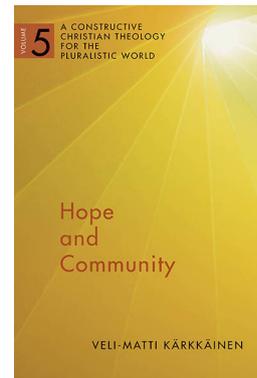
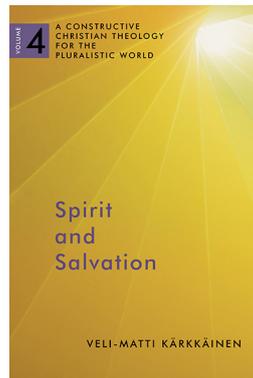
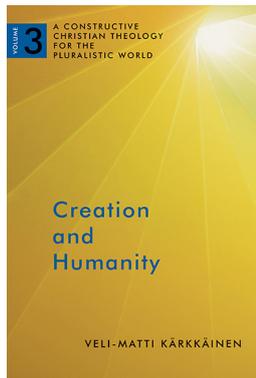
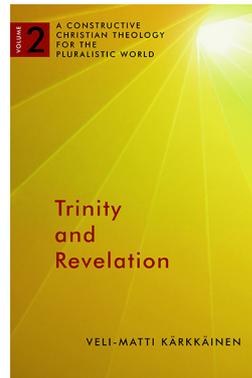
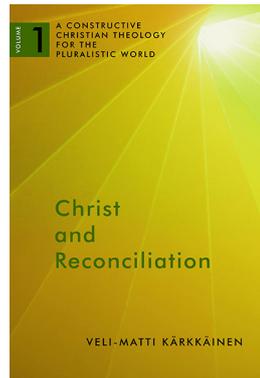


Multidimensional Monism: Veli-Matti Kärkäinen's Proposal for a New Theological Anthropology

Viktor J Tóth

KEYWORDS:

| Multidimensional monism | Theological anthropology | Constructive theology |



Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol. 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6853-4. \$45.00

Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol. 4*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6856-5. \$45.00

Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol. 2*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6855-8. \$45.00

Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Hope and Community: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol. 5*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6857-2. \$50.00

Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Creation and Humanity: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol. 3*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6857-2. \$50.00

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INTRODUCTION

Multi-volume evangelical systematic theologies are not published everyday, thus Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* is a most welcomed contribution.¹ The project of the Finnish theologian, both professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Docent of Ecumenics in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki in Finland, is groundbreaking in many ways. The most important is his aim to construct a full-scale presentation of Christian doctrine for the twenty-first century. What he means by "constructive theology"² is "an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures, and living faiths" (1:13). He also considers "younger churches" (e.g., free churches of various types and Pentecostal/charismatic groups) as equal conversational partners. Although he has close ties to the Pentecostal church, his work exceeds the growing focus of Pentecostal/charismatic theologians to

demonstrating specifically Pentecostal/charismatic contributions to wider systematic theology.³ He believes that the "integrative" nature of systematic theology is its most distinctive feature in the current theological curriculum. Nevertheless, he hopes that at the end of the constructive task his proposal lines up with biblical revelation and with the best of tradition. He regards the canonical Scripture as ultimate authority "not only in the way Scripture is used in the church, but also on the basis of the 'authorial intention'" (1:11).

My aim here is to highlight some of the important aspects of Kärkkäinen's anthropology which is presented as an individual topic in the second half of his third volume, but, naturally, surfaces in the other volumes also. He develops his anthropology in his usual constructive pluralistic framework but with an emphasized focus on the interface between theology and science. His approach is clearly indebted to the interaction with his colleagues at Fuller Theological Seminary (most notably the nonreductive materialism of Nancey Murphy, Joel Green, and Warren Brown), but he goes beyond them, incorporating the voices of such scholars as Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Philip Clayton, Ted Peters, John Polkinghorne, Keith Ward, N. T. Wright and others.⁴ First, I will give a thematic introduction to his anthropological project, then I will highlight some of its distinctive characteristics, finishing with an attempt to point out some of the advantages, as well as some of the possible liabilities of his proposal.

1 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, vol. 1 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Church in the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); id., *Trinity and Revelation*, vol. 2 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); id., *Creation and Humanity*, vol. 3 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); id., *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 4 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); id., *Hope and Community*, vol. 5 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017). Page numbers in parenthesis in the body of my text are from the various volumes. The Arabic numerals from 1 to 5 designate the particular volume separated with a colon from the page number. For example, 3:239 indicates page 239 in the third volume titled *Creation and Humanity*.

2 Kärkkäinen uses the terms "systematic", "doctrinal", and "constructive" interchangeably.

3 Kärkkäinen considers himself as "Lutherocostal." He was first ordained as a Pentecostal minister in Finland, and then recently, as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

4 The list of cited material is very impressive (the bibliography of volume 3 lists more than 1500 items!).

1. THEMATIC INTRODUCTION

Before he presents his Multidimensional Monism, Kärkkäinen, carefully maps the field of theological anthropology, thereby he “paves the road” for his own proposal. The mapping in itself is “multidimensional” in the sense that it involves time (the historical perspective of theological anthropology), space (surveying diverse living faiths throughout the world), and different cultural dimensions (e.g. church culture, and scientific naturalism).

First, Kärkkäinen accurately points out the shift in biblical scholarship from substance dualism toward a more holistic and monist view of human nature. He also observes that the two creation narratives in the beginning of Genesis signify “a dynamic mutuality, fellowship, and unity-in-diversity among creatures” (3:233). At the same time, he highlights the post-modern turn from individualistic tendencies toward relationality and communion, and from isolation to connectedness within human society and to the rest of creation. Yet his proposal moves beyond both the modern self-affirmed “identity” and the post-modern self-constructed “identity” toward a “robustly God-referential, holistic, and communion-driven account based on trinitarian resources” (3:274). Following John Zizioulas, the Finnish theologian concedes that what gives us identity is our continuous relationship with God. Thus, theologically speaking “identity” is a task.

Although Kärkkäinen deeply engages with sciences (e.g., neuro- and brain science, evolutionary biology, evolutionary epistemology, quantum physics, etc.), he pushes back against the physicalist tendencies of contemporary scholarship of those fields. However, he is able to do it without “falling back” to the conventional dualist alternative. While

emphasizing the importance of physicality, he recognizes that there is a deeper dimension or more-than-physicality in humans. However, according to his claim, this “other dimension” does not signify an ontological otherness. Here he builds on his doctrine of creation where he introduces a view in which creation is not a closed system but fundamentally open to God (i.e., against “physical closure”), and in which emergence is constantly at work (3:104). Creation has a monistic nature which is not characterized by mere physicality or idealism but by a dynamic “pluriformity” (3:345). His anthropological conclusion is “that all views that take the mental as real (existent) and that also therefore assume its causal efficacy, end up being property dualism of some sort” (3:338). However, instead of asserting “dualism” he highlights the “dualistic” tendencies of human life. In his view human beings are psychosomatic unites rather than dual beings (3:337).⁵ Thus, he affirms property dualism and the kind of “no-partism” and “differentiated unity” which is advocated by N. T. Wright. The Finnish theologian seeks to create an account of human nature which can explain all layers of human existence, let it be the physical, biological, psychological, or spiritual.

Although he emphasizes the deep connection between humans and the rest of nature he also provides a “thoughtful critique of the scientific denial of human uniqueness” (3:235).⁶ He sustains that we are more than “advanced mammals” (3:251), and consequently human uniqueness is not a difference in degree but in kind (3:427). He lists some of the

5 With reference to John Polkinghorn.

6 “[T]he tasks of constructive theology,” he declares, “is to provide thoughtful critique of the scientific denial of human uniqueness in its linking of humanity with the rest of creation, or of brain study with a reductionistic denial of the whole concept of human intentions and free will” (3:235).

conventional markers of this uniqueness (i.e., language, Theory of Mind, episodic memory, conscious top-down agency, future orientation, and emotional modulation [3:248–49]) but then he adds his own “items” to the list: the ability to discern beauty and to have deep feelings (e.g., fall in love, or depression), imagination (3:249); (uniquely) human intelligence, self-transcendence/self-reflection, *qualia*, symbolic skills and capacities (3:253–54),⁷ menopause, being born premature (3:255),⁸ and openness beyond time and matter (3:259). He also emphasizes the widespread consensus among the three Abrahamic faiths concerning the unique nature of human beings.

Kärkkäinen describes *H. sapiens* as a “two-natured animal” in whom “genetic and cultural information comes together in an absolute unique way” (3:254).⁹ Creatively combining the scientific and philosophical concepts with Zizioulas’s notions of *extasis* (meaning “standing-outside-of-one’s-self” which emphasizes the openness/transcendence/freedom element) and *hypostasis* (which is the bearer of the totality of human nature [3:290]) he builds his case that human religiosity is, theologically speaking, the “apex of human development” (3:261). It points to the fact that “the concept of God is an essential part for a proper human self-understanding” (3:265).¹⁰

Having been introduced some of the important notions of Kärkkäinen’s theological anthropology let us see how he employs them in his Multidimensional Monism.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL MONISM

Multidimensional Monism intends to provide a terminology which can accurately communicate the “pluriform unity” of the multilayeredness of existence while honoring the monistic nature of reality. Human beings exist in this multilayered reality as psychosomatic pluralistic unities having access to all layers of this complex existence. Accordingly, Kärkkäinen’s proposal is characterized by *holistic multilayeredness*, *pluralistic relationality*, and *unified embodiedness*. I will develop the second portion of this article along these concepts.

2.1 Holistic Multilayeredness

On the one hand, Kärkkäinen concedes both the monist and the holistic anthropology of the Tanakh, but on the other, he does not rule out duality or plurality (3:335, 3:373). Following New Testament scholars like Joel Green, he warns against preconceived dualistic notions, but also pushes back against the view (mostly presented by the same scholars) that every “clearly dualistic passages ... could be forced into a monistic hermeneutic” (3:336). In fact, he proposes that “the most sensitive reading of the biblical data points to a multidimensional, elusive, open-ended conception of human nature” (3:336). He also utilizes the holistic nature of the mainstream Buddhist view in his proposal (3:382, 3:385).

He employs the notion of strong emergence to secure his holistic interpretation of human nature. This concept not only highlights the dynamic nature of human personhood but ensures the “realness” and the causal efficacy of the mental “layer” without sinking back into ontological dualism, which would make his enterprise liable from a scientific point of view.

7 Symbolic skills and capacities are related to language, but Kärkkäinen introduces these concepts in a new light.

8 These two biological traits also underline the fact that human beings are cultural beings by nature.

9 With reference to Philip Hefner.

10 With reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg.

This holistic notion of the person is an ever-unfolding narrative. It is true both about the particular individual, and also about the whole of humanity; depicted both in biological and cultural evolution, and also in personal growth. Here, again, he finds support for the uniqueness of human nature but in a way that also ties humans to the rest of creation. Following Pannenberg, he argues for an exocentric, future-driven interpretation of human nature (3:278). He declares with the late German theologian that the human being “has a center not only in itself but also beyond itself” (3:280). And, as the best representative of this notion, Jesus of Nazareth is the original image of God (3:279). With the same breath Kärkkäinen invites the Spirit into the dialog about human nature. He argues that true existence as self-transcendence can only be cultivated through the Spirit. In this trinitarian framework God’s multiplicity is reflected in humans more than in any other creatures.

2.2 Pluralistic Relationality

Kärkkäinen’s view is pluralistic in two senses. In the commonplace use of the phrase it signifies his methodological commitment to a pluralistic approach in constructive theology. But even more importantly it is pluralistic in the sense that it is neither dualist nor physicalist. Although he advocates for the dual-aspect nature of the world, this “duality” goes beyond material versus mental (3:340). Claiming that dual-aspect monism can lead to a view in which mental is “less than real” he advocates for ontological pluralism (3:340). This pluralism supposed to guarantee that “partism” does not get back through the back door.

His turn to relationality helps theological anthropology to see human beings as persons rather than as individuals (3:290), or “world-

mastering rational” selves (3:272).¹¹ Kärkkäinen regards the *imago Dei* concept as Christian theology’s most significant anthropological concept which claims to provide an account of human nature in relation to its Creator, other creatures, the whole cosmos, and to oneself (3:269, 3:290). By combining creation theology’s stewardship principle with the equal value of each human being based on their relationship to God as *imagines Dei*, and the communion of humanity to the rest of creation he even sets the basic requirements for a fair economic system (3:460).¹² The same concept secures human dignity for the disabled and the sick (4:384).

2.3 Unified Embodiedness

Contrary to the traditional tendency to emphasize the difference between human beings and the rest of the creation, Kärkkäinen aims to establish the unity of the whole of creation. He identifies “the complex unity of the finite world as God’s creation” as a key Christian belief (3:341). Consequently, it is part of the divine mandate “to seek a lifestyle facilitating the flourishing of creation” (3:430–31). As I pointed out above, he proposes a unified picture of creation (“unity of nature”) in which all creation share a common nature. So, it becomes necessary to talk about the “composition’ of the human person in light of the ‘composition’ of the whole cosmos. Whatever ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ there is in the cosmos, small or big, it all has to be integrally connected” (3:344). Thus, even before talking about *imago Dei*, the Finnish theologian wants to talk about *imago*

¹¹ With reference to Stanley Grenz.

¹² The three basic principles are: [1] “freedom and dignity of individuals; [2] satisfaction of the basic needs of all people with special reference to the weak; [3] and protection and flourishing of nature” (3:460—with reference to Miroslav Volf).

mundi.¹³ With this move he intends to hold fast both to the human capacity for transcendence and the embodiedness of this transcendence.

3. KÄRKKÄINEN'S ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF HIS PROJECT

In the third part of this paper I aim to shed more light on his theological anthropology by using notions from every volumes of his constructive enterprise. This list is in no way comprehensive, I only pick and chose a few examples to show how interconnected Kärkkäinen's anthropology is.

3.1 Doctrine of Creation

Kärkkäinen's anthropology is inseparably linked to his work on the doctrine of creation. Thus, it is not an accident that he presents his doctrine of creation alongside with his anthropology in the third volume of is project. I already pointed out several links. Here I only say that after defining nature as creation he affirms that the "personal nature of humanity belongs to the very nature of nature" (3:141).¹⁴ Here, again, he emphasis the close relationship between us and the rest of creation.

3.2 Christology

Kärkkäinen utilizes many of his anthropological notions in his effort to remain faithful to Chalcedonian Christology. His "Holistic, Pluralistic, and Unified" (chapter title on 3:332) Multidimensional Monism gives him the scope for affirming both the "unity and the duality" of Jesus Christ the "God-man" (1:106). A dynamic view of humanity in which growth

and relationality play fundamental roles sets the agenda for his dynamic Christology "From Below to Above" (1:24, 1:237). In this framework Jesus is the "messiah on the way" (1:256).¹⁵ Furthermore, if *theosis* is God's plan from the beginning, as Kärkkäinen presents it, then Christ's embodiment is the perfect fulfillment of that plan. It leads to the concluding remark that "authentic humanity is humanity in God" (1:174).¹⁶ He also points out that many of the problems of Chalcedonian Christology "go back to the use of the terms 'person' and 'nature'" (1:112–13). In Kärkkäinen's view person is a relational term, thus the "personhood" of the eternal Son is played out in his relation to the eternal Father, and thus located in the divine Logos. This concept of personhood gives the necessary "horizon" (1:113) and "boundary" (1:116) to utilize the terms *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis* in a creative way.¹⁷

3.3 Revelation

Kärkkäinen maintains that the divine embodiment is the distinctive principle that supports both the idea of revelation and salvation (2:25), and Jesus is the exemplar of "creaturely fellowship" (1:135). Thus, he confirms that the humanity of the second person of the Trinity is the revelation of God, but adds that, because of its nature (i.e., assuming "real" human life), it is also revelation about humanity. It leads us "beyond the mere possibility of knowing God to union [i.e., to become one] with God" and "Jesus then, of course, represents the culmination of that union" (2:23–24). The

13 With reference to Jürgen Moltmann.

14 With reference to Thomas F. Torrance.

15 With reference to Moltmann.

16 With refernce to Demetrios Bathrellos.

17 These terms are used by the Second Council of Constantinople to ratify that Jesus' "personhood" is "located" in (*enhypostasis*) the divine Logos rather than in his human nature.

incarnation is transforming a particular human life through the Divine Life “by uniting it to itself ... The particular is taken into God, as a foreshadowing of the destiny that awaits all finite things” (2:25).¹⁸

Revelation is dynamic, multidimensional, contingent, partial, incomplete (in the sense that it is unfolding, 2:53), and it is “given in human form” (2:63).¹⁹ The “anthropological argument” seems to indicate that it “belongs to human nature to be open to inquire into the realities beyond the visible world” (2:223). This openness unfolds in an ever-present “wrestling with God” through which human words become the living Word of God by receiving life from God. Thus, his view on human nature is depicted “in action” in Scriptural revelation as an outcome of the divine-human dynamic (2:62–66).

3.4 Pneumatology and Soteriology

Personhood, which is established through relationality and community, plays an important role in his Pneumatology (4:33). The Finnish theologian makes the edifying claim that God’s charismatic gifting ought to think about in personal terms (i.e., humans receive a “Person” instead of a “power”, 4:242, 4:329). In this relational the term “grace” is happening in the dynamics of a loving relationship between (human and divine) persons. From this point of view election is set into a personal and relational context (4:242). Such a framework also makes the salvation resistible thus creates a space for human responsibly (also for free will, which is a major theme in his anthropological volume).²⁰

It also places conversion into a relational context. Here, again, he aims for a wholistic approach and argues against theological reductionism and individualism. The “place of forgiveness” is the Christian community and includes forgiveness “between human persons” (rather than just between the person and God, 4:284); it is a communal act (see subtitle on 4:293). Thus forgiveness “is a manifestation of love for the neighbor” and is a “profound act of hospitality” (4:285, 4:328). Furthermore, the experience of God’s Spirit happens in the “social experience of the self” in the communal perspective of the *imago Dei* which includes the relation between men and women, and their relation to the community of nature (4:190).²¹

Theosis (or deification) is an extremely important term for the Finnish theologian. This concept surfaces in all of the volumes (e.g., 1:174; 2:22–24;²² 3:284, 390, 392; 4:318–321, 356–57; 5:226, etc.). It is not surprising when we consider that it is perfectly in line with his dynamic view of “Humanity in the Becoming” (see subtitle on 3:277). In this framework sanctification is a lifelong progress in praxis of holiness and spirituality in the “earth-grounded” daily life (4:356–59). Based on this idea he proposes a “Trinitarian Form of Salvation as Participation in Divine Life” (see subtitle on 4:344), in which he links the dynamics of salvation with the whole of divine economy and “includes the salvation of communities, and even the whole of creation” (4:346). It is in relation to this concept that he calls to reframe the doctrine of justification as the defining form of soteriology in the West. Although *theosis* is considered

for freedom of choice rather than for freedom of will. Ultimately the human being is a “two-natured animal” and therefore both conditioned and free” (3:359).

21 With reference to Moltmann.

22 Here neither “*theosis*” nor “deification” occurs, but the author referring to texts which were crucial to develop this theological notion.

18 With reference to Keith Ward.

19 Notice the obvious terminological analogy with his anthropology.

20 See chap. 13 in vol. 3, titled “Freedom and Determinism—Divine and Human,” where he argues

as a mainly Eastern Orthodox theological concept, in recent years it became an important topic in ecumenical dialogs. As a professor of ecumenism and one who considers himself as a “Lutherocostal,” Kärkkäinen welcomes this development. He highlights the findings of Tuomo Mannermaa and his school about Luther’s theology of justification and its affinity with the Orthodox notion of *theosis* (4:338ff). From a Pentecostal point of view the underlined focus on the divine-human cooperation in salvation, and thus more openness to the active role of the Holy Spirit in the believers’ everyday life is also appreciated (4:320). He also refers to the recently uncovered similarities between Orthodox and Pentecostal pursuit of holiness (4:356).

His “widening” of the horizon of the doctrine of the Spirit by including human capacity for art is especially interesting from an anthropological point of view (4:184ff.). He describes it as an “elevation of the human person from immanence toward transcendence” (4:185).

3.5 Hamartiology

His doctrine of sin is located within his Anthropology and juxtaposed to the idea of human flourishing in this life. He points out that the Hebrew and Eastern Orthodox notion of sin is rooted in human freedom (and not in original sin). In Orthodox theology sin is depicted as woundedness and sickness. However, sin is still an intrusion to human life (3:400), and better described by “misery” as an umbrella term (3:396), to which only the *imago Dei* concept gives meaning (3:397). Accordingly, sin is a turning away from unification with God, and thus missing the will of God and true human destiny (3:406). Human beings are sinful even before they commit an individual sin, because

sin is located in a deeper (universal) level of human existence, but guilt is imputed only in light of personal responsibility (3:407, 3:410). Sin is transpiring in concrete acts as something against the will of God (3:411), and it is both a personal and a collective/structural matter (3:407). Nevertheless, “the universality of sin is the presupposition for the universality of redemption in Christ” (3:407).

3.6 Eschatology

Kärkkäinen depicts resurrection as the “Destiny of the Cosmos and Humanity” (see chapter title on 5:110). Building on the presumption that “resurrection” is not re-creation from *ex nihilo*, he utilizes his “personalistic” view of human nature to establish a continuity of personhood (and thus find a solution to the “gap” theory).²³ Here the Finnish theologian voices his reservation about some tenets of nonreductive physicalism. His reluctance lies “in the complex and mutually conditioned continuity versus discontinuity relationship between [one’s] own personal life on Earth and life in the resurrected body as well as between [one’s] own personal eternal destiny and that of the whole cosmos” (3:349). Building on the findings of information theory and complex systems theory he describes the “meaning” of the soul as “almost infinitely complex, information-bearing pattern” (3:348, 5:128),²⁴ in “which both continuity and discontinuity are dynamically present” (5:125). Kärkkäinen agrees with Nancey Murphy that the physical parts of the body provide the substrate for all of the personal attributes, holds one’s memories, and allows one to be recognized by others in this

23 I.e., the perceived “gap” in the continuity of personhood between bodily death and bodily resurrection.

24 With reference to John Polkinghorne (also see 3:145ff., with reference to Philip Heffner).

life (5:126), in spite of the fact that the person's biological constitution changes dramatically during one's lifetime because of cell replacement (5:121, 5:126). However, for "new creation" the "matter" (body, physicality) must be different from the earthly body, "notwithstanding the continuity to the point that it still makes sense to speak of 'body' rather than merely 'spirit'" (5:127). Nevertheless, since it is our relationship to God that denotes our identity, this "identity" is ultimately safeguarded by the Creator, who exists in eternal present (5:128).

4. ADVANTAGES AND POSSIBLE LIABILITIES

4.1 Effective and Balanced Science-Faith Interaction

It is not just the wide scope of his science-faith interaction which demands recognition, but, and even more importantly, the effectiveness and creativity of its implementation. His anthropology provides a healthy counterbalance in contemporary theological anthropology by pushing back of its (sometimes too) physicalist tendencies (3:235, 3:328–32). He recognizes that too much physicalism might help the theologian to forge alliance with the majority worldview in the science community, but, at the same time, she loses the opportunity for "mutual critical dialogue" (3:342).²⁵ It also could be counterproductive when it comes to interfaith dialogue. He does not only make it clear that scientific reductionism is not an option for Christian theology but also effectively defends his notions against it. For example, he rightly points out that the reductionist approach to neuroscience, or genetic determinism takes away the possibility of free will (3:350). Yet,

25 With reference to Philip Clayton.

instead of just pushing back against such notions he recognizes the "two-naturedness" of human beings (both determined and free).

4.2 Re-definition of the Meaning of "Soul"

He does not consider it "wise, let alone necessary, to leave behind the ancient term 'soul,' even if traditional dualism is let go" (3:345). He gives several reasons for his assessment: (1) the theologians' work is not to eliminate, but "to help the faithful to grasp its redefinition, as they have for many other terms whose meaning have changed" (3:345); (2) it is "so widely and frequently used in the biblical canon—and consequently everywhere in Christian tradition—that its dismissal seems to be totally unfounded and counterproductive as it may cause the rejection of the proposal itself without further investigation" (3:346); (3) it would seriously hinder interreligious dialogue (3:345); and lastly, (4) it is not the term itself to be blamed for causing certain kinds of ills in Christian tradition, but its misuse (3:345).²⁶ As we already saw above, instead of trying to define the ontological base for the soul or spirit of humans he talks about the meaning of the soul as a complex information-bearing pattern.

4.3 Christology

Multidimensional Monism opens new possibilities for a twenty-first century reinterpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. I mentioned above how the personal unity of the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth can be

26 Physicalists routinely accuse dualists with gnostic tendencies. There are several claims in this line of argument (e.g., diminishing the role of the physicality of human existence, thus encouraging an unhealthy relation to the body; emphasizing individuality over collectivity; one-sided focus on the "afterlife" which leads to negligence of the issues regarding to everyday life, etc.).

established in this context. Moreover, Jesus' sinlessness means that he lived in an unbroken dynamic relationship with the Father through the Spirit. Another possibility is about the "perfection" of the God-man. How can a perfect being "develop" (Luke 2:40) or being thirsty or tired (John 4:6-7)? A dynamic, "unfolding" perspective of human nature, which is based on *theosis* and the *imago Dei* principles, Jesus Christ was perfect because he lived out this dynamic role in perfect accordance with the eternal will of the Father in every aspect. This living, dynamic perfection only can be evaluated from the future, from eschaton, which makes the eschatological relevance of the resurrection even more powerful.

4.4 All-embracing Humanity

Since the most basic tenet about humanity is our relatedness to God as *imagines Dei*, everybody (even the physically or mentally disabled) bears the image. It is this relation, established and depending on the Creator, which secures the dignity of all human life (3:285). Kärkkäinen also makes it clear that it does not mean that Christian theology should not support human attempts to establish and protect human dignity. Following this principle, racism, for example, is a threefold sin. It is a sin against another human being, it denies the permanent value of the Creator's work of humanity, and divides humanity. Being faithful to his trinitarian approach he says that "[d]iversifying unity, loving and accepting embrace of the other, and peace are ontologically founded in the triune God" (3:454). A page later he adds: "Acting on the basis of hospitality rather than violence, Christians should therefore be guided by the spirit of openness, inclusion, and welcoming the other" (3:455). These are very apprehending notions, but they seem to be a rather utopian,

and thus somewhat unrealistic. What this note, I turn to some of the perceived liabilities of Kärkkäinen's anthropology.

4.5 Monism or Something Else?

Kärkkäinen insists that his notion of human nature is a strongly monist one. Yet it is neither idealist nor merely physicalist. On the one hand, he puts much emphasis on the physical or bodily dimension of human existence, but on the other, he claims that a truly Christian anthropology must embrace the spiritual dimension(s) of existence. He thinks that "any authentic physicalism ultimately leads to 'ontological physicalism,' according to which all there is physical" (3:341). He refrains the classic idea of "inner life" as an experience of God in the social dimension of the self and the personal experience of sociality and not as a mystical experience (3:292).²⁷ He also maintains that it is the unparalleled complexity of the human brain that allows us to do certain thing which only make sense "in terms of activities that transcend matter" (3:256). Following Nancey Murphy and Warren Brown, he describes the brain as "a nested, hierarchic action loop in constant interaction with the surroundings" (3:256). These abilities are "responsible" for all openness toward the future and beyond the physical. Thus, human intelligence is not determined by genes, but developed in the "complex interaction of genetic, psychological, cultural factors" (3:254). His strong emphasis on the notion of emergence also fits into the nonreductionist agenda. Still, other times he warns against a too strong physicalism. It seems that the only thing we can safely say about his attempt to find a "radical middle" is that there is only one kind of stuff that underlines human existence. What

²⁷ Referring to Moltmann.

is this stuff? He does not (cannot?) say. But maybe it is more important for him to affirm that this stuff becomes human not on its own capacity, but because its manifold relatedness to the manifold God. A related question is how the “information bearing pattern” (i.e., the redefined “soul”) is related to this stuff? Or is it the stuff itself?

4.6 Distorted View of Greco-Roman Anthropology

One of the advantages of Kärkkäinen's methodology, which marks all of his volumes, is that he always provides a careful historical background for his topics. His anthropology is not an exception. However, here (following Pannenberg and mostly nonreductive physicalist scholars) he somewhat oversimplifies the process of how “dualism” won the day in early Christian anthropology. This view communicates that Christian theology was “corrupted” by the “mainstream” Neoplatonist dualism of the Greco-Roman world. However, more recent scholarship pushes back against this notion. First, it seems that what is called “Neoplatonism” today was much more a harmonization of Platonist-Aristotelian philosophy.²⁸ Second, while it distinguished itself with its dualist ontology it was far from being the only anthropological option of the time.²⁹ What made “dualism” commonplace

in Western thought was the fact that the late Church Fathers choose this view as the base of their anthropology, and later, as Christianity became the leading intellectual force of Western thought, so did its preferred dualism.

These final remarks are by no means intend to lessen the merits of Kärkkäinen's anthropological achievement. They are only attempting to point towards additional “dimensions” in the manifold life of human existence. As stated in my subtitle, I regard Multidimensional Monism as a new framework for theological anthropology, and very much looking forward how it is going to be utilized in future theological initiatives. I make the claim that there is no parallel to Kärkkäinen's anthropological enterprise in contemporary theological anthropology. Although he confesses that for many years he did not feel competent to “handle” creation and anthropology (3:465) the scope and creativity of his work proves his competence.

Viktor Tóth

Viktor Tóth is a PhD candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary in Theological Anthropology. In connection with theological resources, his fields of research include brain sciences, complex systems theory, philosophy of mind, psychology, and paleoanthropology. He currently studies Phenomenology at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. He is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, USA. He holds various ecclesiastical positions.

28 Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22. Also in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 84.

29 Recent publications on the issue are: Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The Incorporability of the Soul in Patristic Thought” in R. Keith Loftin and Joshua R. Farris, eds., *Christian Physicalism?: Philosophical Theological Criticisms* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018) and Paul L. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on the Ultimate Questions*, vol. 44 in *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

