

## REVIEWS

**Christa L. McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need: The Gift of Our Dependence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022. (240 pp.) [ISBN 9781540962799]**

**Martin Samson**

Every so often a book jumps out at me. Christa L. McKirland's book *God's Provision, Humanity's Need: The Gift of our Dependence* already stands out in its title, and even more so in how one feels while reading it.

This book is a bold project. It is also a deeply satisfying journey for the mind. My own interest is where various disciplines, such as theology and science, come into conversation with each other to discover newer ways of understanding and synthesising separate disciplinary concerns. McKirland bridges what some might consider the impossible. She finds a way to go beneath synthesising, at a foundational level, many threads of theology and anthropology. Her method integrates biblical exegesis and analytic philosophy to develop her systematic theology. By applying it to the anthropology offered by both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament she defines one central fundamental human need, the meaning of what we were created for, as the need to relate to God. The book is a theological anthropology based on what we are meant for; a second-personal relationship to God. "Such communion is possible through the incarnation of the Logos, the firstborn of creation, putting on human form, depending on the Spirit, and giving the Spirit so that all humanity might flourish both now and always" (14).

Using biblical language and metaphors of bread, water and filial/kinship language and the importance of tabernacle and temple, a way is prepared for us to understand that the second-personal relationship to God is sustainable and experienced as God's indwelling presence. For McKirland this fundamental human need is more essential than theological anthropologies describing the human being's creation in the image of God in 'incompleteness' and 'fall-redemption' metaphors.

McKirland defines a divine presence and needs-based anthropology as a pneumachristocentric anthropology. It is a theological anthropology that acknowledges we can be human without a second-personal relationship to God, but we do need it if we want human flourishing to happen:

The Spirit is the empowering personal presence of God, and Christ is the true image in human form, mediating the divine presence while also needing the divine presence himself... Christ is the centre of anthropology. Still, the spirit cannot be separated from Christ... pneumachristocentric anthropology recognises that God crafted human beings in such a way that humans must rely on God's spirit to flourish fully... the image of God and what it means to be human are conjoined but not collapsed into one another. This conjoining allows for all humanity to be understood as made in the image of God, intended toward becoming the image of God in a uniquely human way... (160).

This book is not just a wonderful presentation of a foundational theological anthropology nor just a presentation of cross-disciplinary method; it also presents McKirland quietly suggesting that this is a religious path, when in prayer I can “become more like the author and perfecter of my faith and encourage others to do the same” (xv). She offers the project as an act of worship that can continue to refine our thinking and character into the likeness of the One – the true image – Jesus Christ. In reading this work I found it requires a devotion, a slow reading, challenging my own theological assumptions, my language of understanding, and allowing the journey through the book to bring its own fruit and engagement with the divine presence.

While the book offers a theological anthropology it might be asked if this extends beyond the Christian community. Can people of other traditions find a second-personal relationship to god if human flourishing is so centred in Christ and the Holy Spirit? What would that look like in all community expressions? I would welcome another chapter on that expansion of the pneumachristocentric anthropology in a future book.

I would recommend this book to every serious reader who wishes to go on a challenging journey to deepen and expand their philosophical and theological understanding of the human condition.