

CHILD THEOLOGY

Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives

EDITED BY MARCIA J. BUNGE, PHD



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With heartfelt gratitude for my parents

and for those who teach us to see the image of God in all people.

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This method of theological engagement has contributed to the transformation of the entire range of theological disciplines, including biblical studies, systematic theology, and ethics. Under the influence of liberation theologies, theology has been notably transformed from an academic exercise in a university context to a discipline that engages the urgent issues facing marginalized people and an endangered creation.

If all theologians attended to the experiences and suffering of children, how would this transform the practice of theology in its various disciplines? It would mean, above all, seeing children as persons and recognizing that the forms of suffering that children experience are not the same as those of adults. We would expand the range of sources employed in theological study, giving attention to the process of human development, socioeconomic issues affecting children, resources from childhood studies (including history and literature), and other sources that allow the voices and ideas of children to be heard. We would view all the urgent issues facing our society—including environmental crises, systemic racism, gender justice, poverty, and education—from the perspective of their impact on children, and develop strategies for deepening and expanding public advocacy efforts that focus on the issues facing children.

This chapter argues that the experiences of children have been either absent from or underrepresented in the work of liberation theologians and offers directions for renewed focus on children across diverse theological disciplines. Any form of theological method has the capacity and opportunity to recognize children as persons, take seriously their experiences, and hear their cries of suffering as well as their stories, ideas, and hopes. Only by drawing attention to the unique, varied, and complex experiences of children within the very method of theology will they no longer remain ciphers or nonpersons within the work of theology. "Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children" (Sitting Bull).

THE POWER OF ENGAGING THEOLOGIES OF CREATION AND CHILDHOOD

Michael Welker

Christians worldwide believe that God "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1), and theologies of creation explore the meaning of this confession of faith. In doing so, theologies of creation address fundamental questions about the nature of God, human beings, and the world. Given the major role science plays in our understanding of the world today, many contemporary theologies of creation also directly address relationships between biblical understandings of creation and various scientific explanations, such as of the human genome, evolution, and climate change.

As a Reformed theologian who has a long history of interdisciplinary engagement with philosophy and the sciences, I have sought to provide an alternative to theologies of creation that dismiss scientific discoveries or theologically conceptualize "creation" by means of simplistic conceptual dichotomies. Theologians are easily tempted to build on dichotomies in exploring the meaning of creation because the distinction between creator and creature is fundamental to Christian theology. Since Christians believe that God is the creator of the universe, the creator/creature dichotomy tends to govern creation theology from the outset. Shaped by the nondichotomous thinking of complex modern systematic thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead, G. W. F. Hegel, and Niklas Luhmann, but most of all by careful attention to the complexities of the biblical witnesses, my work emphasizes that the biblical distinction between creator and creature cannot be reduced to familiar dichotomies such as "cause/effect," "determiner/determined," or "former/formed." By attending carefully to the biblical witness, my work on creation highlights multiple and dynamic structures and relationships in our world that speak to our lived experience and resonate with scientific findings.¹ Devoted to the dialogue between theology

¹ For my theological work on creation and relationships between theology and science,

and the sciences, I have worked with church leaders and religious educators who understand that simplistic misconceptions of creation are inadequate not only for adults but also children.

Regardless of the range of resources being developed by theologians and church leaders for thinking and teaching about creation in meaningful and biblically informed ways, simplistic notions of creation that our work has sought to dismantle are still being passed on to children in homes and congregations. For example, when our twin daughters were two years old, "paradise" became a big topic in bedside conversations. Paradise was fascinating. The angels were there, God was there, Great-Grandmother was there. Our children imagined it as a wonderful place, full of joy, harmony, and love. The notion of paradise prompted their speculations and questions, and it gave rise to much awe and wonder. One night, however, the little girls asked my wife, "What are we going to eat in paradise?" The answer came: "In paradise we are not going to eat and drink. We will praise God for ever and ever." Our children expressed a deep sigh of disappointment, followed by the remark, "Well, we are still little kids [Na, wir sind ja noch klein]." And paradise vanished from our conversation. When we told this story to a very kind and experienced pastor, my wife and I received the following lesson: "You should have said: 'I do not know what we are going to eat and drink in paradise. But I'm sure it will be much better than what we have here.'" Were we to pass down the simplistic notion of God and heaven—always bigger and better?

Simplistic "theology" was also passed down to me in my early childhood. My siblings and I liked to sing the religious song: "Do you know how many stars there are in the deep blue sky above? . . . God alone has counted them all so that not one is missed from their enormous number" [Original German: *Weisst du, wieviel Sternlein stehen an dem blauen Himmelszelt? . . . Gott der Herr hat sie gezählt, dass ihm auch nicht eines fehlet an der ganzen großen Zahl*].² And so the song went on from stars to clouds, gnats, fish, and children. God has counted them all. God knows their number. The All-Counting, Almighty God! Early in my childhood this song sounded comforting. But already in my pre-electronic and pre-social media childhood this trust in the all-counting and in analogous ways all-knowing and almighty God became shaken whenever

see, for example, *The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); and *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, ed. Michael Welker and John Polkinghorne (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

² This song, with lyrics written by the German pastor and poet Wilhem Hey in 1837 and set to a melody based on a folk song, has been included in German Protestant hymnals through today. See Nr. 511 in the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*.

our pets died or beloved grandparents became terminally ill. Today, children are still struggling to bring together the message of the almighty, all-knowing, and all-determining God with the everyday news of a fragile, finite, suffering, and violence-ridden world. Children are handed fairy-tale and Disney visions of God and creation that everyday realities constantly tear apart.

Against this background, those who seek to articulate theologies of creation framed in the light of a strong theological understanding of children face a double challenge. On the one hand, theologies of creation need to attend more explicitly to children and young people when discussing human nature or communities. Acknowledging that children are part of God's creation with their unique needs and strengths will enrich many aspects of theologies of creation. Just as feminist theologies deepened many areas of theological reflection by drawing attention to gender biases and discrimination, child-attentive theologies will strengthen theological reflection by exposing age-based and adult-centered biases. On the other hand, creation topics framed in the light of a strong theology of childhood have to engage classic texts and topical theological insights and ask: In what ways have creation topics been presented and taught to children, and in what ways should they be taught in the future? Where did religious education materials and pedagogies create a false and misleading trust in creation, in nature, in life, in the world, and in the creator? Where did they give a paltry picture of God's creativity and loving care, presenting God flatly and one-dimensionally and thereby generating among young people a deep suspicion against "the blind watchmaker"³ and eventually against the church itself?

In addition to these two challenges, theologies of both creation and childhood have to recognize children's honesty, their ability and willingness to engage religious ideas and highly speculative thoughts, and their experiential realism. Children are complex human beings, as research in a growing number of fields related to child well-being indicates, including studies of brain development and emotional intelligence.⁴ Systematic theologians and religious educators both need to challenge simplistic views of children and their spiritual and religious experience. Respect, realism, and honesty are crucial in theological discussions with children as well as adults, and any approach to the religious education of children must deal responsibly with the enormous potentials for creative imagination in young minds and with the vulnerability of young hearts.

³ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

⁴ Cf. John Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012).

Keeping in mind the complexity of children, the primary aim of this chapter is to contribute to theologies of both creation and childhood by reviewing four central creation topics that I have addressed in my previous work and raising these two questions: First, how might attention to children enrich and expand our understanding of these topics? Second, in what way might adults present these central biblical and doctrinal creation topics to children in order to stimulate their religious imaginations, on the one hand, and to protect their sense of honesty and realism, on the other? In this chapter I introduce each of the four creation topics along with commonly raised questions, and I draw implications of each topic, first, for theologies of creation and then for religious formation. Although many more implications from these four creation topics can be drawn, the primary aim is to indicate how attention to children can strengthen theologies of creation and how robust theologies of creation can honor children's questions, spark their religious imagination, and strengthen child-adult relations. Being honest with children and having the readiness to correct a cheap triumphant theism early in their lives will have positive repercussions not only for children but also for parents, teachers, and the church. Hopefully, these brief reflections inspire systematic theologians and religious educators to draw further implications as they reflect on and teach a host of additional creation topics and encourage the church to resist the temptation to perpetuate narrow dichotomies between God and creation as well as adults and children.

Creation in Seven Days?

In its first chapter, the Bible states that God created the world in seven days. Contemporary science states that the world (the cosmos) is 13.8 billion years old. Is the Bible naïve?—offering stories “just for kids”? It is a most important dimension in theologies of childhood and child advocacy to get rid of any condescending “just for kids” perspective in religious education.⁵ The creation account (Gen 1) does not offer a fairy tale. It presents serious insights. It expresses a much more differentiated perception of reality than grasped by those who see this account as the expression of a naïve and outdated worldview. This becomes obvious as soon as we concern ourselves with some of the apparent inconsistencies or even contradictions of the text.

On one hand, Genesis states, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Gen

1:3–5). On the other hand, nine verses later, Genesis describes the creation of the sun, moon, and stars that are to separate day and night: “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years.’” (Gen 1:14ff).

If we approach these statements without sensitivity to this text's particular perception of the world, then it seems to be propounding contradictory nonsense. How could God create light without creating the sun, moon, and stars? Why is the separation of day from night carried out twice? Is this separation carried out directly by God, or are the sun, moon, and stars to separate day from night? Such questions, which with apparent cleverness hold themselves aloof from this supposedly naïve text that cannot clearly work out its ideas, do not perceive the differentiated view of reality that is developed here.

The light of God—the light in which God creates, rests, and is alive and effective—is not simply identical with the light in which human beings and other creatures live. The Bible differentiates the “days of the Lord” and the days on earth, below the sky. And it knows that the “days of the Lord” are immense spans of time: “For a thousand years in [God's] sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night” (Ps 90:4). In these long spans of time, the Bible depicts first the creation of cosmological, then biological, then cultural, and finally religious processes at work. It describes a great architecture of creation, an insight that is valid also in today's scientific perspective.⁶ Only when domains of life are interwoven do they become “creation” in the strict sense.

Implications

As theologians reflect on domains of life and the great architecture of creation, they should recognize more carefully the role of children in the dynamic development of the human species, communities, cultures, and religious traditions. This means articulating theologies of creation that respect children as persons, recognize their needs, and honor their gifts and contributions to creation's vast architecture and various domains.

In addition, if we want to nurture children's spiritual lives as we teach them about creation, then it is crucial to help them understand the relativity of time—long days, short days, patience, impatience, hope, human and divine perspectives—and biblical thinking in different time systems. In learning about Genesis 1, children should engage the texts imaginatively. Unimaginative readings aimed strictly at religious learnings flatten the complexities and narrative

⁶ Welker, *Creation and Reality*, chapter 1; Michael Welker, *The Theology and Science Dialogue: What Can Theology Contribute?* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012), 23–30.

⁵ Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 25–28.

richness of Genesis 1 and neglect children's agency in their spiritual development. Furthermore, flat and "factual" lessons taught to children about Genesis 1 set children up for unnecessary quandaries as they wrestle one day with the relationship between faith and science. Thus, as we teach children about creation, we must invite their questions and insights, engaging them in developmentally appropriate ways.

Does God Do Everything in Creation?

No! God does not do everything in creation. The creature's own activity is not simply a consequence and result of a creation that is already completed. Rather the creature's activity is embedded in the process of creation and participates in that process (cf. Gen 1:11ff.). God gives enormous power to all creatures, not only human beings. Anxiety about the creature's own power being too great is apparently foreign to the classical creation texts of the biblical traditions, and this anxiety tends to entrench itself behind the theistic model of absolute causation and absolute dependence. God is the "all-determining reality," the "cause of everything." This primitive model of God's so-called omnipotence is poisonous. It provokes the question: Why does God allow finitude, suffering, and death in creation?

Instead of dreams about the "perfect watchmaker," we encounter in the classical creation texts a rich description of that which is creaturely engaged in the activity of separating, ruling, producing, developing, and reproducing itself. Yes, God separates the cosmic powers; but that which is creaturely—the firmament of the heavens, the gathering water and the stars—also assumes functions of separation (Gen 1:6, 9, 18). Yes, God rules; but that which is creaturely—the stars—also rules by the establishment of rhythm, differentiation, and the gift of measure and order (Gen 1:14ff.). Yes, God brings forth; but creatures also bring forth creatures: animals of all species and plants in an abundance of species (Gen 1:12, also 1:11, 20, 24). That which is creaturely develops and reproduces itself, as is recorded explicitly and in detail with regard to plants, animals, and human beings. The Bible describes creation, as itself active, separating, ruling, and imparting rhythm, as itself producing and giving life.

From a biblical perspective, creation and evolution are not incompatible. Indeed, the biblical view of creation cannot abstract from its evolutionary activity. It is most important to notice that the participatory activity of that which is creaturely is not only reserved for human beings.

Furthermore, the creation narratives of the Bible speak of God's *reactive experiencing and acting* as he responds to the presence of that which is created. They describe God intervening in that which is already created. Seven times the

first creation account says, "And God saw that what had been created was good" (Gen 1:4a, 10b, 12b, 18b, 21b, 25b, 31a). Three times it emphasizes God's activity of naming (Gen 1:5a, 8a, 10a). Twice God intervenes in that which is already created in order to separate it (Gen 1:4b, 7b). God saw, God evaluated, God named, God separated, God brought to the human being, God allowed to be named, and God reacted to the needy situation of loneliness and helplessness of the human being who is not yet differentiated into man and woman (Gen 2). According to the classical creation texts, all these activities and re-activities are part of the complex "creation" event. All these reactive activities, which relate to that which is already "produced," are requisite in order to bring the process of the creation of heaven and earth to a close.

Implications

Insights into the creative and participatory activity of all of God's creatures can strengthen theologies of creation and help the church appreciate more fully that human beings have creative powers, not only as adults but also as children. After all, from the start, infants are thinking, sorting out, and creatively interacting with the world. Insights from both the Bible and new, groundbreaking social-scientific research on brain development and child development can help us all more deeply appreciate the growing capacities and contributions of children and young people.

Furthermore, we must honor children's growing spiritual and intellectual capacities when we talk to children about God's powers and relation to the world. Biblical insights into God's reactive experiencing and acting specifically remind us that an abstract theism of a God who does "everything" is not biblically sound, and this notion should not be passed along as "good enough" for either children or adults. The church has a responsibility to critique this metaphysical ideology at every level of religious education and spiritual formation.

Do the Creatures Become God?

If God gives such a great power to the creatures, if God reacts to the activity of the creatures, then is there not the danger of confusing "both sides": the divine and human, the infinite and the finite? The basic problem here is the idea of there being only "two sides." Most religious and metaphysical thinking regards "God and man," "God and the world," and "creator and creation" in a one-to-one figure. In this figure, any co-creativity threatens the power of the Divine. The biblical creation account, however, presents multiple dimensions and structures. God relates creatively to different co-creative creatures and to different

creatively powerful and even evolutionary activity. It is remarkable how the biblical creation account seems interested in a compatibility of its insights with general observations on the course of natural history. In contrast to some other ancient oriental creation accounts, the biblical account honors creaturely powers while eliminating any deification of sun, moon, and stars, of the heavens and the earth. It counteracts the divinization of the powers of heaven and earth as well as the eerie monsters from the deep. The stars and the "great sea monsters," the *tannim*, are not gods on high or anti-gods from the deep. They are creatures with great powers yet not divine. To make this point, Genesis explicitly emphasizes that "God created the great sea monsters" (1:21) or, as Luther translates, "the big Whales."

Implications

The biblical appreciation of creaturely powers as well as the distinction between creature and creator can help us think more dynamically and deeply about human relations, including child-adult relationships. If we think of all human beings, children and adults alike, as fellow co-creators, then people of all ages might relate to one another more respectfully, nimbly, and creatively.

Furthermore, a robust theology of creation that both cultivates a sense for creaturely powers and honors people of all ages as co-creators could, in turn, foster more meaningful and intergenerational theological conversations within families and congregations.

How Is Creation "Good"?

On the basis of these observations, the creation account clearly speaks of the world in which we live. Creation is not paradise. Creation is not glorious. God calls it "good" —which means "life furthering." But it is not an extension of the Divine. It is radically different from God. Honest talk about creation has to acknowledge the ambivalence of nature and life. All life lives at the expense of other life! The regulation of conflicts between the human beings and the animals and the "call to dominion" expresses this clearly:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, so that they have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." . . . God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and

over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food." (Gen 1:26, 28, 29a)

Both verbs used here in the biblical text—*rdb* (trample under, subjugate) and *kbs* (subjugate)—belong "in the context of violent subjugation and domination." Both words for domination are otherwise applied to slaves or to a conquered land.⁷ How is this compatible with human beings' ordination to be the *imago Dei*? What light do these human beings reflect back upon the God whose likeness they are?

Genesis 1:30, a verse that normally receives little attention in the context of the question we are posing, offers a key that is at first glance wholly unremarkable. Genesis 1:29 reads, "God said: 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.'" Then follows verse 30: "'And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so."

Both human beings and animals are to take their nourishment from the plants that sprout on the surface of the whole earth. Human beings and animals thus have a common realm of life and nourishment. One can already envision problems, tensions, and colliding interests. How will conflicts of interest between human beings and animals be regulated? How should human beings behave toward animals when, in the latter's interests in nourishment, they drive the human beings away from plants yielding seed? How should animals behave toward human beings, when human beings use the plants yielding seed for their own nourishment? It is at this point that the situation necessitates the so-called mandate of dominion.

The mandate of dominion serves to impart a differentiated order to the "world of nourishment" shared by human beings and animals. This order is established through a hierarchy of power. On the one hand, human beings and animals are neighbors and live together in a common sphere. On the other hand, it is clear and unequivocal that animals—analogueous to slaves and subjugated peoples—are living beings secondary and subordinate to humankind. There is no question of allowing one's neighbor to starve in favor of one's house pet. Human beings have primacy over animals. In no case may an animal be given higher status than a human being. That is radically excluded. At the same

⁷ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 161, cf. 147ff. 158–159.

time, there is a *community* of nourishment and of interests between human beings and animals. Just as the admittedly lesser rights of slaves are secured in the Old Testament bodies of law, and just as the subjugation of foreign peoples can extend to taking them into service but not to exterminating them, so the relation of human beings to animals is a relation of tolerance and of preservation in human beings' own interest.

Of course, biblically based and theologically sound Christian theology today does not support slavery nor subjugating persons because, as the biblical witness states, all human beings are made in the "image of God." Furthermore, as the Bible commands and as Jesus's own teachings and example confirm, we are called to "love your neighbor as yourself," and the foreigner, the stranger, and the marginalized are all our "neighbors."

However, the mandate of dominion provides for an unquestionably one-sided and hierarchical relation between human beings and animals. We should not cultivate romantic images about this relation. At the same time, this unquestionably hierarchical relation must not involve brutal or indifferent extermination. Instead, it is positively determined in a twofold manner. *First*, it is God's will that human beings stand in a community of solidarity not only with each other but also with other creatures. *Second*, as "God's image," human beings stand in a specific relation over against animals. They are made "royal deputies of God the Creator."⁸

As such royal deputies, human beings have to exercise justice and mercy among their fellow creatures. They thus are to extend God's righteousness and care regardless of their designated domination over other creatures. The fact that they are supposed to have "dominion" over the animals also means that they must exercise responsibility toward animals. As rulers over animals, human beings must grant animals a relative level of "rights." The "call to dominion" singles out both conflicts and tensions in creation and a divine care that involves the creativity of human beings.

The call to dominion and the image of God go hand in hand. God privileges and ennobles human creatures to care for the earth and their fellow creatures. Care, love, and responsibility are expected from human creatures. This call opens up enormous realms of ethical reasoning for all people. Many ethical issues come to mind that need addressing: from issues of very individual and personal behavior to threats of global ecological self-endangerment and gigantic political responsibilities.

⁸ Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte*, 2nd ed., Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 112 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987), 90.

Implications

As the church seeks to address ethical and environmental issues, it is crucial to discuss concrete challenges and actions in the framework of a robust theology of creation that emphasizes respect for the powers of creation as well as its frailty and its self-endangerment (sickness, death, and sin) among all generations. A theology of creation framed in the light of a strong theology of childhood also needs to recognize more fully that all human beings, including children, are made in God's image and called to care for the earth. By honoring children's full humanity, the church might more intentionally support and empower children as well as more readily recognize the creative and effective initiatives for environmental justice and human rights that young people worldwide are already leading.

Furthermore, any theological discussion of creation with young people cannot avoid recognizing the realities young people themselves see around them, including the tensions, ambivalences, inner power struggles, and brutalities involved in creation as well as urgent social and environmental injustices. As we honor young people's realism, concerns, and activism, we can, at the same time, nurture the church's commitment to care, love, and responsibility by emphasizing God's "good" and "life-furthering" creation, the biblical meaning of dominion, the "common realm of life and nourishment" shared by human beings and animals, and our "community of solidarity." We cannot start early enough with these messages.

Conclusion

A theology of creation is not a theology with simple answers to complex questions. A theology of creation has to help children and adults honestly explore ethical tensions and conflicts. It has to deal with the deep truth that children and adults both experience life in the tension between frailty, helplessness, despair, a sense of power, encouragement, and hope. The complexity of creation topics challenges us to enter again and again into the community of new learning. To navigate honestly and responsibly both cognitively and ethically in this tense field is crucial for this intergenerational community of learning.

The farewell to simplistic notions of the Divine and of creation is crucial for children and adults. We have to see that God did not create a paradise but a world that is very different from God and God's heavenly existence. This creation is called "good" in the biblical creation account: a creation in which fragile and finite beings are endowed with powers and capacities. God does not spare us from this life. God is also not omnipotent. But God reveals us his power to create new and good things even out of suffering, need, and death.

Furthermore, a robust theology of creation deepens our awareness of the enormous breadth and depth of human persons, including children. On the one hand, we are frail and poor and helpless, "dust from dust" (cf. Gen 3:19). On the other hand, God has made us "little lower than God" (Ps 8:5). Here we see the seeds and grounds of human dignity and human glory. The enormous tensions in creation and in human personhood and existence raise a sense of awe and wonder as well as deep gratitude and hope.

As we continue to explore issues related to theologies of creation and childhood, we must expand and build on other domains and subfields in theology. We cannot separate these topics from other areas of theological reflection. Theologies of creation and childhood can, for example, build on and enrich the area of theological anthropology.⁹ Doing so will help us to overcome reductionist perspectives on the human being and to investigate the fascinating polyphony of human existence: flesh, body, heart, soul, conscience, reason, and spirit. Keeping in mind the full humanity of people of all ages, we can also appreciate more fully the enormous array of human gifts and powers as well as limits and vulnerabilities across stages of human development. Theological anthropology will also be strengthened by paying attention to God's dealing with this existence in the power of God's Spirit and God's reign, in the guidance through the life, work, and reign of Jesus Christ. In these and other ways, various domains and subfields can continue to enrich one another.¹⁰

⁹ For more on theological anthropology, see Michael Welker, "Flesh–Body–Heart–Soul–Spirit: Paul's Anthropology as Interdisciplinary Bridge-Theory," in *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); and Michael Welker, *In God's Image: An Anthropology of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

¹⁰ With gratitude to Marcia J. Bunge, Megan Eide, and John F. Hoffmeyer for their careful review of and positive suggestions for the chapter. Marcia Bunge has also written and added most of the passages on "Implications" in this chapter.

CHILDREN IN AFRICAN THEOLOGIES OF COMMUNITY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

Kenneth Mtata

Understandings of humanity and the human person have shaped Christian theology in many ways. This is indeed also true of African theology. As Zimbabwean theologian Gwinyai Muzorewa observed, "How African humanity has traditionally perceived itself is of primary importance to a developing African theology."¹

Over the past century, African theologians have offered various insightful perspectives on the human person in the context of changing cultural and political realities. For example, in reaction to colonialism and missionary domination, early twentieth-century African theologians formulated conceptions of the person that seriously considered African traditions and cultures. In the context of racial segregation in apartheid South Africa, Black theologians highlighted blackness as a God-given source of pride in opposition to the pejorative perspectives of the racists. African feminist and womanist theologians expanded African constructions of the human person by showing how all the previous constructions worked with an assumption of a male African person. African theology's advancement was therefore closely tied to advances in the expansion of its anthropology.

Although varied, these and other African theologies integrally connect understandings of the individual to community and articulate what have been called "communitarian notions of personhood." Such notions emphasize that the human person can only be understood and defined in relation to others. African communitarian understandings of the human person were prompted in part by critiques of Western anthropologies that defined the self as rational

¹ Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 16; cf. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 77–81.