

## **2120 Week 10 Jesus: Our Example of Perfect Humanity**

### **Introduction**

This topic has long been a subject of intense theological consideration.

‘if the word became man, it is so that man may become gods.’ (Irenaeus).

“Because of his great love (Jesus Christ) was made into what we are, so that we might become what he is.” (Irenaeus).

“He became man so that we might become divine.” (Athanasius).

“We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man” (Chalcedonian Creed)

‘The humanity , became God... in order that I might become God as far as he has been made human.’ (Gregory of Nyssa)

Who although He be God and Man yet He is not two but one Christ; one however not by conversion of the Godhead in the flesh, but by taking of the Manhood in to God (Athanasian Creed)

“When God wants to be what is not God, man comes to be.” (Karl Rahner)

“Man is the measure of all things, since God became man.” (Karl Barth)

What are all human declamations about the intrinsic dignity of human beings compared with the foundation which it is given here according to the witness of the Bible? On the other hand, how can this honor be overlooked, forgotten or denied in the face of this foundation? How can “dignity” be denied to even the most miserable of human beings when the glory of God himself was the honor of that person as nailed in supreme wretchedness to the cross? (Barth CD 111/4 654)

“The identity of the prodigal is not to be sought in a demonstrable link between the various stages in his story. As noted, this could only produce biological identity, which is irrelevant to the story, to his reacceptance. The true secret of identity is not to be found, then, in a demonstrable link, for there is no such link. Possibly his self-alienation was indeed so great that the inhabitants of the village could no longer recognize him on his return; they could no longer “identify” him. The secret of his identity is to be found, rather, not in himself but in the mind of his father, in his father’s love. Here and nowhere else it is preserved.

In this light we probably need to revise the usual concept of the divine likeness, which is constantly perceived, as in Thomism, in an indestructible continuity of human nature, so that it has to be insisted that man's nature is the same through the stages of innocence, fall, and redemption. If, however, man's real identity is hidden in the heart of God, this means that the divine likeness is not the sum total of man's demonstrable and persistent qualities. It is finally the image that God has of us.

This prepares the way or, and underlies, the christological concept that man's worth is not immanent; it is an alien dignity. What finally constitutes it is not demonstrable; it is an object of faith. Hence this dignity consists in what is done on and to us, not in us or anything we become. It consists in the fact that we are bought with a price, that Christ died for us (1 Corinthians 6:20; 8:11; Romans 14:15; cf. Deuteronomy 7:7; Proverbs 17:5; Malachi 2:11), and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16). (Helmut Thielicke)

“Roger Hurding (1986:387) has claimed that attempts to delineate and articulate “a biblical anthropology will come to nothing unless they focus at some point or other on the person of Christ.” We would argue to the contrary, that unless they commence with a consideration of the nature and attributes of God as manifested in Jesus Christ — who is God incarnate (Col 1:19) — they will be doomed to failure, because their conceptual horizon is limited to that of human ability. Christians are called to a theocentric worldview that encompasses much more than merely that which is within human comprehension: ie, simply because something is beyond our understanding does not mean that it ceases to be reality.”(M. Stringer)

### **A Note of Caution**

The history of Western thought has stood under the shadow of the influence of the Greek philosopher Plato. His dominant teaching was that this world is a pale imitation of an eternal perfect world of Forms or Ideas. The only true patience, for example, is found in this eternal world; this is a radical form of dualism. Under the influence of Platonism, many Christian teachings have unconsciously represented Jesus as the perfect example of what humanity should be, in a Platonic sense. Jesus becomes a model of what God expects of us. In the Jesus movement of the 1970's, Jesus was “cool” because he was a “brother” figure with a beard, long hair and flowing robe. In Liberation Theology, to use a contemporary example, Christ is seen as the complete liberator; the problem here is that “liberation” is defined in terms drawn partly from Marxist thought. To cast Jesus in the form of a pre-existent concept, no matter how “Christian” it may appear, is simply a subtle form of idolatry.

Barth explains how the relation between God and humanity is Jesus Christ,

“We have now reached the point where good reason can be seen for the most important thesis of this section : “As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our knowledge of the nature of man as created by God.” *The attitude of God* in which the faithfulness of the Creator and therefore the unchanging relationships of the

human being created by Him are revealed and knowable, *is quite simply His attitude and relation to the man Jesus*:

His election of this man; His becoming and remaining one with Him; His self-revelation, action and glorification in Him and through Him; His love addressed to Him and through Him to those who believe in Him and to the whole of creation; His freedom and sovereignty which in this man find their creaturely dwelling and form, their Bearer and Representative. He is God as even in His eternal Godhead He became this man in His human creatureliness. This is God's attitude towards sinful man. He answers or reacts to the sin of man by *this relation to the man Jesus*. Everything else that the biblical testimony to this divine answer and reaction discloses has at this point its beginning, centre and goal, and receives from it its light and explanation. And our hearing and reception of this testimony are true and right and clear and effective when we allow ourselves to be enlightened and instructed at this point. The Word of God is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, it is *the revelation of God's attitude to this man*. As it reveals this, it reveals sin in its terrible gravity and judges it with supreme force, showing man that he cannot atone for it, and delivering him by assuring him in his heart that God Himself atones for it, and showing how He does this. In *God's attitude to this man* the decision is made that the divine grace is primary and the sin of man secondary, and that the primary factor is more powerful than the secondary. Recognising that it is made at this point, we cannot contradict the order which it establishes. We are forbidden to take sin more seriously than grace, or even as seriously as grace."

(CD III/2, 41)

### **Understanding Humanity through the God- man**

- a. we cannot understand the truth of God, including who we are as created, sinful and redeemed, apart from revelation
- b. there is no analogy of being between man and God; i.e. you do not understand God by observing humanity
- b. nothing gives us the full picture until the man Jesus is born, grows, lives, dies and rises, and is glorified.
- c. Jesus alone is the authentic paradigm of humanity, he is deity enacted in humanity as we should act (Phil 2:1ff.)
- d. in Jesus, the fallen pattern of understanding, "man – as – a- God" is reversed, the truth is "God - as - a - man"
- e. his humanity is true humanity, and we only view it as beyond ours because ours is a fallen humanity
- f. it is precisely under the conditions of our humanity (John 1:14; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4) that Jesus was fully obedient (Heb 2:17; 4:15)

- g. this leaves us “without excuse”, the thought, “we are only human”, is invalidated
- h. similarly, the idealisation of going back to an Edenic *state* is undermined in the *person* of Christ. (“The person and history of Jesus Christ provides it (Christian eschatology) with the touchstone by which to distinguish the spirit of eschatology from that of utopia.” Moltmann)
- i. the Christian is a new person by virtue of being in the New Man—Christ. All the true resources for rich humanity lie within him

### **Hope beyond Cause**

- a. since the new creation (1 Cor 15:20, 45; 2 Cor 5:17etc.) has already come in Christ, this means, in technical terms, the anthropological vision of the church/counselor must be eschatological and not dominated by the categories of the old order
- b. Christian faith is future oriented, as only this perspective can reveal the fullness of our humanity in Christ (1 Cor 2:6 -10; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2)
- c. hope is essential to life, “The belief in the inevitability of the future serves as a gyroscope to stabilize behavior. The loss of a future makes...an immersion in sensory experience a necessary adjustment.” (William Moore) “The believer becomes essentially one who hopes....for he has staked his future on the future of Jesus Christ.” (J. Moltmann)
- d. this theology of hope is intrinsically opposed to a therapeutic model of life that sees the healing of the bruised as the means of self- discovery. Self- improvement, self – understanding and self – fulfillment are not the axes of meaning in scripture. In our culture, the goal of being righteous has been replaced with one of being whole and happy. We extend our conceptions of God to find out what will occur at the culmination of life in the world.

The hope of dying well – in old age and prosperity, surrounded by family and friends - has replaced the hope of the resurrection. This “domesticates and individualizes heaven, making it the mere continuation of victorious Christian living now.” (Doyle). God does not promise we will “die well” but that we will share the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:17-18; 2 Cor 1:5 -7; Phil 1:29; 3:10; 1 Pet 2:21) as we await a crown kept in heaven (1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10).

- e. whatever the causes of present distress rooted in the past, they are not final but have already been overcome in Jesus own life (John 19:30; 1 John 5:4 cf. 2 Cor 4:18)
- f. Christians cannot accept the identity of victims, because Jesus was never a victim (John 10:17 -18)

g. in this sense “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37)

### **Elements of True Humanity Revealed in Christ**

a. strictly speaking, everything we see in the life of Jesus falls into this category

b. foundational is Sonship: as Jesus is the true Son (John 1:18) we are called as sons (Luke 3:38; Acts 17:27; Gal 4:4- 6)

c. this entails:

	Jesus	Christian
obedience	John 5:19ff; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8	Rom 1:5; 6:16; 1 Pet 1:2
glorifying the Father	John 5:17; 13:31- 32; Phil 2:11	Rom 15:7; 1 Cor 10:31; Phil 1:11
responsibility	John 3:35; Matt 11:27	Rom 5:17; Rev 1:6; 5:10
servanthood	Mark 10:45; Rom 15:8; Phil 2:7	1 Cor 3:5; 1 Tim 4:6; 1 Pet 2:16
good works	Matt 11:20; John 5:36; 14:10	Matt 5:16; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 6:18
character: love	Mark 10:21; John 13:1; 15:9- 10	John 13:34; Gal 5:22; 1 Pet 1:22
joy	Luke 10:21; John 15:11	John 17:13; Gal 5:22; Phil 4:4
peace	John 14:27; 16:33; Col 3:15	Rom 1:7; Gal 5:22; Jude 1:2
overcoming evil	Matt 4:1 – 11; John 12:31; 14:30 -31; 16:11; Heb 2:14- 15; Col 2:14 -15	Rom 12:21; Eph 6:11ff; 1 Pet 3:9

## Counselling as Facilitating Participation in Christ

‘That there is only one work of salvation, that it has been accomplished by Jesus Christ, that it is identical with his person, and that being perfect it needs no supplementation but only acknowledgement, reception, participation, anticipation, and proclamation for what it is – these are the great themes of Barth’s soteriology.’ (G. Hunsinger)

### A. The Theological Framework

#### 1. The Achievement of the Incarnation

- a. the starting point is the trinity as a communion of divine persons
- b. fellowship or relationship is the ultimate reality
- c. humanity was created for complete union with God
- d. sin is a falling away and loss of potential for this oneness
- e. as the enfleshed Word, Jesus is the full union of God with humanity
- f. the re-creation of humanity is actualised in the incarnation of the divine Logos, the Second Adam. The chasm of fallen nature is bridged by incarnation, of sin by crucifixion and of death by resurrection. The ascension unites heaven and earth as one.

“This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty upon himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.”

(Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. Xvii. 2)

- h. in this model all the events of Jesus life are redeeming/recapitulatory; we do not bypass the actual life of Jesus (birth, childhood, ministry years etc.) in order to arrive at his death and resurrection. “What has not been assumed cannot be restored; it is what is united with God that is saved.” (Gregory of Nazianzus)
- i. every stage of human life is sanctified by the Incarnation, “When Jesus was born for us at Bethlehem, was baptised by the Spirit in the Jordan, suffered under Pontius Pilate, rose again and ascended, we were born again, baptised by the Spirit, suffered, died, rose again and ascended in him.” (J.B. Torrance)
- j. since the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means a human participation in the new creation (1 Cor 15:42- 49; 2Cor 5:17 etc.) it signifies a transformation in human being. This transformation came about in the experience of Jesus, the Word, through the work of the Spirit (Rom 1:4; 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18etc.).

## 2. Salvation as Participation in the Divine Nature

- a. Ephesians 1:4 speaks of a reality “in Christ” prior to any conscious decision on our part. Additionally, other passages e.g. Rom 6:1- 4; Gal 2:19 -20 speak of a real union with Christ in *his* death and resurrection. This is not simply something applied to us after the events of Christ’s life.
- b. only a renewal of humanity by the Spirit of Jesus can effect the same order of transformation of being into this new situation of eternal life in God.
- c. what is needed for salvation is a new act of creation (Gal 6:15) . This is the meaning of regeneration (Tit 3:5).
- d. through grace, believers become partners in the divine nature as it is in Christ (2 Pet 1:4)
- e. all the elements of the Christian life are understood as a sharing in Christ himself e.g. Heb 12:1; 2 Cor 12:9- 10; 1 Cor 1:30

“This will become still clearer if we reflect, that the work to be performed by the Mediator was of no common description: being to restore us to the divine favour, so as to make us, instead of sons of men, sons of God; instead of heirs of hell, heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Who could do this unless the Son of God should also become the Son of man, and so receive what is ours as to transfer to us what is his, making that which is his by nature to become ours by grace? Relying on this earnest, we trust that we are the sons of God, because the natural Son of God assumed to himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh, bones of our bones, that he might be one with us; he declined not to take what was peculiar to us, that he might in his turn extend to us what was peculiarly his own, and thus might be in common with us both Son of God and Son of man. Hence that holy brotherhood which he commends with his own lips, when he says, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father, to my God, and your God,"” (John 20: 17.) Calvin *Inst* II. 12.2

## B. The Counselling Event as Communion with God in Christ

- a. this necessarily flows from the theological framework outlined above
- b. it means that Christian counselling is essentially different from all other forms of counselling
- c. this is not a statement concerning the knowledge or abilities of the counselor, but the relationship that has graciously been established by God with them in Jesus
- d. in as much as the words of the counsellor are a participation in the Word of God (1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 2:3; Heb 4:12), they effect a transformation in the hearer (through faith and in the Spirit) at the level of being

- e. something eternal, conformity to Christ, is imparted (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 3:16ff. Col 3:10 etc.)
- f. this is an ongoing participation in the character of God (John 17:22, 23, 26)
- g. this will strongly relate to the level of maturity and obedience of the counsellor, rather than simply gifting, knowledge or technique
- h. as a ministry of Christ (2 Cor 6:1; 1 Thess 3:2), it cannot be compromised by issues to do with money, human approval, status etc. but must remain pure in every way, for only the pure in heart “see God” (Matt 5:8)

### **Some Implications for Counsellors**

- a. one implication of this is that Christian counselling, like all ministries of the Word of God, holds a unique dignity
- b. the Christian counsellor will not be tempted to imitate the world’s “success”
- c. the Christian counselor will work by the foundational principle: grace alone/faith alone
- d. a dichotomy between psychology/counselling and theology/faith at the level of practice is a sign of confusion about the basic humanity of Jesus
- e. theological terms cannot be reduced to psychological terms without resorting to “practical atheism” e.g. neurosis is not = sin, acceptance is not = justification
- f. psychology and theology cannot be integrated in one whole, as their subject matter is not identical
- g. integration is found in the person of the counsellor, to the degree they are in fellowship with Christ
- h. this is a participation in the union of humanity and deity in the person of Christ- “in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and occurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons” (Chalcedonian Creed)
- i. the first step in counselling is prayer as this is the primary attitude God requires of humanity
- j. it places the situation in touch with the mediation and intercession of Christ (Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5)