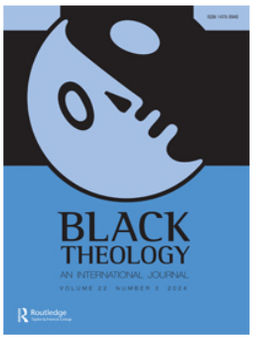

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Embodied Community, Communal Bodies: Karl Barth and James Cone on the Relational Human Creature

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue for a shared basis for Barth's and Cone's theological anthropology in Christological anthropology, warranting their anthropological claims with claims about how Christ embodied his own humanity. This leads Barth to characterize humanity as relational, defining human nature in relation to God and other human persons. Cone argues that Barth stopped short in developing this relational understanding of humanity. Where Barth stopped, Cone continues to implicate the social-situatedness of the human creature and Christ's transformation of social structures in assuming humanity. From Cone's development, I argue that humanity is created as embodied and relational creatures formed in our belonging to one another in community. While this relational constitution of the human creature is principally found in the God-human relationship, it cannot be reduced to the God-human relationship. Instead, human persons rely also on their embodied relationships to one another in life-giving community for our flourishing.

KEYWORDS

James H. Cone; Karl Barth; theological anthropology; Christology; relational human nature; communion/community

1. Introduction

James Cone undoubtedly changed the shape of theology, bringing to bear on a number of doctrinal *loci* crucial questions of race, justice, and God's relationship to the oppressed. Cone's transformative work in theology didn't just ask new questions, but forced us to ask old questions in new ways. One place where this is readily apparent is in his critical appropriation of and engagement with Karl Barth's theological anthropology, both in his appraising work in his doctoral thesis and his constructive work in *Black Theology and Black Power*. In this paper, I argue for a shared basis for theological anthropology between Barth and Cone in *Christological* anthropology, warranting their anthropological claims with Christological claims about how Christ embodied his own humanity. This leads Barth to characterize humanity as relational, defining human nature in relation to God and other human persons. Cone, on the same Christological grounds on which Barth operates, argues that Barth stopped too short in developing this relational understanding of humanity. Where Barth stopped, Cone continues to implicate the social-

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situatedness of the human creature and Christ's transformation of social structures in assuming and healing his incarnate humanity. I then continue to build constructively upon Cone's Christological developments, arguing that humanity is created as embodied and relational creatures formed in our belonging to one another in community. While this relational constitution of the human creature is principally found in the relationship between God and humanity, it cannot be reduced to the God-human relationship. Instead, human persons rely also on their embodied relationships to one another in life-giving community for our flourishing.

2. Which Christology, Whose Christocentrism?

Before we can understand Barth's uniquely Christological anthropology and Cone's development of it, it would help our efforts to first identify precisely in what ways Barth and Cone are Christological. For one could imagine that both theologians have some Christological emphasis to how they approach theological questions about the human creature, but that each Christological approach is markedly different from the other. This is in large part the problem of assessing any two theologians who claim Christology to be the heart of their doctrine; there is more than one way to be Christological and some ways of being Christological could in fact be in conflict with one another when it comes to thinking about certain doctrines. Thus, showing Barth and Cone to both be Christological *in some fashion* would not be enough to claim that Cone is developing Barth's thought rather than breaking from it. To trace the themes between each theologian's Christological anthropology, and especially to demonstrate how Cone develops Barth's anthropology on appropriately similar Christological grounds, it behoove us to first establish that they are in fact Christological in similar ways.

At one level, the diversity of potential Christological approaches seems obvious. For if one imagines that one's Christology guides one's theological investigation of any subject, then differences in Christology could produce radically different theological conclusions to any line of questioning. A Lutheran Christology, for instance, is likely to arrive at different Christological conclusions about the nature of humanity than a Reformed Christology operating in the theological lineage of Calvin, especially as these two Christologies have stark differences in how they construe the relationship between Jesus' divinity and humanity.[1] But even within a similar Christology, a great diversity exists of how one may apply Christology to theological questions. Richard Muller observes this diversity of "Christocentric" methodologies in a recent article and demonstrates the dramatically different conclusion such methodologies can reach.[2] The map he provides, I think, will help us to understand what Barth and Cone each mean when the place Christ at the centre of their approach to theological questions about the human creature.

First, Muller identifies soteriological Christocentrism. This type follows the basic affirmation of "the absolute and necessary centrality of Christ *to the work of salvation*."[3] At some level, this type is assumed by Christian theology generally: salvation is best understood in terms of the person and work of Christ, in terms of who he is and what he does. Next, Muller identifies prototypical Christocentrism as that type which places

[1]See for reference, Everhart, "Highpriesthood and Holy Presence."
[2]Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism,'" 253–4.
[3]Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism,'" 255. Emphasis added.

a "systematizing emphasis on the Adam-Christ typology and the priority of Christ over Adam."[4] Those who affirm and make use of this type would likely also hold to soteriological Christocentrism, but would also make use of the Adam-Christ typology to frame this soteriological emphasis on Christ's person and work. However, the Adam-Christ typology would go beyond soteriology as well, helping the theologian to think through the relationship between the New Humanity in Christ and the old humanity under Adam, the doctrine of sin, and even eschatology. The driving force of these expansion beyond the doctrine of salvation, according to this type, is the implications of the tension between Adam as a prototype of Christ and Christ as the fulfilment of the Adamic covenant. What sets this methodology apart is not necessarily its content, but the way in which theological claims are organized under this typological framework.

Muller identifies principal Christocentrism as a third type. This type moves beyond simply how we organize theological claims within a Christological typology to argue that "the Christ-idea must be used as an interpretive key to understanding and elucidating all doctrinal topics."[5] Muller includes in this typology thinkers like Schleiermacher, who utilized Christ as a philosophical concept to determine which parts of scripture were truly the "word of God," and Barth, who claimed that the person of Christ simply *is* the Word of God and is thus the interpreter of all reality.[6] This last type should seem odd to those of us who have read Barth closely. Barth was, in fact, quite critical of Schleiermacher's Christ-idea and the German liberal methods of interpreting revelation according to their own *a priori* notions of the Christ-idea. Barth took, as we shall see, Schleiermacher's and the German liberal Protestants' emphasis on Christ as the first principle of theologizing about any doctrine, and applied it in a dramatically different way. While we can distinguish Barth from others in the third type of Muller's typology (suggesting perhaps a fourth type) the way in which Barth stands out is sufficient enough for us to map him in relation to, for instance, the Christcentrism of Cone.

2.1. Barth's Personal Christocentrism: A Fourth Type

To say that Barth is Christological in his approach to theology generally (and for our purposes the particular doctrine of theological anthropology) is a bit of an understatement. While one could not adequately limit the scope of Barth's extensive contribution to the discipline of theology to his work in Christology, Barth saw his theological project as growing out of his Christology; all theological knowledge for Barth is obtainable only through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[7] Here, he fits neatly into Muller's third type. Christology, therefore, plays a central role in everything Barth has to say about theology, including but perhaps especially his theology of the human creature.

But Barth is not doing exactly what Muller attributes to this third type; Barth does not have (or at least he tries not to have) a prescribed, *a priori* idea about *what* Christ represents philosophically in order to apply that philosophical ideal to theological doctrines. Instead, he treats Christ's person, living, acting, and speaking in the world, as his first

[4]Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism,'" 255.
[5]Ibid., 256.
[6]Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism,'" 256–7. Muller is quite critical of this type, arguing that the Christ-idea is an artificial construct allowing thinkers of this type to interpret revelation in which way they suppose.
[7]Barth, *CD* IV.1, 123.

principle, applying who Christ is to such doctrines rather than applying a Christological idealization. *Christ himself* is the *a priori* rather than ideas about Christ, because it is God who must reveal himself rather than us knowing God from our own fallen and finite frameworks of knowing. As Barth puts it, "only because God posits Himself as the object is man posited as the knower of God."[8] Therefore, rather than treat Christ as an idea represented by a person, Barth treats Christ as a person whom we encounter. This idea of encounter comes to define how Barth approaches doctrine Christologically. Christ as a divine-human person reveals to us what God is like in himself because Christ *is* the revelation of God.

At the heart of this conviction and of Barth's turn away from the Schleiermachian version of Muller's third type is the deep seated conviction that the finite human mind cannot contain the infinite revelation of God. As Barth puts it, there is an "infinite and qualitative distinction between time and eternity," between the divine and the human.[9] This distinction grounds Barth's belief that "we can only speak of and with God because God spoke to us."[10] Because God is infinite, our fallen and finite minds cannot comprehend him nor be trusted to interpret his revelation accurately. We thus require a mediator between the finite creation and the infinite creator: the incarnate person of Christ. *A priori* concepts of Christ, for Barth, are insufficient to ground this sort of mediatorial knowledge between God and humanity; we require God himself to be embodied and revealed humanly in the incarnation. Hence Barth's emphasis on the uniqueness of revelation as encounter with the risen Christ: "only in the incarnation does one encounter the Word of God as the Revelation of God Himself. The knowledge of God is grounded in God himself, not in nature, history or human words."[11] Knowledge of God for Barth is inter-personal, grounded in concrete knowledge wrought from Christ encountering us as particular beings in time and history.

This sort of Christological emphasis, if we can name a title for a fourth type on Muller's map, might be called personal Christocentrism, as it emphasizes encounter not with abstract propositions *about* Christ but concrete knowledge of the person and work of Christ that comes from encounter *with* Christ. In encounter with Christ, God reveals Godself rather than human beings providing a theological or philosophical framework for interpreting divine revelation. This type of Christocentrism became the means by which Barth combatted the Nazi takeover of the state church in Germany during the second World War. This is probably one of the better known chapters of Barth's historical context, and so I will exposit on it only very little. I raise it only to demonstrate what Barth thought such a Christocentrism ought to do; encounter with Christ cannot affirm Nazism, but instead repudiates it and calls it to repentance. By grounding our knowledge of God in God's self revelation in Christ, humanity is forced to relinquish control of that revelation and all the hermeneutical questions that guide our control. No culture or concrete history can claim ownership of Christ; Christ instead challenges and transforms our cultures through encounter with human persons. God is both the object and subject of theology for Barth and his Christocentrism is one that calls humanity to relinquish our desire for control of our object of study, emphasizing instead our encounter with

[8]Barth, *CD* II.1, 22.
[9]Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 533.
[10]Ibid., 1–2.
[11]Ibid, 7.

a person who is both divine and human. This encounter is concrete, contextualized by both the concrete and particular history of Christ and our own concrete and particular history in which we encounter him. But these histories do not become revelation themselves for Barth, because Christ can challenge, reshape, and call us to reinterpret our histories in which we encounter him. More could perhaps be said about Barth and his doctrine of revelation, but for now this will suffice to demonstrate that Barth's personal Christocentrism emphasizes encounter with Christ in concrete history that is capable of repudiating cultural frameworks that claim to contain or own the proper interpretation of divine revelation.

2.2. Cone's Christological Intensification of the Personal

Cone shared with Barth a similar Christological emphasis on encounter with Christ in one's particularity, on the freedom of God in Christological self-revelation, and on the principled starting point in Christology for all of theology. This should not surprise us, given that Cone's theological career began with both a Master's thesis and a Doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth's thought. In Barth, Cone found an interlocutor whose emphases on the transcendent freedom of God, the non-ownership of interpretation of divine revelation, and the revelatory nature of encounter with Christ were helpful for building the foundations of what would become known as Black liberation theology. And while Cone later moved away from Barth as a source, and indeed he was criticized for his use of white, western theologians in his early work, this paper does not endeavour to solve whether or not Cone was a Barthian. At a minimum, Barth held some sway in Cone's early theological thinking and particularly in his theological anthropology. Wherever that influence went later is beside the point; what matters for our purposes here is to compare what Cone's Christocentrism with that of Barth, tracing Barth's influence on Cone while noting where Cone took this Christological centring further.

Cone imbibed, too, from Barth this centrality of the Kierkegaardian infinite qualitative distinction, seeing in Barth and his Christology a way forward for expressing a theology of Black liberation. As J. Karmeron Carter puts it, "Cone's early imbibing of this form of thinking gives him a vantage from which to deploy black theology as a religious critique of culture."[12] Much like Barth, Cone saw Christ's being the revelation of God as a critique against any culture or educational structure that claimed to own or control knowledge of God. Where Barth's Christocentrism was a weapon against the Nazi takeover of the German State Church, Cone's Christocentrism was a cry of liberation against white, racist Christendom.

Cone's theology undeniably centres Christ at the heart of his methodology, and it appears that he does this in way very similar to Barth. In this, Cone is at a minimum a principle Christocentrist of some kind. In his own words:

> Christianity begins and ends with the man Jesus—his life, death, and resurrection. He is the Revelation, the special disclosure of God to man, revealing who God is and what his purpose for man is. In short, Christ is the essence of Christianity. Schleiermacher was not far wrong when he said that "Christianity is essentially distinguished from other faiths by the fact that everything in it is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth." In contrast

[12]See, Carter, *Race*, 161.

> to many religions, Christianity revolves around a Person, without whom its existence ceases to be. For this very reason Christology is made the point of departure in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. According to Barth, all theological talk about God, man, church, etc. must inevitably proceed from Jesus Christ, who is the sole criterion for every Christian utterance. To talk of God or of man without first talking about Jesus Christ is to engage in idle, abstract words which have no relation to the Christian experience of revelation.[13]

In some ways, Cone would appear to be a mere principle Christocentrist, as shown by his quoting of Schleiermacher. But, as the above quote shows, Cone quickly moves beyond Christ as an idea that distinguishes Christianity from other religions to what Christ does for the particular religion of Christianity. Cone quickly centres the *person* of Christ as central to his methodology, following Barth at this critical juncture.

This return to the person of Christ, to his concrete history and work, is a consistent theme for Cone as he attempts to tackle various theological problems. Christ's person is what unites the whole Christian story for Cone and thus reinterprets our consistently sinful and oppressive notions of who God is. It is thus,

> the humanity that the God of Israel assumes in Jesus of Nazareth [that] is the location from which God secures and affirms all of creation in its historical unfoldings. Therefore, contra the logic of modern racial reasoning … Jesus' Jewishness is not racially arrayed against non-Jews but, rather, is the perpetual sign of God's embrace of Jew and non-Jew (or, in scriptural parlance, Gentile) alike.[14]

It is precisely the concrete and particular history of the person, Jesus Christ, which allows Cone to think and speak of who God is to other peoples in concrete and particular times and places. Cone therein demonstrates a similar emphasis to that of Barth on concrete encounter with Christ over and against the universalization of a Christ-idea. Cone seems, therefore, to be of the personalist type of Christocentrism.

Where we begin to see Cone's development beyond Barth is in the way that Cone unpacks these encounters. While operating in a Barthian Christological mode of dogmatics, Cone nevertheless pressed Barth's emphasis on the transcendant in order to see God relating to us at sites of racial and social identity. Cone puts it like this: "we know who God is, not because we can move beyond our finiteness but because the transcendent God has become immanent in our history, transforming human events into divine events of liberation."[15] While perhaps going beyond what Barth would have said Christologically at many points, Cone might find significant resonance with the later Barth's emphasis on the transcendent God *who we could find anywhere and everywhere*.[16] Barth affirmed that our encounters with the person of Christ were always contextual, but he was more reticent to speak about the role of our own cultures and concrete histories in that encounter. His fear of treating culture or history as revelation perhaps led him to this reticence. But Cone holds no such reservations. While Barth called us to

[13]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 34.
[14]Carter, *Race*, 159.
[15]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 82.
[16]See, for instance, Barth's interview in the documentary film: *JA und NEIN, Karl Barth zum Gedaechtnis*. Barth says both that one can find God "not only in the Bible, but also here, there, and elsewhere … But, attention! … This begins to sound something like Hitler, yes? This is where the mistakes happen over and over again. When people think 'now I have it!'" (Translation from the German is my own) Where Barth is nervous about ascribing immanent revelation to a particular culture or people, he is nevertheless willing to grant that Jesus encounters us in and through our own particularity in just the way that Cone emphasizes.

encounter Christ in his own concrete and particular history, Cone calls us to recognize also our own context and concrete histories wherein the particular Christ is encountered. He writes,

> Jesus is the man for others who views his existence as inextricably tied to other men to the degree that his own Person is inexplicable apart from others. The others, of course, refer to all men, especially the oppressed, the unwanted of society, the "sinners." He is God himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship with God.[17]

In one sense, Cone is pressing Barth on the very same personal-Christological grounds that Barth claims to stand on. In another sense, Cone's emphasis on Christ's encountering us in our own contexts allows him to speak more dynamically of Christ's revelatory encounters with humanity. It is this dynamic encounter that allows Cone to emphasize the theological perspective of the oppressed.

Barth and Cone are both undoubtedly Christocentric, though it seems that at moments Cone is able to go beyond Barth without losing their shared Christological commitments. This is at least partially because they both centre not *a priori* ideas about Christ, but his divine and human person. This going beyond occurs principally where, as Carter observes, Barth struggles to articulate the real and actual encounter of God in history and in creation subjectively while maintaining the divine freedom of Christ's revelatory work.[18] For reasons discussed above, this is not as much of a problem for Cone, who sees God's subjective presence in and with creation as dynamic and concrete. God's revelation in Christ can encounter us anywhere, but God *particularly* encounters humanity in and with the oppressed. As shall be argued below, these Christological and dogmatic dynamics play out particularly in the personalist-Christological approach that Barth and Cone both have to theological anthropology. Where Barth provided for the possibility of Christ's encounter with humanity in all its particularity, Cone carried out that intuition in a thoroughly Christological way.

3. Union with God: Barth's Relational Christological Anthropology

At the heart of Barth's theological anthropology is a salient emphasis on Christology. This mode of theological anthropology has often been called Christological anthropology, the fundamental intuition of which is that "beliefs about the human person (anthropology) must be warranted in some way by beliefs about Jesus (christological)."[19] Barth is one of the most explicit Christological anthropologists of history, not only arguing that the proper grounding of the doctrine of humanity necessarily in Christology but also demonstrating how so doing changes various aspects of the doctrine in critical ways.[20] Namely, Barth demonstrated how a Christological ground of theological anthropology changes how we conceive of relationality and ontology.

[17]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 35.
[18]See, Carter, *Race*, 181–2.
[19]Cortez, *Christological Anthropology*, 20.
[20]Ibid., 141.

For Barth, "the ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus."[21] Humanity is only understood properly in looking to how Christ assumes and embodies his own humanity. This is because Jesus "exists originally and properly in an inner connexion and correspondence between his divine determination and his creaturely form, between his being as the covenant-partner of God and his being as man."[22] As the *God*-man Jesus knows what it is for humanity to image God truly. As the God-*man*, Jesus embodies that true imaging and reveals it to us in a human way. These are two crucial sides to the same hypostatic coin for Barth. In God becoming incarnate, "true man, the true nature behind our corrupted nature, is not concealed but revealed in the person of Jesus, and in His nature we recognize our own, and that of every man."[23] At the same time all of humanity may encounter the fulness of God (*via* human ways of knowing and relating) in this particular man from Nazareth.

Because of this Christological emphasis, Barth defines the human creature as that particular creature uniquely addressed by God in this way. Humanity "does not first have a kind of nature in which he is then addressed by God … He is from the very outset, as we may now say, 'in the Word of God.'"[24] Christologically, humanity is defined not by its faculties or substance or potentialities, but first by its relationship to the divine constituted by the Image who is Christ. Because human nature is defined by its being called into covenant relation with God *via* divine address in Christ, Barth defines human nature relationally. Where other accounts of humanity's creation in the *imago Dei* focus on faculties like rationality or substances like soul–body dualisms, Barth emphasizes the human body as "a spatio-material system of relation" in which the person is constituted by their relations to God, themselves, and other objects in the created order. But principle among these is the relation of the embodied soul to the divine. This embodied soul is always and already created in and for covenantal relation to the divine and it is this relation that defines it among the many created things in the cosmos.

This leads Barth to conclude that humanity is ontologically determined in Christ for God. Just as Christ demonstrates and reveals in his own humanity his being-for-the-Father and his fundamental need for the Spirit, so too is humanity ontologically determined for the Father and in fundamental need of the Spirit.[25] This relationship constitutes what we are as those creatures uniquely created in the image of God. But what is interesting is the way that Barth extends this to include fellow-human relationship. Just as our humanity is ontologically determined for relationship with God in Christ's relationship with his own divinity and with Father and Spirit, so too does his being God-for-us determine us in ontological ways.[26] He is both the "man-for-God" and the "man-for-man" atoning for and reconciling all of humanity with itself.[27] This introduces a horizontal element to humanity's ontological relationality that is entailed by the vertical element; our being ontologically determined in relation to God entails that we are ontologically determined for fellow-humanity. This stands in contrast to other construals of

[21]Barth, *CD* III.2, 132.
[22]Ibid., 133–134
[23]Ibid., 43.
[24]Ibid., 149–50.
[25]McKirland, *God's Provision, Our Need*.
[26]Barth, *CD* III.2, 220.
[27]Ibid., 208.

human nature available in Barth's day which emphasized particular faculties or substances as defining human ontology. On options that determine humanity as a body–soul composite or as an individual rational substance, human nature is something which an individual can have on their own. But on Barth's relational Christological anthropology, we cannot be in Christ without being together with one another; there is a togetherness that becomes essential to our being human in the Image of Christ.[28] Humanity is not self-determined nor is it independent and self-contained. It is a contingent reality that depends fundamentally on God and derivatively on other human beings.

Barth's challenge to the typical approaches to theological anthropology grounds our being in our need for God. This, for Barth, is uniquely revealed in the incarnation in such a way as to establish this being-constituting relationship in himself. In doing so, he also implicates fellow-human relationship as in some way following from this more ultimate one. Interestingly enough, Barth's has ultimately very little to say about this horizontal dimension of our relational ontology. What little he does say is often decried as insufficient or inconsistent by Barthians the world over. Perhaps it is the case that Barth's salient emphasis on the absolute otherness of God is what leads him to so emphasize the divine-human relationship and leave so underdeveloped the fellow-human relationship. Barth's active resistance to the inscribing of revelation on created things, particularly in the context of the Nazi takeover of the State Church, would thus have led to his reticence to speak of any ontological determination on the part of fellow-humanity. Whatever the case, it is Cone who ultimately saves Barth from this problem by yet another re-return to Christology.

4. Union with One Another: Cone's Christological Development(s)

Cone's anthropology bears a similar emphasis on personalist-Christology as that of Barth, looking to the person of Christ as the perfector and finisher of our humanity in his role as liberator because he is the wholly other (God) come to us in human form. At several points throughout his work, Cone utilizes Christological doctrine to critique the racist Christianity of white slave owners, calling for a re-return to Christ as the basis for liberation. Most notably, he notes a latent Docetism in Christologies that attempt to separate Christ from his Jewishness and separate Christ's being-with-the-oppressed from his divine soteriological mission. He writes,

> because human liberation is God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ, its source and meaning cannot be separated from Christology … Jesus Christ, therefore, in his humanity and divinity, is the ground of our present freedom to struggle and the source of our hope that the vision disclosed in our historical fight against oppression will be fully realized in God's future.[29]

Cone maintains with Barth that humanity cannot know itself apart from Christ; he alone "is the Revelation, the special disclosure of God to man, revealing who God is and what his purpose for man is."[30] Like Barth's theological anthropology, Cone grounds the essence of the human creature in God's becoming human in Christ.

[28]Barth, *CD* III.2, 222–96. See also, McClean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, 39.
[29]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 88.
[30]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 166.

But Cone extends Barth's dual emphasis on Christ being God for us and human for us, deepening the horizontal element of Christ's revelation. For Cone, Christ is the revelation of humanity, but he does this in essentially human ways by becoming the particular man, Jesus of Nazareth. Cone emphasizes here the particularity of Christ's humanity, especially his Jewishness and his location in history. Apart from his human particularity, he is not Christ for us but is only God who seems to be human for us. Identifying this impulse to emphasize only the role of Christ's divinity in his salvific work as docetic, Cone reiterates the significance of Christ's humanity for Christological anthropology. He writes,

> the historical Jesus was separated from the Christ of faith, and the result was Docetism … If the historical Jesus is unimportant then the true humanity of Christ is relegated to the periphery of Christological analysis. At best, Christ's humanity is merely verbalized for the purpose of focusing on his divinity.[31]

This is part of Cone's broader critique of Christologies from above that undermine or underemphasize the humanity of Christ. Such approaches to Christology (and by extension, humanity), cannot speak to who Jesus is to us today; only who he has been from before time. Cone critiques Barth on precisely this point, noting how his Christology from above accurately captures Christ's transcendence but undermines his real and true presence with us in our human ways of being.[32] Barth does, Cone states, recover from this oversight to an extent in his later work. It is around this time that Barth's absolute transcendence becomes committed not only to our inability to force the Word of God to work through a particular context (such as the Nazi regime) but also God's capacity to work through anything (such as a dead dog).[33]

This Christological point of departure (and later return) from Barth is targeted particularly at God's presence in and with humanity. For Cone,

> God reveals itself in Christ among the sinful so that human beings can partake in God's grace in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God. But in doing so, Christ becomes a human being and becomes the 'fellow' of every other human being, although both sin and the power of evil still remain in the world. In creating an anthropology, Cone releases Barth and turns to the New Testament to clarify what God's revelation means for humanity.[34]

Though enamoured by Barth's Christological emphasis, Cone was not convinced that Barth was sufficiently Christological with regards to the significance of the incarnation for theological anthropology. The Eternal Word of God did not simply become something like a human or a generic sense of human; he become a particular human being, taking on human relationships and a human social context that defined and determined his salvific work in key ways. The socialized and embodied particularity of Christ's humanity emphasizes, for Cone,

> the social context of Christology and thereby establishes the importance of Jesus' racial identity. *Jesus was a Jew*! The particularity of Jesus' person as disclosed in his Jewishness is

[31]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 107.
[32]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 107–9. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gunna Tell Nobody*, 10.
[33]See several examples of Barth's commitment to finding God anywhere in some of Barth's more public and political work: Barth, *Barth in Conversation*.
[34]Kht Maat, "Looking Back at the Evolution of James Cone's Theological Anthropology," 5.

> indispensable for Christological analysis … [and] pinpoints the importance of humanity for faith.[35]

Cone identifies this emphasis on the humanity of Jesus as crucial to the liberative worship of God amongst black slaves. Apart from Christ becoming a particular human being and working out our salvation in particular, socially-constituted ways, we do not have a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Rod of Jesse, the Lion of Judah, the Passover Lamb, or any of the other Hebraic basis for God's dwelling with humanity. This implicates not only the God-human relationship made new in Christ, but the reconciliation of fellow-human relationship. As Cone puts it, "the image of God is not merely a personal relationship with God, but is also that constituent of humanity which makes all people struggle against captivity. It is the ground of rebellion and revolution among slaves."[36]

While Cone is not alone in implicating the significance of the human and historical Jesus for Christian theology, he is perhaps more unique in implicating this significance for Christological anthropology. If it is Christ's embodiment of his humanity that reveals to us the nature of our own humanity, then our relationships with other human beings are a part of that. This is not to be confused with the identification of God *with* history common to the German Liberal Protestant theology against which Barth decried, *Nein!* It is a participation of human activity and relationship in Christ's human and divine activity and relationships. While Barth may be correct to be wary of immanentalizing human social structures and cultures formed by fellow-human relationality, it is not clear that this warning is lost on Cone nor that this is what he is doing.

On the contrary, Cone is advocating for a theological picture of the human Christ who became and continues to be relationally present with his people. Cone is not essentializing any social structure but proclaiming Christ's work in and through the liberative activity of his people with whom he is present. "'The struggle of the oppressed is God's struggle' is not religious projection and neither is it a statement which moves from the human situation to divine revelation."[37] Unlike those against whom Barth revolted,

> neither [Israel's faith nor that of the black community] was based on a feeling of inwardness separated from historical experience. Both Israel and later the black community took history seriously and continued to test the validity of their faith in the context of historical struggle.[38]

Cone is not undermining Christological transcendence; he is returning to a true Christological transcendence in which Christ is more than just a docetic idea or principle but a transcendent presence in and through the struggle for liberation.[39]

While consistent with Barth's Christological impulses about human nature (perhaps more consistent than Barth himself until later), Cone's proposal pushes what we can know Christologically about humanity beyond Barth's claim of divine ontological determination. This is essential to Cone's Christological anthropology, but it is not the whole

[35]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 109.
[36]Ibid., 91.
[37]Ibid., 91.
[38]Ibid., 91.
[39]Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 1–2. Christ's narrative gave them "an identity far more meaningful than the harm that white supremacy could do to them." *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 22.

picture. Cone carries forward Barth's underdeveloped claim about the significance of fellow-human relationality for human nature. Where Barth may have been reticent to affirm an ontological determination by fellow-human relationality, Cone demonstrates just how Christological this is: God in Christ relates to us as a fellow-human. If the horizontal element of our relationality is not ontological, we have no access to the vertical.

What is even more interesting is the particular way in which Con implicates fellow-human relationality. While raising some instances of one-to-one human relationships that can be constitutive of human nature, he more often approaches our ontological sociality through implicating community and large social structures. The particularity of Jesus which Cone invokes to demonstrate the significance of his humanity is a social identity constituted by generations of Jewish traditions and social-structures. It is in distorted communities that structural oppression is able to persist and it is through Spirit-wrought communities of the oppressed that liberation can take place. Through community, and particularly the sharing of communal history, Cone argues that the oppressed are able to transform societal structures and create communities in which freedom is experienced by oppressed peoples.[40] Christian reconciliation must include Christ's call upon us to "change the structures of injustice … This means fighting for the inauguration of liberation in our social existence, creating new levels of human relationship in society."[41] Cone is not only essentializing God-human relationality for human nature (as Barth does), nor only human-to-human relationality (though this too is significant), but the role of community in constituting who and what we are. It is this communal aspect of human nature into which Christ steps particularly as a Jew and that human persons are called to participate in as a participation in Christ's reconciling activity.

5. Embodied Community, Communal Bodies: Towards a Communal-Christological Anthropology

Cone Christological developments open up new possibilities and directions for theological anthropology. By extending Barth's relational account of human ontology to include fellow-humanity and implicating our particularity as members of various communities and social structures as formative for what it means to be human, we can seek for ways that Christ can be present in and work through our particular context without essentializing that context after the fashion of Barth's opponents. Such essentialization becomes the ground for oppression and colonization as one's community comes to believe that it holds, in some static fashion, the true Word of God and that identification with that community in all its particularity becomes a prerequisite for communion with God. Instead, Cone points us to a Christological anthropology in which God can speak to each of us in our own context, being present with and calling to participation peoples of every tribe, tongue, and nation. While both of these demonstrate the formative power of community for our human ways of being, the latter grounds the particularity of our community in our participation in Christ.

If human beings are at least partially constituted by their relationships with God and other human persons in ways partially determined by their socio-historical context, then

[40]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 99.
[41]Ibid., 93–4.

the transcendence of the Word of God speaks not only to his freedom but also to his freedom to speak in each of our mother tongues. Alan Torrance has called this sort of thing "divine commandeering" while Willie Jennings has referred to it as translation.[42] It is the freedom of God to speak (or not speak) through a particular context using that community's language, practices, and cultural intuitions to reveal himself. Christ is both three to accommodate, on this account, through our socio-cultural locations without being bound to them in controlling or immanentalizing ways. In being human with us in community, Christ can speak to a particular context through that context's liberative work, but he may also speak from that context to the world. God called the Gentiles to salvation through the Jews, just as Christ can speak through the liberative activity of the black community to call white slave masters to repentance.

Human beings are not reducible to rational individual substances, to a set of unique faculties, or to a unique material/spiritual constitution. We are more than individuals, but individuals created in Christ to be in community. It is in such community that God calls us to realize our Christological destiny, challenges our notions of what it is to be human, and transforms our ways of being and relating. The communities we inhabit are a part of us, shaping how we relate to God and to one another in ontology-constituting ways. We are not bodies only, nor merely relational bodies, but communal bodies. It is in this fundamental togetherness for which humanity is created that humanity flourishes as image bearers and in which we might understand better what it means for us to be particular. Cone's Christological development of Barth's theological anthropology pushes our understanding of what we are beyond the boundaries of our bodies, calling us to recognize our *communal* embodiment.

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[42]Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 229–30. Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12–3.

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