-day sequence, but as Robert Letham observes, their creation is distinct from the creation of the other land animals on the sixth day because it is the only one described in the narrative with divine self-deliberation: "*Let us make man* in our image" (Gen 1:26). For Letham, "this section

⁴I here follow the five-act structure of the divine drama presented in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 2–3.

stands out in bold relief, highlighted as a distinct element, a pointer to the significance of the whole account.⁵ The choice of the triune God to create human beings in the image of God set them apart from the rest of creation. These image bearers were created male and female (Gen 1:27) to complement one another, because “it is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18).

God assigned human beings dominion over creation. They were called to “fill the earth” and “subdue it,” to “the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth” (Gen 1:28). As the psalmist observes, this dominion over creation means human beings are made a little less than God or a little lower than God:

When I observe your heavens,
 the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars,
 which you set in place,
 what is a human being that you remember him,
 a son of man that you look after him?
 You made him little less than God
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
 You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
 you put everything under his feet (Ps 8:3–6).

The God-given task of human beings to rule the earth is not itself the image of God in the narrative but a clear consequence of being an image-bearer. Being qualitatively different from the rest of the created order, human beings were given stewardship over it.

Yet the beautiful story God was writing in act 1 took a tragic turn when the man and woman rebelled against God. Deceived by the serpent, the man and the woman ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent told a half-truth when he said, “God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4). Adam and Eve have, in a sense, become like God in their knowledge of evil and suffering. Previously they were in blissful ignorance, but now, ashamed of their nakedness, they were painfully aware of the

⁵Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 319.

difference between good and evil. This turn of events introduces humanity to the world they will know until the fifth act of the grand narrative: a world with shame, toil, suffering, alienation, and death.

2. *Chosen humanity in act 2—the election and mission of Israel.* Though God expresses remorse and sorrow for human wickedness (Gen 6:5–7), he sees glimmers of hope for the human experiment in persons like Noah who have found favor with him (Gen 6:8). God “resets” the world by destroying it with the flood and then makes a covenant with Noah, promising never to destroy every living creature again in this manner (Gen 9:12–17). But when the descendants of Noah attempt to make a name for themselves at Babel (Gen 11:4), the Lord God confuses their language and scatters them throughout the earth (Gen 11:7–9).

God initiates a new stage in the drama when he calls Abram, a descendant of Noah’s son Shem (Gen 11:10–32), to be the father of a new nation through whom he will bless all the peoples of the world (Gen 12:1–3; 15:4–6). After the descendants of Abraham are enslaved in Egypt for four centuries, God dramatically rescues them from bondage and renews (or establishes) his covenant with them in the Law. On Sinai, the Lord gives Moses this instruction:

This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.” These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites (Exod 19:4–6).

Out of faithfulness to the promise he made to Abraham, the Lord God chose this tribe, though small in number, to be a “holy people . . . his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6).

Israel received “the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. . . . and from them, by physical descent, came the Christ, who is God over all” (Rom

9:4–5). Israel had a God-given mission to live as a holy and set apart people unto the Lord so that they could make the name he revealed to them known. Yet as most of the OT bears witness, act 2 is a story with epic highs and catastrophic lows. The people of Israel often vacillated between faithfulness to the Lord and waywardness and disobedience. Still, God remained ever faithful to his people, knowing full well that this small population of the human race would be the means by which he could rescue all humanity.

3. *The model of true humanity in act 3—the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ.* The third act—the incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ—is the climax of the grand narrative. In this act, the Word of God assumes a true human nature in order to redeem humanity from sin. Christ, who himself is the perfect “image of God” (2 Cor 4:4), makes the character of God known (John 1:14, 16–18; Col 1:15; Heb 1:2), but he also reveals God’s purpose for true humanity. The incarnate Son grew mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially (Luke 2:52). He felt physical hunger and thirst (Matt 4:2; John 19:28). He expressed genuine human emotions like frustration (Mark 3:5), distress (Luke 12:50), and compassion (Mark 10:21). He was tempted like us but never succumbed to sin (Heb 4:15). Yet in everything, Jesus modeled perfect service to God and to others (Phil 2:7).

The question is sometimes asked whether Jesus was truly human if he did not and could not sin. To this challenge, Millard Erickson makes note that Jesus, not us, is the true starting point of any inquiry into the doctrine of humanity:

Instead of asking, “Is Jesus as human as we are?” we might better ask, “Are we as human as Jesus?” For the type of human nature that each of us possesses is not pure human nature. The true humanity created by God has in our case been corrupted and spoiled.... Our humanity is not a standard by which we are to measure his. His humanity, true and unadulterated, is the standard by which we are to be measured.⁶

4. *Spirit-empowered humanity in act 4—the church age.* In disciple-making, we encourage believers to see themselves as part of God’s

⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 657–58.

overarching story in history. This is, for the moment, our part of God's story and mission as the body of Christ: the age of the church. In this still incomplete fourth act, "the church lives between the definitive event of Jesus and the concluding event of the eschaton, poised between memory and hope."⁷ For the doctrine of humanity, the church represents a new way to live as human beings in this world.

The church age is, in some respects, a continuation of the mission given to Israel: a human people called to be set apart for the mission God has given them in making his name known among the nations. The church redeemed by Jesus is different from Israel in three crucial ways. First, the work of Christ has removed ethnic and national distinctions between his people: "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:28–29). Much of the tension in NT churches came from Jews and Gentiles, long separated, learning to live together as reconciled co-heirs in Christ.

Second, human beings can now act in the New Covenant power and ministry of the Holy Spirit experienced by Jesus (Acts 1:8; 2:1–12; cf. Luke 4:1; Acts 10:38; Rom 15:13). Those believers who have been justified by faith in Christ enter into the ongoing work of the Spirit in sanctification, by which the Spirit aids them in conforming to the image and likeness of Christ over time. Our human natures "are being transformed into the same image [of the glory of the Lord] from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Following Pentecost, believers in Christ now have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16–17; Eph 1:13), the teaching ministry of the Spirit (John 14:26), and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4–11).

Most importantly, redeemed humanity plays a pivotal role in God's ongoing redemptive project in the world. The completed work of Christ still needs to be communicated to a lost and dying world. This is the mission Paul assigns to every Christ-follower in 2 Corinthians 5:18–21:

Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of

⁷Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 3.

reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God has reconciled humanity to himself through Christ, but he has also tasked us with "the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). Because he has "committed the message of reconciliation" to us (v. 19), he makes "his appeal through us" (v. 20). Redeemed humanity becomes the chief instrument of God in the world for carrying the message of reconciliation to those who have not yet heard it.

5. *Resurrected and glorified humanity in act 5—the eschaton.* Christian interpreters of the Bible disagree about the sequence of events in the fifth act (i.e., the return of Christ, judgment, tribulation, etc.), but agree the future of humanity is resurrection. The biblical story of resurrection is not the story of immortal souls whose true lives begin with death, but essentially embodied creatures whose future destinies involve the re-creation and redemption of our bodies. Our resurrection coincides with the new creation in which God makes all things new (Isa 43:18–19; 65:17; Rev 21:5). With all of creation, "we also groan" about our present, broken state, "eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). We will not be rescued from our bodies (as many Greco-Roman philosophers hoped). Instead, our present, lowly physical bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's glorious, spiritual resurrection body: Christ himself "will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body" (Phil 3:21; cf. 1 Cor 15:42–44; 2 Cor 5:4–5).

Just as our bodies will be perfected and glorified, so too will the intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our humanity be made complete by Christ. In our future glorification, all our knowledge will be freed from sinful thoughts and creaturely imperfections. While it is unlikely we will have godlike omniscience, the present hinderances to our knowledge will be removed and we will have a more complete knowledge of God and his world (1 Cor 13:12;

2 Cor 4:3–4; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4).⁸ Our glorification is also the culmination of the sanctifying work of the Spirit that began with the Christian life (2 Cor 3:18). We will no longer experience sin (Rev 21:27), nor will we suffer its agonizing consequences (Rev 21:4).

II. HUMANITY IN CHRISTIAN TRUTH: THE SYSTEMATIC-THEOLOGICAL TASK

The systematic-theological task involves critical and organized reflection on the theological content of the Bible. The systematic theologian reflects on the content of the grand story of the Bible and organizes its key themes into a coherent framework of thought which can be employed in the process of Christian discipleship. The systematic formulations of Christian theology articulate how Christians answer the basic worldview question, “Who am I?” Evangelical theologians are in broad agreement on major biblical-theological themes related to the doctrine of humanity but disagree on secondary and tertiary interpretive elements of these themes.

1. *I am a human being purposely and purposefully created by God.* God created humanity for his pleasure (Rev 4:11), his glory (Isa 43:7), and his praise (Isa 43:21). We were created *through Christ* and *for Christ* (Col 1:16). We are special and distinct creatures created by God in his image to accomplish his purposes in the world (Gen 1:27–28). We are loved by God and are valuable to him (Ps 8:1–8; John 3:16–17; Rom 5:8).

Since the advent of Darwinism, some theologians have cast doubt on the existence of a historical Adam, preferring to think of the account of the first pair in Genesis 2–4 as merely figurative or symbolic. Most contemporary evangelical theologians reject this notion, presuming Adam and Eve were literal, historical persons directly created by God without the use of another creature or creative process. This view is easiest to reconcile with biblical genealogies which include Adam as the progenitor of the human race (Gen 5:1–4; 1 Chr 1:1; Luke 3:38). More importantly, Paul clearly believed in a literal Adam and Eve (1 Tim 2:13–14), and this belief was foundational for his doctrines of sin, Christ, and salvation (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45). Yet, even among evangelicals who affirm the special, direct

⁸For a further exploration of this theme, see my book, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 64–65.

creation of Adam there is disagreement about the age of creation and the age of humanity.

2. *I am a human being created in God's image.* Christian theologians universally affirm the biblical description of the image of God in humanity (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1–2; 9:6–7; 1 Cor 11:7–9; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10) but disagree about the nature of the image itself. Theologians often group together views on the nature of the image into one of three major categories: *substantive* views, *relational* views, and *functional* views.⁹

Substantive views have been the predominant interpretation of the image throughout church history, though Christian thinkers have conceived of the substance in several ways. What substantive views have in common is the belief that the image is “some quality or characteristic within the makeup of humanity that is shared with God.”¹⁰ A minority view in this category presents the image as physical or corporeal, related to the upright posture of human beings.¹¹ A more common substantive view is one like that of Irenaeus, who asserted the image is the rational soul of humans,¹² which is directly linked to free will and decision making.¹³ Because human beings are distinguished from other creatures by their ability to reason, this ability is properly associated with the image of God. Thomas Aquinas also held this belief, insisting the “image of God is not found even in the rational creature except in the mind.”¹⁴ For Calvin, “the proper seat of [God’s] image is in the soul.”¹⁵ Theologians in the substantive camp also disagree about whether the image was lost, marred, or unaffected by the fall of humanity.¹⁶

⁹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 460–67.

¹⁰Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 658.

¹¹Some biblical scholars, like Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), suggested that the early Israelites worshiped a corporeal god who had human-like physical features. Mormons have held similar views of God and the image. See James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2007), 454–55.

¹²Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

¹³Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.4.3.

¹⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.93.6.

¹⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeil (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 186 (1.15.3).

¹⁶John F. Kilner offers a masterful biblical and historical treatment of this issue in *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity and the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 134–76; cf. Kilner, “Humanity in God’s Image: Is the Image Really Damaged?” *JETS* 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2010): 601–17. Kilner argues that the biblical teaching does not explicitly teach the marring or damaging of

Neo-orthodox theologians like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth advocated relational views of the image of God, denying the claim of the substantive view that the image is something a human being possesses in his nature. According to this relational view, the image is not something human beings are or possess but something that can be found in the relationships human beings have with one another (the horizontal dimension of the image) and more importantly, the relationship human beings can have with God (the vertical dimension of the image). This view rightly stresses God's design for human beings to be in relationship to one another and, more importantly, in relationship to God, but it fails to account for "what it is about humans that enables them to have this relationship no other creature is able to have."¹⁷ Furthermore, despite Barth's and Brunner's claims to the contrary, it is difficult to grasp how every human being bears the image of God if the image is the human relationship to God yet many people "are living in total indifference to God, or even in hostile rebellion against him."¹⁸

A third view, the functional view, does not emphasize metaphysics like the substantive view or existential relations like the relational view. Instead, advocates of the functional view primarily understand the image in the divine mandate for human beings to have dominion over creation (Gen 1:28; Ps 8:3–6). The NT scholar Michael Bird further develops the functional model in his "royal view" of the image. Bird argues that in the ancient Near Eastern context in which Genesis 1:26–27 was written, kings and pharaohs appointed vice-regents who would bear their image and act as representatives of their rule. For Bird, the image is a "function, a royal vocation for humanity to reflect the reign of God in their stewardship over creation."¹⁹

3. *I am more than but not less than the body God created for me.* God created human beings as embodied creatures with spiritual dimensions. While theologians disagree about the precise nature of the human constitution, the broader Christian tradition has historically

the image as many, like Calvin and Luther, presupposed. He also contends that language of the "damaged" *imago Dei* can have disastrous consequences for Christian ethics and the dehumanization of others.

¹⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 468.

¹⁸Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 468.

¹⁹Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 661.

recognized human beings as complex creatures who are more, but not less, than their bodies. Jesus warned his disciples not to “fear those who kill the body [*sōma*] but are not able to kill the soul [*psychē*]” (Matt 10:28). Paul also distinguishes between body and soul and/or body, soul, and spirit. He closed 1 Thessalonians with this exhortation, which drops hints of his view of the human constitution: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may *your whole spirit* [*holoklēron humōn to pneuma*], [your] *soul* [*hē psychē*], and [your] *body* [*to sōma*] be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). While Paul’s primary purpose here is not to offer a systematic view of the human constitution, he does not give a blessing like this in a vacuum.²⁰

What is the relationship between the body and the soul, or between the brain and the mind? Christian theologians debate the human constitution similar to those of philosophers. Are human beings essentially material beings, non-material beings, or creatures composed of material and non-material elements? Christian *monists*, like their philosophical *materialist* counterparts, deny the existence of a soul or mind distinct from physical bodies. Because monists believe human beings to be essentially physical, they often advocate for a “soul sleep” eschatology in which the human “soul” lies dormant as long as the physical body is dead. Monists have no concept of an “intermediate state” between death and the resurrection. In the future resurrection from the dead, human beings will be restored to everlasting physical life. While monists agree on the substantial unity of human beings, they disagree over what makes us essentially human, whether we are free or causally determined by our brains, and what gives a human being his or her identity over time.²¹

The vast majority of Christian theologians throughout church history have embraced one form of *anthropological dualism* or another.

²⁰See Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 44–55. Schnelle contends Paul’s use of *pneuma* describes a fundamentally new way of being human in Christ. Union to Christ (which Schnelle places at the baptism event) results in human beings receiving a *pneuma* from the Spirit of God that enables them to live in a new spiritual reality in the presence of God.

²¹See Nancy Murphy, “Nonreductive Physicalism,” in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 115–38; Nancy Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kevin Corcoran, “The Constitution View of Human Persons,” in *In Search of the Soul*, 153–176; Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

The NT data in support of this position is manifold. Many of the arguments for Christian dualism are based on eschatological texts in the NT which describe a conscious state for the dead even after disembodiment (Luke 16:19–31; 23:42–43; 2 Cor 5:1–10; Phil 1:21–24; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Pet 3:19–20; Rev 6:9–11). And as John W. Cooper has observed, “an intermediate state presupposes dualism.”²²

Christian dualists have disagreed about whether human beings have one or two non-material dimensions. *Trichotomists* contend human beings consist of three substances: body, soul, and spirit. Trichotomists appeal to passages where these terms are listed together to defend this position (Rom 8:10; 1 Thess 5:23). Notable trichotomists include early figures like Irenaeus and Origen, who argued for a “spirit” unique to Christians. Irenaeus believed the human spirit was lost or corrupted in the fall but restored in salvation.²³ *Dichotomists*, by contrast, argue that soul and spirit are interchangeable terms for the same nonmaterial referent (e.g., Job 7:11; Luke 1:46–47). Dichotomists reject the idea that the fall somehow eliminates or disables the human spirit, finding this concept to be without any biblical basis.²⁴

Some theologians reject the choice between a monism that emphasizes the body and a substance dualism that labels the soul the true human being, arguing for a mediating position that associates true humanity with body *and* soul, not one or the other. Erickson describes his view of the human constitution as a “conditional unity” in which “the normal state of a human is as an embodied unitary being.”²⁵ Death temporarily breaks this conditional unity, but the resurrection will restore it. Michael Horton takes a similar position that he calls *psychosomatic holism*. Distinguishing his position from Platonic dualism, Horton writes, “Platonism sees *embodiment* as a curse, while biblical faith understands *disembodiment* to be a curse.... We are not saved from our bodies, but with them, in the general resurrection of the dead.”²⁶ While there is good reason not

²²See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 104–6.

²³Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

²⁴John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 801.

²⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 491.

²⁶Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 378–79.

to overemphasize the differences in the material and non-material aspects of the human being, it is important for us to remember that embodied creatures like ourselves have a need for relationships with other embodied creatures and an even greater need for God. Human beings alone are capable of relating to God in this way because of their spiritual natures.

4. *I am a human being who is responsible for my moral choices.* Christian theologians disagree about whether human beings can be truly free and be under the determining influence of God's providence. Those who argue that divine determinism and human freedom are compatible call themselves *compatibilists*. Others argue for non-compatibilism or *libertarian freedom*, insisting that human beings may be influenced by God but are ultimately self-determining free creatures. Though theologians have significant disagreements in this area, virtually all Christians agree that God is not the author of sin (Jas 1:14; 1 John 2:16) and that human beings are ultimately responsible for their moral choices.

III. HUMANITY IN CHRISTIAN PRACTICE: THE TASK OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Christian ethics takes its primary directives from special revelation, not philosophical speculation. For this reason, theology and ethics are closely related.²⁷ While we can make a formal distinction between the two disciplines, Christian ethics builds on the foundations of Christian theology. Christian ethics is the application of theological convictions to human practice and behavior. The *indicatives* of a Christian theological anthropology outline the *imperatives* of Christian ethical practice. In other words, our belief that human beings are image bearers is foundational to what we do in the practice of Christian ethics.

1. *All image-bearers have a right to life.* Nowhere does this issue become more controversial in ethics than the issue of human abortion and the so-called "right to choose." The Bible does not directly address abortion, but it does provide the worldview that guides our ethical decisions. Scripture strictly prohibits the murder of humans made in the image of God (Gen 9:5–6; cf. Exod 20:13). Repeatedly

²⁷See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

we are told that it is God who forms us in the womb (Ps 139:13–14; Jer 1:4). Unborn children are capable of feeling and expressing joy (Luke 1:41–44).

2. *All image-bearers have intrinsic value to God and are entitled to basic human dignity.* This dignity means that all persons have value attributed to them by virtue of who they are. As creatures who “think, feel, will, and relate” to one another, human beings are afforded more value than any other creature in the created order.²⁸ Basic human dignity, not age, ethnicity, nationality, legal status, social status, gender, or education, is the foundation for all inalienable human rights.²⁹ Chief among our basic human rights is the freedom of the human being to worship and obey the God who created him. Every other human right flows from this one. On abortion issues, this means the unborn has the right to life. Human slavery and trafficking also goes against this fundamental right of every human being. Economic liberty enables humans to obey God with generosity and a clear conscience.

3. *Image-bearers must express care for other image bearers in word and deed.* Paul charged the Philippians to follow the example of the incarnate Lord and practice selflessness in their interactions with others: “Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (Phil.2:4). This call to selflessness begins with the family. Paul regards a refusal to meet the needs of family members as tantamount to apostasy: “But if anyone does not provide for *his own family, especially for his own household*, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). This call to care for the natural family also extends to the family of God: “Let us work for the good of all, *especially for those who belong to the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). The Bible also repeatedly instructs us to care for those who are incapable of caring for themselves: orphans, widows, and resident aliens (Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17–21; 27:19; Ps 146:9; Isa 1:17, 23; 9:17; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; 1 Tim 5:3; Jas 1:27).

3. *Image-bearers should conform to God’s original design for gender*

²⁸Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 1:172.

²⁹Pablo Gilibert, *Human Dignity and Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

and sexuality. Never has the church needed a clearer definition of what it means for image bearers to be made “male and female” (Gen 1:27). The sexual revolution that redefined traditional gender roles in Western culture eventually eroded into the radical separation of physical sex characteristics from “gender identity.” Many parents under the influence of postmodernity are reluctant to call their child a boy or a girl, insisting that the children can make that decision for themselves. In other cases, these parents have started walking pre-adolescent children through a process of “gender transitioning” with drugs which block natural hormones and surgeries which mutilate and alter the appearance of genitalia.

From the beginning of creation, men and women were designed to complement and correspond to one another. God gave Adam responsibility over the garden and its maintenance (Gen 2:15) and charged him with naming every other living creature (Gen 2:19–20). But seeing no helper (*ezer*) to complement him (2:20b), God created the woman from Adam’s own rib and brought her to him (2:21–22). The man was so pleased with Eve that he broke into song, calling her “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). God created Adam and Eve with physical compatibility, with different sexual organs designed to stimulate one another and be instrumental in human procreation. Human sexuality is a gift from God designed to provide intimacy and trust in marriage, but men and women are more than sex objects or fodder for fantasy and lust.

But in addition to their physical complementarity, these image-bearers served different functions in the created order. Man was created to work the ground (Gen 2:6, 15). The woman was created to help him in this service (Gen 2:20). Paul highlights the way differences between the husband and the wife in marriage bear witness to Christ’s relationship to the church. Though men and women have different, complementary roles in marriage they are equals who are called to Christ-like mutual submission to one another (Eph 5:22–33).

IV. HUMANITY IN CHRISTIAN AFFECTIONS: THE PASTORAL-THEOLOGICAL TASK

Faithful doctrine does more than stimulate our intellects; it also serves the important pastoral-theological task of stirring our hearts

and affections to love God and love neighbor. Josh Moody and Robin Weekes define *affections* as “*the movement of our thoughts, feelings, and will toward a desired object, person, or event. An affection is what inclines us to something. . . . Affections are what move us to action.*”³⁰ Affections, unlike passions, can be trained and directed toward a good and noble end. Our doctrine of humanity ultimately helps us fulfill the second Great Commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39; cf. Lev 19:17–18; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27).

Loving one’s neighbor demands healthy, God-honoring self-love. We must avoid the extremes of pride and self-hatred, both of which are denials of the good work of God in creating, redeeming, and renewing us. A proper affection for self as an image bearer will extend to others—even those who do not deserve our compassion or our care. After all, as we reflect on the grand narrative of Scripture, we recognize that we ourselves are undeserving recipients of the mercy and grace of God. Now we are called to offer mercy and grace to others just as God has forgiven us through Christ (Matt 5:7; 6:12; Luke 6:36; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Jas 2:13; 1 Pet 4:10). Jesus even goes to the extreme position and tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who wish us harm (Matt 5:44). We love our enemies and act as their benefactors, expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:35).

Love for neighbor is universal, meaning we are called to love all image bearers despite the differences in ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background between us. Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), which he offered up in response to the question of a scribe who inquired of Jesus the identity of his neighbor. In the parable, the neighbor was not someone who shared ethnicity or culture with the man who fell into the hands of the robbers but the one who showed mercy to him (Luke 10:36–37). All image bearers are part of the same family and share a common ancestor, Eve, “the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). Yet because of the fallen state of our world, this has often been forgotten or entirely rejected. We must not value any ethnicity, nationality, or skin color over another. The reconciling work of Christ which brought us back to God has also reconciled us to one another.

³⁰Josh Moody and Robin Weekes, *Burning Hearts: Preaching to the Affections* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2014), 14.

God-honoring affection for our neighbor becomes the grounds of obedience to the whole law of God. Paul explains this connection,

Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, **Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet;** and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8–10).

Love or proper affection for neighbor always guards the best interests of others. Love for one's neighbor means refusing to sleep with his wife. We cannot murder a neighbor we love because we are concerned about her health and well-being. Healthy, God-honoring self-love which holds the private good and the good of our neighbors in balance is fundamentally incompatible with theft or dishonest gain. To love our neighbor is to look out for his best interests as a fellow image bearer, to treat him fairly in all matters. When our affections are turned to God and neighbor, we celebrate the grace of God poured out on him in material, financial, and family relationships. We do not envy him or wish God to remove his hand of blessing from him.

These affections do not always come naturally to us, so they must be trained in us like our deeds and thoughts. The work of the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love for neighbor in us (Gal 5:22). We must meditate on God's clear instruction about what it means to be human, what he has done for us in Christ Jesus, and what he demands of us as his people. Contemplation on the activity of God in our lives will manifest itself in love for those who bear his image. To love fellow man is to be like our Creator, who loves us more than any other creature (Matt 10:31; 12:12).

The doctrine of humanity teaches us about the human constitution: the relationship between our physical bodies and our spiritual natures, but theological anthropology must be more than a speculative philosophical exercise about substances and properties, free will and determinism. It must come alive with the bold proclamation that God has made human beings in his image and endowed them with

honor and value. Only through God's Word do we really know how we should think about humanity, how we should behave toward other human beings, and what we should feel toward them. The doctrine of humanity is a vital part of Christian disciple-making, and it can help us approach the complex issues we face in the present moment.

