



Chapter 6

Humanity

Every human being is created in the image of God. In Jesus Christ, God took on the limits of human flesh and culture, and is known through them. We therefore affirm without exception the worth of every human being. We also affirm that God has blessed humankind with the gift of agency: the ability to choose whom or what we will serve within the circumstances of our lives.

Introduction

Community of Christ cherishes the belief that our humanity is an immeasurable gift from God. All of us deeply and thoroughly share this humanity with Jesus Christ. A newborn baby, an annoying neighbor, a terminally ill friend, a maimed veteran, a developmentally challenged child, an athlete, a refugee, your mother, my grandpa, a local farmer, the prime minister, an undocumented worker, a medicine woman, a malnourished child: we are human beings. The Incarnation, as Chapter 3 explained, refers to the mystery of the eternal divine Word or Logos becoming flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. In the Incarnation, then, Christ assumed the common humanity all of us share: North and South; East and West; rich and poor; male, female, and differently gendered; big and small; black, brown, and white; all with varied abilities. The Incarnation once and for all declared our shared humanity to be spiritually precious. Thinking about this affirmation of faith is theologically necessary and ethically essential.

What does it mean to be human? How do we understand our humanity as the source and hope for the “worth of all persons”? What is human nature and what do our scriptures and the Christian tradition say about it? Human beings are biologically connected to and interdependent with all other life forms, but how can we make sense of the many distinctive dimensions of our human nature? What actually makes us unique, as part of God’s creation? What does it mean that Christ was fully human? How can the church’s beliefs about Jesus Christ influence our thought about what it means to be human and our actions for good in a world that is too friendly to inhumanity? This chapter invites us to think about these and other questions.

Biblical Foundations

The scriptures offer rich images and powerful stories about what it means to be human. In the Hebrew Bible the relationship between humanity and God is complex. As creatures, human beings are distinct from the Creator. We are finite; this means we have limits to our knowledge, ability, and lifespan. We can make independent choices with often disastrous consequences: violence and injustice are the all-too-frequent companions of human attitudes and actions. At the same time, biblical writers consistently see human beings as dependent on God for their existence. We depend on God for life and breath, for daily bread, for the impulse to make responsible choices, and for our ability to act freely. Scripture portrays God as the source of every human being’s incalculable worth. Human beings are an integral part of the creation, which God declared “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Creation’s very being depends ultimately on the generosity of God. Thus, human existence is to be treated as a profound, gracious gift.

One source of our belief in our dependence on God is the Book of Genesis. As Chapter 5 above noted, Genesis tells two separate stories about creation, linked together in chapters 1–3. Both stories contribute important concepts to a Christian understanding of humanity. The first creation story is Genesis 1:1–2:4a. This story introduces a central idea of Jewish and Christian teaching about human beings. Humanity is made *in the image of God* (1:26–30). This phrase decisively informs our Christian view of our humanity before God. As human beings, we have a unique place in the world, because we reflect something of what God is like. The text does not explain these characteristics but leaves it to readers to imagine them. Through history, both Jewish and Christian interpretations

of this passage have influenced important ideas, such as the inestimable worth of persons and a belief in human beings' inalienable rights and dignity. Community of Christ is shaped by and upholds this long tradition. In 1829, almost a year before the church's official organization, members were called to "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c). Even though in practice we have often fallen short of our convictions, Community of Christ's faith intends to underscore the beauty, dignity, and value of being human.

Human beings reflect the image of God. The first creation story tells how human beings were created on the sixth day as the next to last act of God's creation. Genesis 1:27 states, "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." God's image *upon* us and *in* us gives us a unique role among all other creatures. This verse is inclusive. Women and men share equally in God's image. By extension, so do all ethnicities, tribes, and nationalities, in their diversity. The heart of the biblical tradition would reject as monstrous the idea that there are individuals or groups who lack, or have less of, God's image. This divine image is the common gift to all, and the church's faith upholds this claim as one of the primary sources of our belief in the dignity of every person. Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as Community of Christ's Enduring Principles, affirm this core conviction.

Additionally, Psalm 8 poetically reinterprets Genesis 1. The poet asks the question, "What are human beings...?" (8:4). This question touches the fact that we human beings are deeply mysterious to ourselves. In Kathryn Tanner's words, "humans imitate God's incomprehensibility by having a nature that is also in a sense unlimited," and characterized by "expansive openness."¹ The Psalmist celebrates the mystery of the dignity and high role God has given human beings in creation: "Yet you have made [humankind] a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet..." (8:5-6). In the Psalmist's lyrical description, the glory and honor God gives humankind are reflections of God's own majesty. There is an unmistakable "godlike" quality to our human nature and calling. The text understands that people are to share in the divine work of reigning in creation. However, we must be careful not to misunderstand what reigning or dominion means in this passage.

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

Neither Psalms 8:5–6 nor Genesis 1:26–28 understands dominion as domination, disregard, or abuse. God reigns, but God’s way of reigning is the example humanity must follow. God does not reign in creation as a tyrant or dictator. Rather, the God of the Hebrew tradition reigns by making space for countless creatures to flourish. The high calling of human beings is to care for creation with God, in *the way God does*. God gives human beings this calling and responsibility. Human beings are not better than the other creatures with whom they share the cosmos, but different from them. Our human dignity is linked to this gift. Humanity’s role within the cosmos is unique: to nurture and fulfill, with God, the purpose for creation, which is its ultimate shalom, or well-being.

The second creation story runs from Genesis 2:4 through the end of chapter 3. It differs significantly from the Genesis 1 story but in its own way also reaffirms the human dependence on God. Genesis 2:7–8, 18–23 portrays God forming the human being out of Earth’s dust. The ancient storyteller here plays with the Hebrew language. The human (*adam*) is formed from the soil (*adamah*). This wordplay depicts an abiding connection between humanity and the earth. Next, God breathes life or spirit into the human’s earthen form. God animates earth with *ruach* to make humans into living beings. Thus, human beings are a unity of flesh and spirit; we are living souls, and indeed the Hebrew word for soul (*nephesh*) means not something “in” a person, but the person in her or his totality. The Hebrew Bible thereby maintains that embodied life is intrinsic to human existence. A person is body and spirit. “Inner” and “outer” are of equal value. Our wholeness as persons includes bodily life. This view is important for contemporary Christian thought, especially about human nature, and has significant implications for ecological ethics.

These Genesis texts remain valuable to a Christian understanding of humanity. But much more needs to be said. Christian theology looks to the person and work of Jesus Christ for clues to the true meaning and fulfillment of humanity’s existence. The Gospels are especially important. Matthew, Mark, and Luke narrate scenes from Jesus’ life and ministry and call readers to follow or imitate him. They highlight his compassion for others and his actions that liberate people from powers that oppress their humanity. These Gospels depict Jesus’ horrific death and his Easter appearances to the disciples. The Gospel of John further offers a deep meditation on the meaning of Jesus’ identity as Son of God. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1, 14). As the flesh and blood revelation of God, Christ in John symbolically is Light, Truth, Bread, Living Water, Vine, Door, and many other metaphors. According to John’s testimony,

Christ is everything human beings need in order to live their lives most fully and fruitfully in relation to God.

Together the four Gospels portray how Jesus Christ personifies the relationship between humanity and God. For the Gospel writers, Jesus bears the full image of our humanity, frequently expressed in their memory of Jesus' own way of referring to himself as the "Son of Man" (e.g., Mark 10:33). One meaning of this identifier in Jesus' context was simply "the human being." In his life and ministry, Jesus Christ humanly embodies God's divine wishes for creation. In his death, he takes upon himself the anguish of human separation from God. In the resurrection, his risen body is the sign that the restoration of creation had begun. Both in the memory of his historic ministry and in his ongoing presence and activity through the Spirit, Jesus remains the image of God's yearning for shalom for the whole creation. This is true with varied accents for the whole New Testament. Jesus' life, ministry, and risen presence are in the church's faith the measure of our hope for the fulfillment of humanity.

Paul's writings offer additional insight about how Christ reveals our true humanity. Two important themes will illustrate this point. The first is where Paul encourages the Philippians to live from Christ's example of humility. Christ emptied himself of his divine advantages to serve humanity. For Paul the picture of Christ pouring out his own status and prerogatives for the sake of humanity teaches that the fullest meaning of our humanity will emerge by following Christ into self-giving for the well-being of others. The church is to be the community that reveals this kind of new humanity. In Paul's view, this new humanity arises from embracing the outlook of Christ, who gave himself for others. Paul writes: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5–8). From the example of Jesus' descent and death for others, Paul upholds for the Philippians that the way to our truest humanity leads through mutual self-surrender. As Jesus himself taught, "those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

The second Pauline theme is where Paul declares that in the death and resurrection of Christ God has acted to abolish all categories of human division. In Christ, we now share one humanity—a new humanity. Paul writes: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer

slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27–28). Paul believes that Christ brings a universal and revolutionary new humanity, freed from constructs like class or ethnicity. Christ transfigures religious and ethnic divisions (Jew or Greek). Christ overcomes political and economic divisions (slave or free). Christ even transforms gender differences (male and female). In another letter, Paul imagines Christ as a kind of second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45–47), a sort of fresh start for the human race. In this way Paul believed Jesus represented the renewal of humanity, as well as revealed a radical new way of being human.

The theme of a new humanity in Christ is central to Paul’s message. And one of Paul’s students, writing after the time of Paul’s death, superbly summed up the great apostle’s teaching on this point. This writer held that Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15), and those who are baptized into Christ “have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Colossians 3:10–11). In Christ, the Image of God, we see what our humanity is about. Christ’s humility and freely chosen self-offering are the measure of being human. By baptism Christ’s crucified and risen life dwells in us, which empowers the church to imitate Christ’s love and share it for the well-being of the whole creation. Vitally important for our own time, in Christ all human divisions are already overcome. And, in Christ, our humanity is revealed to be not ultimately individual, but most fully realized in community. That is why for Paul the church is to be the place where this new, divisionless humanity ought to be visible to the world.

Tradition

Christian teaching through the centuries has continued to wrestle with the mystery of what it means to be human. Theologians regularly lift up Christ as *the* example and fulfillment of human nature. Community of Christ, in alignment with the faith of the historic Christian church, believes Christ to be both fully divine and fully human. In the Incarnation he assumed a complete human nature and in so doing elevated the meaning of human life. But this human nature is distinct from the divine nature. This is because Christian thought also understands human nature in light of the relationship of creature to Creator. Creaturely existence is

marked by finitude. As medieval theologians expressed it, created things, including humans, are “contingent beings.” This means that at one time we might not have existed and one day will cease to be. Eternal being is a property of God, not creatures. Thus, Christian writers have consistently emphasized that human beings are not God or gods, regardless of whatever godlike qualities we may possess. There remains an infinite distinction between being divine and being human. Twentieth-century history confirms that moral calamity follows when human beings disregard that truth and imagine themselves to be gods.

Centuries of Christian thought on the question of human nature is rich and varied. Theologians have often focused on humanity’s unique position within God’s creation. Following the Bible’s affirmation that human beings bear the image of God, many thinkers have sometimes tried to locate that gift in the human capacity to reason, or to exercise free will, or our capacity to be creative. Others have sought humanity’s uniqueness in our ability for complex thought or in our power to love or our desire to understand ourselves and our world. Our ability for imaginative thinking, our yearning to ask about the meaning of our lives, and especially our ability to ask the question of God’s existence indeed point to something distinctive about being human. Who we are is a subject of constant curiosity. The Psalmist was right to ask, “What are human beings?” (Psalms 8:4). We find ourselves poised somewhere between the angels and the rest of creation.

Much traditional theology thinks of human beings as a unity of body and spirit, or body and soul. From this starting point, it is not some inner capacity that makes us spiritual, but the whole person who is a spiritual being. One important figure who thought in these terms was Origen (c. 185–232), one of the most creative theologians and biblical interpreters in the ancient church. Origen brought the resources of his love of scripture, a passionate devotion to Christ, and his training in types of Platonic philosophy to the task of thinking about human nature. Following Paul (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23), Origen saw the human person as body, spirit, and soul. Our spirit is the human point of contact with God’s Holy Spirit; our soul is the center of freedom and will; our bodies define us as creatures.²

Origen saw bodies as what distinguishes creatures from God, and therefore in the Incarnation Christ assumed a body, as well as a rational

² This summary comes from Henri Crouzel, *Origen: the Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A.S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 87–90, 206.

soul.³ Origen affirmed the immortality of the soul, as did the ancient Christian church generally. But again, following Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, Origen believed that final redemption included not just the soul, but a spiritual body. Salvation in the ultimate sense was, for Origen, the restoration of all things to God. In his view, every single being would finally be elevated to direct contemplation of God.⁴ For Origen, the soul's original ground is God, and bodily existence in time is part of a long journey of the soul back to its source. In the soul's journey back to God, bodies have as their essential function preserving what Origen calls the "life principle."⁵ The ability of the soul to reason and contemplate God is a significant aspect of the soul's spiritual journey. Christ as fully God and fully human is the one who both shows and is the way for the soul's return to God.

With other medieval thinkers, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) understood human nature to be a unity of body and soul. He believed that the soul (*anima* in Latin) is the "first principle of life"; it is what *animates* the body.⁶ The soul is also the intellect or mind, but in a very broad sense. Human beings understand their world and themselves through the capacities of the soul. The soul is the principle of movement and comprehension. Indeed, the word "soul" holds for Aquinas the essence of what it means to be human. He imagined that though the soul had an independent existence, it belongs to the nature of the soul to be joined with the body.⁷ However, the soul ceased to be a person when it is separated from the earthly body. The species "human being" is a composite of soul and body. The soul with all its powers, said Aquinas, "in a certain way, requires the body for its operation."⁸ For him the body is as important to being human as the soul. Having a body and a rational soul are the necessary components of being a person and living a human existence.

³ Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), Book II, Chap. 6.4–7.

⁴ Origen, *On First Principles*, Book III, Chap. 6.4–9.

⁵ Origen, *On First Principles*, Book II, Chap. 10.3.

⁶ Aquinas discusses the nature of human being as the unity of body and soul in *Summa Theologiae* I-I, q. 75–76.

⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, q. 76, a. 1.

⁸ "The body is not of the essence of the soul; but the soul by the nature of its essence can be united to the body, so that, properly speaking, not the soul alone, but the 'composite,' is the species." *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, q. 75, a. 7.

These traditions have valuable insights for us today. Using the term “soul” in our theology illuminates important aspects of our human experience. In spiritual formation, language about the soul gives a way to glimpse the depth dimensions of life. To sing with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46), or with the psalmist “My soul waits for the Lord” (Psalms 130:6) helps convey an element of our encounter with the Divine. Centuries of Christian spiritual traditions also depend on language about the soul. We need this language still. For example, when we are sad or unwell, referring to what is amiss in our souls conveys that physical existence is but one dimension of our personhood.

These traditions also have limitations. Christians have sometimes used this language in ways that treat the human person dualistically. Dualism creates a sharp division between the physical and the spiritual. It denies the unity of body and soul/spirit that makes us human. This division has led to unhealthy assumptions and practices, like emaciating fasts or an unhealthy rejection of the goodness of human sexuality. Some types of dualism even treat physical nature and bodily expression as if these were evil. Furthermore, severing the spiritual from the physical has often allowed oppressive political powers to assert unjust control over economic and social life. At different times in history, these powers have argued that the church should take care of “spiritual” needs, but the state must control everything else. This is one of dualism’s negative consequences.

Gnosticism in the ancient church was an extreme example of dualism. Gnostics held that God as Spirit was too pure to come into contact with matter. Gnostics thought of the material world as a mistake, instead of being very good. This view, which first appeared at the beginning of the second century, made belief in the Incarnation impossible. But Christian tradition at its best has rejected these kinds of dualism and contended that the physical nature is itself good and thus capable of revealing God.

Biblical thought and much recent theology criticize the lingering effects of dualism. Community of Christ theology also has traditionally rejected this division of spiritual and physical. We understand human nature as a unity.⁹ Body and spirit are essential to our humanity. We believe our ability to reason, to relate to the good creation physically,

⁹ Consider Doctrine and Covenants 28:8 for its use of language concerning the spiritual and temporal. In the view of time and eternity, the temporal refers to the time-bound and the physical.

emotionally, and mentally, to reflect on our experience, and to act creatively in the world all reflect what it means to bear God's image. Human agency and intelligence and embodied life are divine gifts that make responsible choices possible. Agency and intelligence are part of our bodily life. Spirit and element are inseparable. These beliefs also inform Community of Christ thought about our common humanity and the worth of all persons. They have implications for how we act in the world. Among these are that the creation matters to God. It is therefore the arena in which God calls us to act responsibly: for the dignity of others and for the well-being of the world itself.

For millions of people, violence, poverty, racism, oppression, and economic injustice hinder the full expression of their humanity. Community of Christ theology aligns with Christian traditions that work against any forces that would deface the image of God in every person. As tyranny descended on Europe in 1937, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these important words: "Christ has taken upon himself this human form. He became a human being like us. In his humanity and lowliness we recognize our own form. He became like human beings so that we would be like him. In Christ's Incarnation all of humanity regains the dignity of bearing the image of God. Whoever from now on attacks the least of the people attacks Christ."¹⁰ Bonhoeffer voiced here a principle deeply embedded in Community of Christ thought: the principle our tradition calls the worth of souls.

The Incarnation underpins our belief in the goodness of humanity. To be Community of Christ commits us to seek human well-being in every new setting. Our belief in the goodness of human life and the worth of persons further calls us to learn from the wisdom of various theologies of liberation. These theologies seek to address and transform the oppression of marginalized people: the forgotten, the harassed, the persecuted, the refugees, the ignored, and the disadvantaged. They are the poor, the differently gendered, women, the victims of structural racism, immigrants, the disabled, indigenous peoples, and others. Theologies of liberation believe that a key principle in the Bible is God's special concern for people pushed to the sidelines. Christian theology that is credible must address oppression, work to dismantle political and social structures that

¹⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 4: *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001 [1937]), 285.

create oppression, and oppose beliefs and policies that do not promote the flourishing of all people.

Recent Community of Christ thought about humanity reflects the positive influence of liberation theologies. We can see it especially in Doctrine and Covenants 163.4a: “God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.” This counsel may remind us that our ancestors in the Restoration movement were poor and despised. It also summons us to side with the marginalized of our time, seeking to alleviate conditions that dehumanize people. Community of Christ thought about humanity also reflects the influence of Paul’s writings. We can hear echoes of Galatians, Romans, and 1 Corinthians in Doctrine and Covenants 164.5: “It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.”

The word “imperative” gives this counsel a moral or ethical urgency. In Christ, God overcomes human divisions and reveals our common humanity. In Christ, the Holy Spirit renews our humanity with knowledge of its true image.¹¹ Through Christ’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection, God calls us in our humanity to seek the restoration of creation, which is the work of living and declaring God’s shalom.

Application for Discipleship

Our humanity carries the creative power to make peace or destroy. We can obliterate ourselves and devastate God’s creation through genocide, poverty, war, nuclear holocaust, environmental ruin, and refusing to solve global problems like climate change. Or we can offer all the resources of our humanity to God and work for the blessing of God’s world. What shall we do?

¹¹ Compare Colossians 3:10

Community of Christ's faith calls the church to live by a different vision of the world and our role in it. We affirm that all human beings, created in the Image of God, have inestimable worth. We believe that by the Incarnation Christ shares our common humanity and elevates what it means to be human. Christ is present in *every* person. Therefore, what we do for the sake of others, we do *to* Christ. Our church yearns to be a community that lives by and lives out these values and this vision. Our baptism calls us to be a church that follows Jesus into the difficult work of lifting up "the least of these." We live to help others discover their truest humanity. This is part of the work of God's kingdom on earth. Our understanding of human nature, informed by voices from Christian tradition and from Community of Christ's unique journey, points to new ways ahead.

Believing in the worth of persons has political implications for the church. Of course, that is complicated. But to "affirm without exception the worth of every human being" requires action that may set us against the powers that be. Given what our basic belief about humanity upholds, it makes immediate sense for the church to align with movements and organizations that promote human flourishing, care for the earth, stand for equality and justice, and struggle for peace.¹² In response, members would quite properly devote themselves to study, spiritual practice, communal life, and political involvement to help bring the blessing of justice to others. We are called to be a prophetic people who confront religious and political powers that dehumanize God's children. Thus, we must speak against theologies that defend inhuman conditions and the suffering of creation as God's will. Further, we will learn to embrace other human beings and their stories as part of Christ's mission. In this way we will practice putting flesh on Jesus' command to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). This is a picture of what it can mean to live out the image of Christ, which is our path to expressing our fullest humanity.

Discipleship calls us to embrace this life with all its dangers and limitations. As human beings, we are creatures. Our physical bodies limit us: we hunger, thirst, are vulnerable, feel fear, and are mortal. We need

¹² For the divine commission to be in the forefront of organizations promoting the worth of all persons, see Doctrine and Covenants 151:9, 164:9c; to care for the earth, see Doctrine and Covenants 163:4b; to seek justice, see Doctrine and Covenants 162:8b, 163:3a; to struggle for peace, see Doctrine and Covenants 133:2d; 156:5a; 161:2a, 6b; 162:1b; 163:2a, 3a-b.

shelter, companionship, and protection. We depend on others and our ecosystem in physical and material ways. Our limitations reflect our created existence, which Christ took on. But ever we recall that created existence is a gift.

Even with our limits, we must never forget that we bear the image of God. Our shared humanity enables us to reach beyond ourselves toward God and our neighbor. God has blessed us with gifts and abilities that can enrich others. We have the capacity both to explore the universe and practice kindness to strangers. We have an endless ability to imagine a different kind of world. We can think about what is just and true and beautiful. We can envision the common good. We can “seek peace, and pursue it” (Psalms 34:14). Confident that God who created our humanity has also claimed it forever, the church can turn its life and energy, its gifts and desires to the healing of creation.

Conclusion

As disciples we believe that in Jesus Christ the Image of God we glimpse what it can mean to be truly human and that in following him the journey of discovering our fullest humanity both ends and begins. He has inaugurated a new creation. It embraces us with our limitations but touches us with God’s limitless possibilities. The Spirit awakens in us a yearning to know who we are and to become more fully what we are created to be. In the words of a beloved hymn,

We long for freedom where our truest being
is given hope and courage to unfold.
We seek in freedom space and scope for dreaming,
and look for ground where trees and plants can grow.¹³

May the church become a community open to all the dimensions of a renewed humanity!

For Further Reading

John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

¹³ “The Love of God,” *Community of Christ Sings* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 2013), 210.

Nonna Verna Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010).

Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2005).

Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2014), chapter 7: "Humanity as Creature, Sinner, and New Being in Christ," 143–67.

Testimony by Barbara Carter

Growing up in a small town on the Oregon coast was for me idyllic. I had extended family around. I felt safe, love, supported. My circle of friends didn't change very much from the time I entered first grade to when I graduated from high school. I had exposure to another circle of friends and acquaintances through the faith community when we attended gatherings such as reunions (family camps), youth camps, and conferences. For me, though, there wasn't a large distinction between family and the faith community. There weren't characteristics that set them apart from each other. Each was a homogeneous group that mirrored the other. I went to a small Midwestern college when I was 18. The people there shared many of the characteristics that I had experienced at this point in my life through my family, friends, and faith community. While there was some diversity, it wasn't enough to challenge the status quo of whom I considered part of my world.

It is easy to read Galatians 3:27–28 and believe you are living it when the humanity you have experienced is consistent with what you have always known. This Bible passage reads: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." And yet the beauty and challenge of being transformed in Christ invites us into relationships and places that expose the unknown, the different, and the uncomfortable. It is in this place I found a new journey that has led me to

seek understanding about what it truly means to seek and desire a new humanity in Christ.

When I open myself up to individuals whose experiences, beliefs, and approach to life are different from mine I am exposed, leaving me vulnerable. It is in this place that I have found space and freedom to try to see others as Christ sees them and to allow myself to be seen as well. I have been blessed to spend time with ecumenical, and to some extent inter-faith, groups. Here I have experienced the sharing of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and positions that would normally create a negative and threatening environment. But because the need for us to understand each other and work together is greater than any single individual's perspective, we have been able to reach moments when our humanity is not ultimately individual but is most fully visible and most fully shared in community. It is in moments like this that I catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God coming closer.

Spiritual Practice: Mindful Eating

"To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration"
—Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 304.

When sitting down for a meal, take a deep breath before you take a bite. Inhale the scent of the food that is before you. Notice the colors and textures on your plate. Place the food in your mouth slowly and savor it. Feel how it dissolves on your tongue and pay attention to each flavor. Contemplate in wonder the way your body processes this food as an act of nurturing and surviving.

Consider the journey this meal has taken to arrive at your plate, the earth from which this food was harvested, the labor of the farmers and workers. Give thanks for the ways we are connected as humans, as creatures, on this beautiful planet. Confess the ways we sometimes live as though we are separate and cause destruction to other people and creatures because of our actions. Commit to mindfulness in the moments ahead. It may be a deeper gaze when stepping outside, eating a meal, receiving an embrace, or taking a breath. Pause in wonder throughout the day at your sacred humanness and connection to this sacred creation.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Consider your own humanity. What do you consider your gifts and strengths? Your weaknesses and failures? How can you affirm and give thanks to God for your whole self?
2. Who is included in your closest circle of family, friends, and colleagues? How can you affirm their humanity and belovedness by God?
3. Who is outside your circle or holds a different perspective on important issues? How can you recognize their worth and embrace their humanity?