

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie  
**Band:** 112 (2022)  
**Heft:** 1  
  
**Artikel:** The face of frailty : some notes on vulnerability in the ecumenical document "Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology"  
**Autor:** Huian, Georgiana  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1074521>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 23.12.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# The Face of Frailty: Some Notes on Vulnerability in the Ecumenical Document “Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology”

Georgiana Huian

## 1. Setting the Stage: Vulnerable Anthropology or an Anthropology of Vulnerability?

Contemporary anthropologists often struggle with the question of human vulnerability. Is this human trait negative or positive? Should we eradicate vulnerability from our society or rediscover its creative potential? Is this trait a sign of weakness or a testimony to the great human capacity to relate to one another and offer true open-heartedness? Is vulnerability an accident of circumstance, or is it intrinsic to the fabric of human nature? Does it abide within the essence of what it means to be human, or does it change and fit itself to different manifestations? One may argue, in fact, that anthropological considerations are themselves *vulnerable* if they fail to accommodate and accept the reality of human vulnerability. Indeed, anthropologies must accept their own vulnerabilities as they uncover systematic theories of vulnerability.

This essay examines how the Faith and Order study document entitled “Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology”<sup>1</sup> considers vulnerability as the manifestation of human unfulfilment, despite our reflection of the image of God. My study questions the identification of vulnerability with seen, touched, relational, and embodied “brokenness”. Furthermore, I question whether or not this “brokenness” argument fully accounts for human vulnerability. I argue that vulnerability consists in more than brokenness or fragility, and instead reflects the image of the suffering, crucified, and resurrected Christ. Human fragility can only be understood in relation to the image of the fragility transfigured in Christ, which is where the true depths of human vulnerability are laid bare. Far from being a deficient ontological or moral structure, vulnerability unlocks our capac-

---

<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology. A Faith and Order Study Document* (Faith and Order Paper 199; Geneva: WCC, 2005) [hereafter: CPTA].

ity for renewal in Christ. It is not, therefore, the negation of perfection, but rather the precondition for its fulfilment.

## **2. Looking at the Script: Some Considerations of Objectives and Method**

Published in 2005, the “Christian Perspectives” document claims to be neither “an ecumenical consensus text” nor “a comprehensive systematic Christian anthropology”.<sup>2</sup> Instead, it presents an overview of affirmations concerning humanity that are common across all churches, while also identifying and classifying differences in anthropological views within these churches. The document responds to various challenges facing humanity today, and encourages Christians from different denominations to “work together”<sup>3</sup> and assume a common – or at least coherent – stance in the face of those challenges. I identify below three main claims established in the document:

1. To advise churches in the decantation of core anthropological affirmations towards a consensus.<sup>4</sup>
2. To persuade churches to identify and evaluate their differences according to common normative criteria, defining “legitimate diversity”.<sup>5</sup>
3. “[T]o encourage the churches in working together on the spiritual, ethical and material challenges facing humanity today.”<sup>6</sup> To remind churches of their common agency<sup>7</sup> and individual or shared responsibilities in today’s troubled world.

Vulnerability occupies a crucial position *at the heart of these ambitions*, and therefore, to achieve these objectives, it must be accommodated within the model of “legitimate diversity” and remain a core part of the fellow-

---

<sup>2</sup> CPTA, § 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> CPTA, §§ 2, 13 and 127. See also the ten common affirmations on theological anthropology regarded both as “results of the study process” and as incentives for further reflection fostering a common anthropological view and action (§ 2). These affirmations structure the argument and development of the whole text and are gathered together again, as if in a proposal for an “anthropological *credo*”, in § 127 and inside the book cover.

<sup>5</sup> CPTA, §§ 3 and 120–123.

<sup>6</sup> CPTA, § 3.

<sup>7</sup> CPTA, §§ 124–126.

ship of the churches and of their common actions. Such common actions require coordinated reflection and convergent strategies, implemented across the whole Christian body. However, human “brokenness” is complex: when adjusting and addressing concerns of vulnerability according to the objectives of this ecumenical dialogue, do we risk losing sight of the depths of vulnerability, both personal and corporate?

The exploration of human vulnerability is thus one of the chief objectives of the document, which also employs a methodological toolbox to present its claims. An inductive method is first used to identify the challenges in today’s experiences at historical-political, socio-economical, scientific, medical, and ethical levels. These challenges are then grouped into three illustrative sets, split further into sub-sets, but gathered under three overarching concepts: brokenness, disability, and technology. Finally, the document presents the challenges as objects of theological reflection, in order “to gain fresh insights on theological anthropology relevant and applicable to our new global context”.<sup>8</sup>

The word “challenges”<sup>9</sup> is a key scaffold in the grammatical structure of reality presupposed – or even projected – within this document. This choice of vocabulary may be considered reductive, as it reduces human experiences down to either challenges or reactions to challenges. Structuring the study around this presupposition also fits reality into pre-established criteria: the study selects only empirical phenomena that fall into the “challenges” category. The theoretical choice of *an anthropology modelled in response to “new” challenges* thus precedes and predetermines the inductive method.

### 3. Choosing the Actors: Notions and Images

The document includes a broad range of terms and images that identify human vulnerability, covering different sets of overlapping phenomena. From this classification, the text constructs a paradigm of brokenness based on “family resemblances” between different terms. To examine

---

<sup>8</sup> CPTA, § 21.

<sup>9</sup> The term “challenges” may also be questioned: why not sorrows, distress, misery, problems, paradoxes, or misfortunes? Does this non-theological and non-Biblical term possess enough conceptual clarity to order empirical phenomena for a reflected anthropology?



these, we must first look at alternative names and approaches to human vulnerability in recent theological and philosophical work.

The term “vulnerability” comes from the Latin adjective *vulnerabilis*, which goes back to *vulnus* or “wound”. In German, this corresponds to *Verwundbarkeit* or *Verletzlichkeit*. In recent decades, vulnerability has been the subject of a research landscape engaged in exploring modern concepts and interdisciplinary perspectives.<sup>10</sup> Hildegund Keul<sup>11</sup> links vulnerability to concepts such as victimhood, sacrifice, and courage, while alluding to migration phenomena, positioning vulnerability in relation to the Incarnation.<sup>12</sup> She contributes an important distinction between *Vulnerabilität* (the potential for or susceptibility to being wounded) and *Vulneranz* (the power to produce wounds), and examines the creative potential of the human condition.<sup>13</sup> Remarking on the ineffability (unsayability) of wounds, Keul underlines the transformative power of liturgical rituals that take vulnerability seriously.<sup>14</sup> Theological anthropologies that engage with our vulnerable, limited, and embodied condition thus provoke new insights into being.<sup>15</sup>

A research group of fundamental theologians and theological ethicists at KU Leuven aimed to develop a theological anthropology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in their interdisciplinary project *Anthropos*. The 2016 *Anthropos*

<sup>10</sup> Heike Springhart/Günter Thomas (eds), *Exploring Vulnerability* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017). Properly speaking, the “interdisciplinary vulnerability discourse” emerged in the 1980s, as Hildegund Keul explains in *Schöpfung durch Verlust. Bd. I: Vulnerabilität, Vulneranz und Selbstverschwendung nach Georges Bataille* (Würzburg: Würzburg University Press, 2021), 9. For further descriptions on the vulnerability discourse, see also pp. 36–37 and 41–43.

<sup>11</sup> Hildegund Keul directs the DFG-Project *Verwundbarkeiten* and a research group called *Vulnerabilität, Sicherheit und Resilienz*, which connects theological reflections on vulnerability with challenges in today’s society.

<sup>12</sup> Hildegund Keul, *Weihnachten – Das Wagnis der Verwundbarkeit* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Keul, *Schöpfung durch Verlust* (as note 10).

<sup>14</sup> Hildegund Keul, ‘Können Wunden eine glückhafte Wendung nehmen? Zur Verwandlungskraft liturgischer Sprache’, in: Katrin Kusmierz/David Plüss/Angela Berlis (eds), *Sagt doch einfach, was Sache ist! Sprache im Gottesdienst* (Zürich: TVZ, 2022), 107–122.

<sup>15</sup> Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Finitude and Theological Anthropology. An Interdisciplinary Exploration into Theological Dimensions of Finitude* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011); Elisabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo, *The Power and Vulnerability of Love. A Theological Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); Michelle Voss Roberts, *Body Parts. A Theological Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

Conference papers were published in a special issue of the journal *Louvain studies*.<sup>16</sup> This dialogue between anthropology and theology constructs a relationship between theories of the mind, psychology, and semiotics, and Jan-Olav Henriksen observes the interdependence between self, relatedness, vulnerability, and love.<sup>17</sup> The contributors also argue that the notion of “being human” is revealed through practice<sup>18</sup> and rooted in action.<sup>19</sup> Being human is a perpetual state, and therefore a fundamental shift from the noun “human” to the verb “to human” is proposed.<sup>20</sup> The question of how “being vulnerable” manifests within “being human” remains unanswered. As if picking up the intuition that triggered the Faith and Order paper in 2005, Jan-Olav Henriksen links vulnerability to the *imago Dei* anthropology<sup>21</sup> in a later article.

The concept of fragility has often been used interchangeably with vulnerability, and is closer to brokenness, as fragility (Lat. *fragilitas*) evokes the breakable condition of the human being (Germ. *Zerbrechlichkeit*). Philosophical and theological perspectives have considered fragility in its ethical relation to goodness and happiness,<sup>22</sup> as well as its ontological and esthetical relation to beauty.<sup>23</sup> Understood as moral imperfection, the instability of the will, and a tendency toward evil or injustice, fragility has

---

<sup>16</sup> Yves de Maeseneer, ‘Relation, Vulnerability, Love. Introducing the *What* and the *How* of Theological Anthropology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 211–219.

<sup>17</sup> Jan-Olav Henriksen, ‘Love as the Power with which God Shapes the World. Theological Anthropology and Human Experience’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 269–285; Markus Mühling, ‘The Perception and Practice of Love in the Love that is God-self. A Response to Jan-Olav Henriksen’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 286–297.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Banner, ‘Why Christian Anthropology Needs a Thoroughly Anthropological Turn’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 220–237.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Brock, ‘I Exist in Believing. Anthropology as a Theological and Emancipative Pursuit. A Response to Michael Banner’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 238–248.

<sup>20</sup> Lieve Orye, ‘Weaving Theological Anthropology into Life. Editorial Conclusions in Correspondence with Tim Ingold’, *Louvain Studies* 41 (2018), 328–355.

<sup>21</sup> Jan-Olav Henriksen, ‘Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable – Reconsidering *Imago Dei*’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62 (2020), 267–294.

<sup>22</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Fragilité* (Paris: Minuit, 2017).

been considered in moral reflections from Seneca to Kant, and Christian Latin thinkers of Late Antiquity.<sup>24</sup>

When linked with dehumanisation, the overarching concept of fragility captures contemporary ethical, social, and political phenomena,<sup>25</sup> and “fractured humanity” and “frailty” become objects of study in Patristics.<sup>26</sup> At the crossroads of philosophical and theological investigations, notions of sin<sup>27</sup> and temptation<sup>28</sup> reflect the broken image of the self. The difficulties of today’s discourse on sin remain pertinent, but ecumenical reflections show that this debate rests on an awareness of the “wound” affecting human nature, namely how human vulnerability penetrates all aspects of our society.<sup>29</sup> Anthropological reflection from an orthodox perspective remains heavily preoccupied with raising awareness of human vulnerability and suffering through an encompassing account of the “sacrament of the human”.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most frequently used terms in the document is “brokenness”, often associated with sin<sup>31</sup> and the landscape of a “broken world” threatening human dignity.<sup>32</sup> In Eucharistic and ecclesiological terms, “brokenness” relates to the “paschal mystery” that unites the whole Church<sup>33</sup> and identifies the “broken” body of Christ.<sup>34</sup> It designates afflictions and suffering that call for lament,<sup>35</sup> and is associated with aggression, exploitation, deceit, and violence.<sup>36</sup> “Brokenness” is synonymous

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Primavera Fisogni, *Dehumanization and Human Fragility. A Philosophical Investigation* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Some examples: Carol Harrison, *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Valentina Duca, ‘Human Frailty and Vulnerability in Isaac the Syrian’, *Studia Patristica* 74 (2016), 429–438.

<sup>27</sup> Ingolf Dalferth, *Sünde. Die Entdeckung der Menschlichkeit* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020), especially ‘Der Sinn der Sünde’, 391–418.

<sup>28</sup> George Pattison, *A Phenomenology of the Devout Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially ‘The Tempted Self’, 122–140.

<sup>29</sup> Institut supérieur d’études œcuméniques, *Comment parler du péché aujourd’hui? Enjeux et expériences œcuméniques* (Paris: Cerf, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *Le sacrement de l’homme* (Paris: Cerf, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> CPTA, § 10.

<sup>32</sup> CPTA, § 22.

<sup>33</sup> CPTA, § 52.

<sup>34</sup> CPTA, § 109.

<sup>35</sup> CPTA, § 72.

<sup>36</sup> CPTA, § 93.

with conflict and perplexity, all arising from the challenges listed in the first part of the document.<sup>37</sup> The document argues that the challenge of brokenness, along with disabilities and new technologies, should mobilise churches to “offer their witness and diaconal service”.<sup>38</sup> The sixth affirmation subsumes the concept of brokenness within sin, as “Sin is a reality which cannot be ignored nor minimized, for it results both in the alienation of humanity from God and in the brokenness of the world, its communities, and the individuals which make up those communities”.<sup>39</sup> Divisions among Christians reflect or even “exacerbate” the “brokenness of human community”,<sup>40</sup> and therefore Christians must work towards unity.

The notion of brokenness is applied broadly across the human condition and the world beyond us. In this latter case, the term refers not to a cosmic reality, but to a global situation, evident through socio-political and socio-medical phenomena such as poverty, violence, and pandemics.<sup>41</sup> Even when applied to such global contexts, brokenness retains its anthropological focus, as these phenomena are often consequences of human agency.

The document also considers vulnerability in relation to wounds, often intertwined with notions of weakness. When examining the concept of violence, one introductory question looks at the assumption that the “weak and vulnerable” are “less human”, which fuels various abuses of power.<sup>42</sup> In addition to sociological uses of vulnerability (such as vulnerable individuals/groups), we also encounter a medical use, when an individual is vulnerable to a medical condition.<sup>43</sup> Disability instigates a reflection in the document on the Christian paradox of strength in weakness based on the defeat of death through Christ.<sup>44</sup> Defined as “openness to pain”, vulnera-

---

<sup>37</sup> CPTA, § 95.

<sup>38</sup> CPTA, § 119.

<sup>39</sup> CPTA, § 127.

<sup>40</sup> CPTA, § 128.

<sup>41</sup> CPTA, § 18: “These and similar realities of contemporary society not only result in very visible manifestations of a broken world, such as acute forms of poverty, increased violence and suffering, but also accentuate new challenges to humanity posed, for example, by pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.”

<sup>42</sup> CPTA, § 26.

<sup>43</sup> See CPTA, § 36.

<sup>44</sup> CPTA, § 52.

bility relates to suffering, and disabled people are called to be “witnesses of vulnerability and partners in pain”.<sup>45</sup>

Vulnerability expresses the created and finite human condition within the ten common affirmations. The second affirmation states that “[t]he presence of the image of God in each human person and in the whole of humanity affirms the essentially relational character of human nature and emphasizes human dignity, potentiality and creativity, as well as human creatureliness, finitude and vulnerability”.<sup>46</sup> A Eucharistic consideration mentions the “wounded body of Christ the King”,<sup>47</sup> whereas human sin is wounding the “love of Christ”.<sup>48</sup> If the “wounds of crucifixion” do not disappear in resurrection and ascension, it is to make possible Christ’s identification with the “wounded on earth”.<sup>49</sup>

The document also considers the relation between frailty, which may have positive connotations, and fallibility, which is only negative. Human frailty is “dignified” in the image of God reflected in humanity,<sup>50</sup> while any examination of ourselves in comparison with Christ exposes “our own failure to be what God intends”.<sup>51</sup> Churches are urged not to fail the “crying need of a divided world”,<sup>52</sup> but this does not fit into an ecclesiology of the one Church, in which the Church is so intimately united with Christ that it cannot fail to communicate His love. In Christ, humans are freed from “the terror of failure, decline and death”.<sup>53</sup> Rather than making humans superhuman, this allows us to accept our limitations and entrust God and our neighbours to succeed where we cannot.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Rehearsals: Speech Acts

As speech acts permeate and structure the document, they also constitute an important methodological approach to my investigation of its intentions and achievements. My examination of speech acts in the document con-

---

<sup>45</sup> CPTA, § 52.

<sup>46</sup> CPTA, § 127.

<sup>47</sup> CPTA, § 52.

<sup>48</sup> CPTA, § 95.

<sup>49</sup> CPTA, § 99.

<sup>50</sup> CPTA, § 92.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> CPTA, § 111.

<sup>53</sup> CPTA, § 114.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

tributes to the evaluation of its systematic scope and ecumenical impact. According to the definition of speech acts by John L. Austin, “saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience, or of the speaker or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them”.<sup>55</sup> Speech acts are performative utterances that communicate prepositional content, but also induce a change in the relational reality of the speakers. Written or spoken, they perform an act, such as “requests, warnings, invitations, promises, apologies, predictions”.<sup>56</sup> Austin identifies five categories of speech acts: verdictive, exercitive, commissive, expositive, and behabitive.<sup>57</sup> John R. Searle further groups speech acts as either representative, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative.<sup>58</sup>

The ecumenical text includes an “invitation to the churches”<sup>59</sup> that contains a list of questions for further reflection, grounded in the ten common affirmations.<sup>60</sup> The whole document explores the need to “reflect on complex and sensitive issues related to a Christian understanding of human nature”.<sup>61</sup> The speech act of encouragement is the fourth objective of this reflection,<sup>62</sup> after identifying challenges, articulating common views, and naming differences. Speaking encouragement is linked not only to reflection, but also to common witness.<sup>63</sup>

The Church (the “wider communion of Saints”<sup>64</sup>) or the churches (as denominations) are invited to perform various speech acts, among which lamentation and encouragement occupy important positions. Lamenta-

---

<sup>55</sup> John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 101.

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell Green/Edward N. Zalta (eds), ‘Speech Acts’, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/speech-acts>. (accessed 03.08.2021).

<sup>57</sup> Austin, *Things with Words* (as note 55).

<sup>58</sup> John R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). John R. Searle, ‘A classification of illocutionary acts’, *Language in Society* 5:1 (1976), 1–23.

<sup>59</sup> CPTA, §§ 128–129.

<sup>60</sup> CPTA, § 127.

<sup>61</sup> CPTA, § 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> CPTA, § 129.

<sup>64</sup> CPTA, § 113.



tion<sup>65</sup> is extensively described: Christians are called to lament amid suffering, to perform “an individual and a communal act which signals that relationships have gone awry”,<sup>66</sup> to attempt to bear the unbearable, individually and communally, and to form a “barrage of tears, reproaches, petitions, praise and hopes which beat against the heart of God”.<sup>67</sup> Christ laments through suffering together with humanity.<sup>68</sup> However, lamenting should be more than mourning; it should mobilise new energies for the future. This requires reflection and fosters the search for common understanding towards common action.<sup>69</sup> The ecumenical text encourages<sup>70</sup> churches and recommends that they should offer “encouragement for all those whose human flourishing is challenged by violence”.<sup>71</sup>

## 5. The Drama: Seen, Touched, Relational, and Embodied Brokenness

My main focus is on the drama of brokenness performed in the ecumenical document, structured as five “acts” and an epilogue. Having explored various definitions of brokenness within the document, I then demonstrate that perceived (phenomenal) brokenness, relational brokenness, and christologically and ecclesialogically embodied brokenness enlighten the meaning of human fulfilment. Finally, I ponder what this new understanding brings to any reflection on anthropological questions today.

<sup>65</sup> According to Searle (‘A classification’ [as note 58]), lamentation is among the expressive speech acts, along with thanking, congratulating, apologising, deploring, welcoming, and condoling. Austin (*Things with Words* [as note 55]) classifies deploring and protesting in the category of behabitive speech acts, which include reactions to the behaviour of others and expressions of attitudes.

<sup>66</sup> CPTA, § 72.

<sup>67</sup> CPTA, § 73.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., § 73, citing John 11:35.

<sup>69</sup> CPTA, § 74.

<sup>70</sup> According to Searle, encouragement belongs in the category of directive speech acts (*Speech Acts* [as note 58]), alongside invitation. Directives aim to make another person (group) comply with the prepositional content of a statement and carry out the action described in this statement.

<sup>71</sup> CPTA, § 113.

### 5.1 *The Image of God – Through Brokenness?*

The image of God is the cornerstone of Christian anthropology. This section considers whether this image is accessible through brokenness, and the kind of access this brokenness affords. The first common affirmation likens humanity to the image of God and identifies our perfect realisation (our Archetype) in Christ: “All human beings are created in the image of God and Jesus Christ is the one in whom true humanity is perfectly realized.”<sup>72</sup> Yet the image of God cannot be seen in its utmost realisation, its archetypal fullness, when we consider broken humanity. Brokenness, addressed in the fifth common affirmation, includes being “inevitably affected by individual and corporate sin”, and the awareness of this condition has grown within “a broken world where faces and forces of threatened human worth and dignity abound”.<sup>73</sup>

The document positions this fullness of the image of God within the idea of human community.<sup>74</sup> Perfection of the image means to be “perfect in love, even as our Father in heaven is perfect”.<sup>75</sup> Paradoxically, vulnerability is the phenomenological medium of this perfection: it cannot be shown, but can “manifest” through “weakness and suffering”.<sup>76</sup> Sin as a form of brokenness distorts “what it is to be human”,<sup>77</sup> as it muddies the image of God.<sup>78</sup> Yet the perfection of the image is restored through vulnerability: “At this point we encounter the Christian paradox of strength through weakness and life through death. The perfection of God is a perfection of vulnerability and openness to pain.”<sup>79</sup>

The document thus differentiates between brokenness and vulnerability, which I formulate as follows: if brokenness is a symptom of sin<sup>80</sup> and

---

<sup>72</sup> CPTA, § 127.

<sup>73</sup> CPTA, § 22.

<sup>74</sup> CPTA, § 45.

<sup>75</sup> CPTA, § 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Common affirmation number 5, CPTA, § 127: “Sin can pervert or distort, but cannot finally destroy, what it means to be human.”

<sup>78</sup> CPTA, § 95: “that our human condition is radically warped, that the image is distorted.”

<sup>79</sup> CPTA, § 52.

<sup>80</sup> Common affirmation number 6, CPTA, § 127: “Sin is a reality which cannot be ignored or minimised, but it results both in the alienation of humanity from God and in the brokenness of the world, its communities, and the individuals which make up those communities.”



a phenomenon of the distorted image, then vulnerability is the medium of perfection and the mirror through which we see the image restored. However, is this distinction clear (and consistent) within the vocabulary of the document? Does brokenness always relate to the spoiled image<sup>81</sup> and to the “sheer destructiveness and wickedness” of sin?<sup>82</sup> Is vulnerability always linked to the potential for perfection and restoration? Let us evaluate the manifestations of frailty in the document to test this distinction between brokenness and vulnerability.

## 5.2 *Face(s) of Frailty*

Descriptions of brokenness begin with the overwhelming presence of “faces and forces of threatened human worth and humanity” today.<sup>83</sup> This metaphorical formulation leads to another key concept in Christian anthropology: the face, which carries both brokenness and vulnerability. The face is the phenomenal space wherein frailty is encountered and brokenness is experienced, but in which the archetypal beauty and glory of the human is also realised. It enables the shift from seeing to touching, and introduces the experience of blindness as a hermeneutical key to make contact with the “face of God”:

In faith, Christians look to a human face and in that face they see the image and glory of the invisible God (Mark 9:2–8; Col. 1:15). This is no ordinary seeing. We know that the face of the Galilean is not literally the face of God; faith is not the same as literal “sight” and may indeed be better compared to the action of a sightless person reaching out to touch and feel the contour of a face they cannot “see”.<sup>84</sup>

According to my reading, the document enacts an iconographical approach in which the human face of Jesus reveals divine glory:

The human face in which that glory is shown to us is the face of one person: Jesus Christ. But what we see and know of him informs and shapes our awareness of the identity, the worth and the calling of every person (2 Cor. 5:16–17).<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> CPTA, § 93.

<sup>82</sup> CPTA, § 94.

<sup>83</sup> CPTA, § 22.

<sup>84</sup> CPTA, § 75.

<sup>85</sup> CPTA, § 76.

This face of glory refers to Christ's radiant glory at the Transfiguration, in which Christ showed his divinity.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Christ's human face also encompasses the suffering of the Passion and Crucifixion. The paper quotes Isaiah 53, referring to He who "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him".<sup>87</sup> The revelation of true humanity must not exclude moments when the "face and body are deformed by suffering",<sup>88</sup> as these moments paradigmatically show, in Christ, what it means to be human.

The document's engagement with Christ's face includes a caution against identifying the iconographical approach with a naturalistic, pictographic view.<sup>89</sup> It encourages interpreting Christ's face and the image of God anew in the Spirit as a transformative contemplation, rather than fixating on one image. Notwithstanding the danger of myriad interpretations of the image, of the relativisation of the archetypal image (or face) of Christ so important for the icon theology of orthodox tradition, this approach underlines the dynamic realisation of the likeness of God, and stresses a pneumatological approach to seeing God's image in Christ's face. The face thus remains in transition between Transfiguration and Crucifixion, resplendent glory and suffering, and beauty and vulnerability. The face is often linked to vulnerability as a medium of restoration and perfection, and is less connected to brokenness alone that includes a representation of a broken image of God. Ultimately, likeness to God creates the degree of beauty and glory seen in the human face.

---

<sup>86</sup> CPTA, § 84.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> CPTA, § 78: "There can be no single, definitive picture or icon of Christ. There is a definitive record of Jesus; it is given in Scripture and received by people in every time and place through the living Tradition of faith. From all this, we can discern the indelible character of Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection. He remains 'the same yesterday, today, forever' (Heb. 13:8) and 'his words will not pass away' (Mark 13:31 and parallels). Yet the Spirit which enables us to see the face of Christ as the true image of God and of our humanity is forever new." This dissociation of the testimony of the Scripture from the testimony of the icon does not follow the arguments of the icon theology as expressed in defense of icons during and after the iconoclast controversy.

### 5.3 In the Light of Christ

Frailty is dignified by Christ in His Passion and Crucifixion, and thus paradoxically reveals God's perfect image. Human failure to reflect the perfection of God's image (our failure to be what God intends) only becomes visible in the light of Christ. The document explores the relationship between frailty and failure:

For Christian disciples, Jesus represents all they are created to be and called to become. In him we can grasp what God intends for humankind. Such an image of what it means to be a human being dignifies our flesh and *frailty*, subverts our notions of power and rule and challenges us to interpret the signs which our world manifests in a new way. But when we look to or listen to Jesus, we are struck, too, by our own *failure to be what God intends*. The light of Christ offers a beacon to all who share his humanity; it also sheds light on the sin of all who share his humanity.<sup>90</sup>

Christ dignifying the inherent frailty of human beings contrasts with the light of Christ "accusing" sin and the failure to live in Christ's image, as God intended. Just as vulnerability was hardly synonymous with brokenness as a symptom of sin in previous examples, frailty does not adhere to sin and failure. Frailty offers phenomenological ground for the revelation of Christ in human nature – for the unveiling of *true humanity*. While sin and the failure to reflect Christ's image are inevitable in human existence, they define what it is to *not be human* in God's eyes.

Christ not only reveals the image of God (in us) to us, but also reveals our failure to reflect this godliness: sin is the "spoiling of the image".<sup>91</sup> A later statement mentions seeing one's own sin in "the light of God's countenance".<sup>92</sup> In my view, this light provokes a crisis of self as it reveals new perspectives and separates the old judgment of the self from a new judgment, which is set in a "dynamic of hope"<sup>93</sup> including repentance, renewal, calling, and "empowerment to act with Jesus in the world".<sup>94</sup> I take "God's countenance" to mean Christ's face, which sheds his light on every human face – not just our physical appearance, but the countenance of the godly

<sup>90</sup> CPTA, § 92, my italics.

<sup>91</sup> CPTA, § 93.

<sup>92</sup> CPTA, § 96.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Some of these terms seem borrowed from a motivational discourse directed towards vulnerable groups, and raise questions as to their theological usage (such as empowerment, which in the best case comes close to the biblical term ἐξουσία).

image that humans are called to be and become. But what is the face, the πρόσωπον,<sup>95</sup> seen in this image?

#### 5.4 Persons, Relations, Wounds

The image revealed by the light of Christ's face leads not only to a performative attitude (the invitation to "act with Jesus"), but also to the formation of personhood. Taking up an important thread set in contemporary theology by John Zizioulas,<sup>96</sup> the document adheres to a relational definition or understanding: "true personhood cannot be understood individualistically, but only as we look at human persons in relationship."<sup>97</sup> This is founded in a relational understanding of the image of God, including a Trinitarian interpretation of the "image" mentioned in Gen 1 26–27.<sup>98</sup> Distorting or "spoiling" the image of God means distorting the relatedness that fundamentally defines the human. The text speaks not only of image, but also of reflecting Christ or even God's being in our humanity. The Trinitarian approach to relatedness resonates with a christological one, providing a new understanding of vulnerability through the lens of broken relationships.<sup>99</sup>

Against this brokenness, the document proposes a relational model for the community created by and around Jesus: the *koinonia*.<sup>100</sup> It sets *koinonia* on the horizon of diversity and differentiation, then advances the concept of partnership as defining the relatedness of humans with God.<sup>101</sup> The notions of "partner" and "partnership" have an important history in the 20<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> The term initially signifies face, aspect, countenance, or even mask (due to its origins in the language of ancient Greek theatrical performance). Theologically, it designates a person, and its Latin equivalent is *persona*. For biblical meanings and use, see W. L. Walker, 'Person, personality', in: James Or (ed.), *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1939, 2021); <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/P/person-personality.html> (accessed 30.03.2021). For ancient meanings, see Nédoncelle Maurice, 'Prosopon et persona dans l'antiquité classique. Essai de bilan linguistique', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 22 (1948), 277–299. In Western philosophical thinking, the term "person" comes to designate ethical agency, as discussed by Kant in *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785).

<sup>96</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1985). His book is cited in the bibliography of CPTA.

<sup>97</sup> CPTA, § 81.

<sup>98</sup> CPTA, § 82.

<sup>99</sup> CPTA, § 93.

<sup>100</sup> CPTA, § 89.

<sup>101</sup> CPTA, § 89.

century due to Karl Barth<sup>102</sup> and other theologians such as the Old Catholic theologian Kurt Stalder.<sup>103</sup> “Partnership” became a pattern for the relationship between God and humanity that did not exclude the flourishing of *koinonia* in ecclesiological thought. The document also reflects this interest in *koinonia* ecclesiology: it mentions the communion that binds human beings together into a single body of Christ as “living stones built together into a holy and spirit-filled temple (1 Peter 2:4–5)”.<sup>104</sup> *Koinonia* is the “new communion” realised by “the new minting of the image of God”.<sup>105</sup>

This relatedness inevitably includes wounds, but their understanding starts from Christ’s reconciling, healing, and life-giving work. In particular, the “wounds of Crucifixion” extend a key interpretation to any Christian anthropology dealing with woundedness:

The raised yet wounded body (...) expresses Christ’s continuing identification with and intercession for the wounded on earth, and reminds Christ’s followers that when they are weak they are strong (2 Cor. 12:10).<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Wolf Krötke, ‘Gott und Mensch als “Partner”. Zur Bedeutung einer zentralen Kategorie in Karl Barths *Kirchlicher Dogmatik*’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 83 (1986), 158–175.

<sup>103</sup> See Kurt Stalder, ‘Meine Theologie. Nachschrift einer Vorlesung (Wintersemester 1982/83)’, redigiert von Kurt Schori, in: Urs von Arx (ed.), *Sprache und Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit Gottes. Texte zu einigen wissenschaftstheoretischen und systematischen Voraussetzungen für die exegetische und homiletische Arbeit* (Freiburg i. Ü.: Universitätsverlag, 2000), 255–431.

<sup>104</sup> CPTA, § 101.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. *Koinonia* as a model of relatedness to God and one another is presented in this paragraph as coherent with the reflection of the Faith and Order Commission in other documents on ecclesiology: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper 181), §§ 48–60; *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, (Faith and Order Paper 32, 2004), §§ 25–35. A later document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC, 2013) [hereafter: TCTCV], continues on this ecclesiological line. A total of 78 church reactions to TCTCV were published in: Ellen Wondra et al. (eds), *Churches Respond to “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”*, 2 vols. (Faith and Order Papers 231–322; Geneva: WCC, 2021). A report was equally issued by the Faith and Order commission of WCC: *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church? Key Findings and Proposals from the Responses to “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”* (Faith and Order Paper 236; Geneva: WCC, 2021). See also the collection of essays by commissioners involved in the analysis of the responses: Ellen Wondra et al. (eds), *Common Threads. Key Themes from Responses to “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”* (Faith and Order Paper 233, Geneva: WCC, 2021).

<sup>106</sup> CPTA, § 99.

Personhood means relatedness and this creates wounds, due to the brokenness of sin, meaning that personhood inevitably means vulnerability.<sup>107</sup> Christ's life alters this vulnerability through His "transformative power",<sup>108</sup> which occurs when Christians share in Christ's death and resurrection, in the "newness of life", through baptism (Rom 6:4).<sup>109</sup> Growth in the image of God means growth in true relatedness, in *koinonia*, and allows the "transformation" of human beings "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18),<sup>110</sup> a transformation that starts when we reflect "God's glory in the face of Jesus".<sup>111</sup> As such, personhood and the meaning of *koinonia* cannot be understood outside the light of Christ's "face".

### 5.5 A New Look at Vulnerability: Mystery and Depth

The mystery of the human is one of the document's key assumptions, which it connects to the paradigm of vulnerability, and the introduction poses the question of theological anthropology as an almost perennial puzzle. The Psalm that asks "[w]hat are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps 8:5) has reverberated and perplexed scholars throughout the ages.<sup>112</sup> The question is complex not only owing to the diversity of humanity and our varied historical contexts, but also because of the intrinsic mystery of humanity: "Human beings are, properly speaking, 'mysterious', i.e. imbued with something of the sacred mystery which comes from the Spirit or breath of the infinite Creator."<sup>113</sup>

Humans' creation in God's image only adds to the "mystery and reality of human beings".<sup>114</sup> An apophatic awareness frames the approach to the *imago Dei*, which is developed in the second part of the document as the second main point.<sup>115</sup> The "unsearchable mystery" of the human is visible in the incarnated *logos*, and depth correlates with human value and

---

<sup>107</sup> A connection between the self, its relation to others, and its vulnerability occurs in Henriksen, 'Love as the Power' (as note 17), 272. The unavoidable interweaving of love and vulnerability is stated clearly by Keul, 'Wunden' (as note 14).

<sup>108</sup> CPTA, § 98.

<sup>109</sup> CPTA, § 103.

<sup>110</sup> CPTA, § 86.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> CPTA, § 11.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> CPTA, § 12.

<sup>115</sup> See Section B, 'Created in the Image of God', §§ 75–88.



dignity. All three – human depth, value, and dignity – are considered inexhaustible in language.

The “mystery of the person of Jesus” is reflected in the “mystery of every person”: the apophaticism of the human has a christological foundation.

The mystery of the true human being we see in Jesus, the Word made flesh, is unsearchable. Our attempts to investigate and understand human nature cannot exhaust the worth, the depth and the dignity which belong to each person as created and loved by God. As we acknowledge, with faith and awe, the holy mystery of God, we see and reverence that same mystery in the person of Jesus and we must also see and reverence a reflection of that same mystery in every person.<sup>116</sup>

The mystery of the human also has a Trinitarian basis, as the document implies that it comes from the mystery embedded in the model of the “mystery and the power of love” in intra-Trinitarian relations.<sup>117</sup>

The third part, “A Call to the Churches”, reconsiders the mystery of the human and reaffirms the christological framework, connecting it to the fullness and perfection of the image of God in Christ, as well as to the subject of human vulnerability (sin, evil, death) that is overcome through Christ’s death and resurrection:

Common understandings of the mystery of the human person, created in the image of God, destined to live in community within the wider creation, constitute a large and solid basis for ecumenical confession, reflection, witness and service. (...) And the churches agree that the full richness of this mystery is revealed and offered in the person of Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, who, through his life, his self-giving death and glorious resurrection, has overcome the forces of sin, evil and death at work in human persons, human communities and creation.<sup>118</sup>

But what exactly links depth and vulnerability? In a sense, “depth” offers a far more profound perception of brokenness than that given by sin. The text invites us to look into the abyss of the broken world: “Sometimes the very word ‘sin’ seems too lame or moralistic to describe the depth and power of

---

<sup>116</sup> CPTA, § 77.

<sup>117</sup> CPTA, § 81: “God must be worshipped and apprehended by faith as Triune, as three ‘persons’ in one ‘nature’ where, by the power and mystery of eternal love, Father, Son and Spirit live in perfect mutuality and unity.”

<sup>118</sup> CPTA, § 117.

all that assaults and harms God's good creation (...)."119 "Depth" unveils the radical nature of sin and makes us see it from a different perspective.

The document puts forward the image of the cross, or the mystery of the cross, as "showing the limitless engagement of God's love with the most intractable depths of the human condition".120 It also shows the different emphases of Christian traditions on the role of the cross in the reconciling work of Christ, whether in the "context of incarnation and ascension" or linked with the centrality and transformative power of life.121 However, I argue that the cross is not emphasised enough as the central driver of the passage from sterile brokenness to fruitful, life-giving vulnerability. In my view, the cross instigates the transfiguration of the form and meaning of human vulnerability, turning fragility into the dwelling place of new creation, new humanity, and new life in Christ. This focus on the cross could be a way to heal the brokenness of the distorted image and restore it, using vulnerability as a medium through which this restoration may be enacted. Unfortunately, the document does not take up this thread, and focuses instead on brokenness in the Eucharist, distancing it from its first appearance as a symptom of sin, and its depiction in the distorted image.

### 5.6 Epilogue: The Eucharist and Brokenness

The document explores how brokenness is expressed, instantiated, and performed through the Eucharist. Within a theology of disability, § 52 mentions the "implications of the fraction, i.e. the breaking of the bread by the priest at the Eucharist", reminding the reader that "brokenness lies at the heart of the paschal mystery and that the Church is united through brokenness". The Eucharist, I argue, is not just a symbol or a framework for remembering (*anamnesis*), but is instead the very experience of the sacrificial love of Christ. In this context, it is worth mentioning the orthodox icon type *Melismos* (μελισμός), which refers to the fraction of the Eucharistic bread, and depicts Jesus as a child, the "Lamb of God", on a *diskos* set on an altar.

In fact, the liturgical experience of sharing in this brokenness leads to a heavenly banquet. The Eucharistic approach to anthropology leads to an

---

<sup>119</sup> CPTA, § 94.

<sup>120</sup> CPTA, § 98.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



eschatological view, clearly stated in § 112, and includes the liturgical “remembering” of the Parousia in the Liturgy of John Chrysostom. “In this way, the Eucharist focuses the whole thrust and direction of Christian anthropology, which is oriented by hope for that which is already achieved by Christ, yet still to come.”<sup>122</sup>

Hope is integral to Christian life, and is highlighted in this document as the response to today’s challenges and human vulnerability. Hope exceeds feeling and speech acts: it expresses a conviction in the “ultimate fulfilment” of humanity.<sup>123</sup> The document uses concepts from Church fathers to illustrate how fulfilment is perceived, including *theosis*, deification (without mentioning the coining of the term by Gregory of Nazianzus), “being raised into the divine life” (Irenaeus), and “finding our rest in God” (Augustine).<sup>124</sup> I have already explained the path to this fulfilment through the distinction between image and likeness, which is crucial to the Eastern Christian tradition. A quote from Diadochos of Photike, a fifth-century Church father, supports this view: “All human beings are made in God’s image; to be in his likeness belongs only to those who through much love have subjected their freedom to God.”<sup>125</sup> For Western churches, the path to fulfilment goes through the “dimension of calling or growth that belongs to true personhood”.<sup>126</sup>

The Eucharist positions the human as image of God within its true dynamics, whether we consider it a calling, striving for likeness, or growth. Anthropology therefore relates closely to the Christological and pneumatological aspects of the Eucharist described in § 107. The breaking of the

<sup>122</sup> CPTA, § 112.

<sup>123</sup> Common affirmation number 10, CPTA, § 127: “Humanity finds its ultimate fulfilment, together with the whole created order, when God brings all things to perfection in Christ.”

<sup>124</sup> All examples are enumerated in § 115. It would be interesting to analyse the selection of these examples by Church fathers in a document that has few references to patristic texts. The reference to Augustine probably means the famous passage in *Conf. I, 1, 1*: “Fecisti nos ad te, domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.” The mention of the antinomic dynamic (restlessness – rest) and the stress on the centrality of the heart are missing from the short reference in § 115.

<sup>125</sup> CPTA, § 86. The quote is from *One Hundred Chapters on Spiritual Perfection*, Chapter Four. See Diadoque de Photice, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, translated by Édouard des Places (SC 5 bis; Paris: Cerf, 1966), 86.

<sup>126</sup> CPTA, § 86.

gifts allows for sharing: brokenness in a Eucharistic setting should not be understood separately from relatedness. A foretaste of new creation and the fullness of the Kingdom is given through the act of sharing that is permeated by the experience of breaking. The Heavenly Banquet, both now and in eternity, cannot take place without (passing through) brokenness.

## 6. Not so Vulnerable, After All

Engaging with the motif of the face of frailty, this essay focuses on the idea that vulnerability is a key component of any anthropological project in contemporary theology. It explores how the Faith and Order Paper dedicated to anthropology (2005) deals with the problem of vulnerability. I examine its methods and objectives, analyse its vocabulary of vulnerability, frailty, and brokenness, and identify and classify the speech acts performed or recommended in relation to the challenges of vulnerability. I consider how a Christocentric and relational anthropology “enacts” vulnerability and, taking it from the level of everyday challenges, resituates it in a Eucharistic context.

The paper’s inductive methodology leaves it open to theoretical presuppositions, and its analysis of speech acts offers only lamentation and encouragement as responses to vulnerability, which seems a curious decision. Further scrutiny may address whether or not the document succeeds in inviting churches to lament suffering and encourage action, and the response to this invitation among churches.

The great achievement of this document lies in its willingness to take vulnerability seriously and its identification of brokenness as a key concept in the ecumenical approach to anthropology. Brokenness does not always relate to the distorted image of God; in its Eucharistic configuration, it intermingles with the notion of vulnerability as the medium of a restored image where wounds are healed and transfigured in a new form of communion (*koinonia*). From this holistic consideration of brokenness in the document, I extract the following thesis: *An anthropology of vulnerability is grounded in the ecclesiological embodiment and Eucharistic framing of what it means to be human.*

My analysis of the document brings to mind other reflections on anthropology and vulnerability. First, an anthropology that takes vulnerability seriously is less vulnerable than one that avoids its difficulties and paradoxes. Christian anthropology that insists on human transformation through love should not forget that love is more than joy and its multiplication (the

famous motif of *gaudio gaudere*).<sup>127</sup> Love also encompasses vulnerability, and the ability to be wounded, as reflected in Augustine's *Confessions*, in which he describes being wounded by the arrows of God's love.<sup>128</sup>

Vulnerability is fundamentally connected to divine light. It is our encounter with Christ's light and face that places the human at the depths of our vulnerability, from which we desire to be raised to the perfection of God's image. Vulnerability is not abolished, but rather transfigured and elevated to the life of inner-Trinitarian love. Ultimately, vulnerability can be clothed in splendour and a theology of beauty can offer a wider framework for the anthropology of vulnerability. An exemplary expression of this movement occurs in Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns of Divine Eros*. There, the darkened heart is the dwelling place of God's coming: "You who rose in a moment in my darkened heart."<sup>129</sup> Symeon expresses how human fragility is changed into light by receiving a "brilliant robe":<sup>130</sup> Finally, he puts forward an anthropology of vulnerability that brings along a theology of Eucharistic union and transparency:

[A]nd my blood mixed with your blood.  
I was united, I know, to your divinity also,  
and I have become your most pure body,  
a resplendent member, a truly holy member,  
far-shining, and transparent, and gleaming.<sup>131</sup>

If I were to address the authors of future ecumenical documents on anthropology, I would encourage them to speak more about the transfiguration of *vulnerability* into *transparency*.

<sup>127</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* 4.15.27, in: *Les confessions* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1998), BA 13, 454, cf. John 3:29. See also the definition of the happy life in *Conf.* 10.22.32 (*Les confessions*, BA 14, 200): "et ipsa est beata uita, gaudere ad te, de te, propter te."

<sup>128</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* 9.2.3 (BA 14, 74): "Sagittaveras tu cor nostrum caritate tua."

<sup>129</sup> Hymn 1, 46, in: *Divine Eros. Hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, translated by Daniel K. Griggs (Crestwood: SVSP, 2010), 37. Further references indicate the number of the hymn, the lines, and the page number in Griggs's translation. A recent analysis of these passages is available in John Anthony McGuckin, 'Repentance as Divine Communion in St. Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns of Divine Love*', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 11 (2020), 7–28.

<sup>130</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymn* 2, 4–6, 44: "How have You vested me with a brilliant robe (Lk 15:22), / flashing forth with the brilliance of immortality, / and turning all my members into light?"

<sup>131</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymn* 2, 13–17, 44.

*Georgiana Huian (b. 1983 Ploiești RO), Professor, PhD in Philosophy and in Theology, studied philosophy, theology and classical philology in Bucharest (2002–2012), received her doctorate in philosophy in Paris and Bucharest in 2012 and in orthodox theology in Paris in 2018. She had a postdoctoral scholarship at the New Europe College Bucharest (2015–2016) and a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship for postdoctoral research at the Institute for the New Testament, University of Bern (2017–2018). Since September 2018, she is assistant professor for systematic theology and ecumenical theology at the Institute for Old Catholic Theology, University of Bern. Since September 2021, she is also invited lecturer of ascetic theology at the Institute for Orthodox Theology “Saint-Serge” Paris.*

*Address: Institut für Christkatholische Theologie, Universität Bern,  
Länggassstrasse 51, CH-3012 Bern*

*E-Mail: georgiana.huian@unibe.ch*

### *Zusammenfassung*

Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit dem Phänomen der menschlichen Verletzlichkeit, das in «Christliche Perspektiven der theologischen Anthropologie» (Faith and Order Paper 199, 2005) behandelt wird. Die Analyse über dieses im Rahmen des multilateralen ökumenischen Dialogs veröffentlichten Dokuments beschreibt Methode, Ansatz und Sprache (Sprechakte), die zur Erforschung der menschlichen Verletzlichkeit verwendet und mit der Gebrochenheit des Menschen in Verbindung gebracht werden. Untersucht wird die Gebrochenheit in Bezug auf Bild, Antlitz und Licht Christi sowie im Hinblick auf das Ideal der christlichen Gemeinschaft. Die Verfasserin stellt fest, dass die Aussagen des behandelten Dokuments zur Verletzlichkeit von einer besonderen relationalen Sicht des Personseins geprägt sind. Die Analyse schliesst mit Überlegungen zum Verhältnis zwischen dem menschlichen Geheimnis und der Verwundbarkeit einerseits und zum Verhältnis zwischen Eucharistie und Gebrochenheit andererseits. Die Autorin verortet Verletzlichkeit in einer Anthropologie der Erneuerung, Wiederherstellung, Neuschöpfung und Vergöttlichung. Verletzlichkeit ist nicht das Gegenteil von Vollkommenheit, sondern Bedingung und Rahmen für die Neuschöpfung nach dem Bild des gekreuzigten Christi.

### *Keywords – Schlüsselwörter*

Anthropology – Vulnerability – Brokenness – Image of God – Relatedness