

# Personhood

## A Christian understanding

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# Themes for this presentation

- Introduction/ Definition of personhood
- When does personhood begin?
- Irreducibility of personhood
- Persons versus individuals
- What sustains “personhood” and what kills?

# Themes..

- Persons need an environment of freedom for its full expression
- Principle of Intrinsic worth or value
- Consequences of an inadequate understanding of the above.
- Animals and personhood
- Dangerous scenarios and destruction of personhood

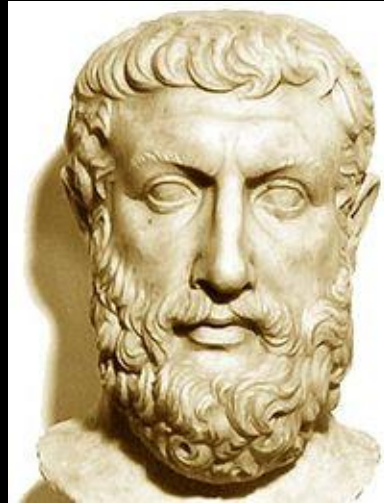
# Know Thyself, but....

- Of all the mysteries engulfing mankind, the greatest mystery is the nature of personhood

*Mass of bio-chemicals ? sophisticated robot?  
moral mammal ? illusion ? cosmic accident?*

# Parmenides

Father of Ontology  
or the science of  
“being”



# Personhood-the term

- Tertullian – First one to call the Trinity as the community of 3 persons
- Genesis 1:26- Imago-Dei (Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness....)
- So humans were also called “persons”.

# Personhood- the ontological question

## 2 ways to know

- Anthropocentric definitions
  - Scientific resolution-
  - Sociological/philosophical resolution
  
- Revelatory resolution

# Anthropocentric approaches

- Human versus persons
- Check list of faculties
- Sentience or consciousness-Peter Singer
- Rights
- Cognition
- Metaphysical-as intentionality, self-consciousness, free will, language acquisition, pain reception, and emotion
- Moral- ability to make moral choices



# Revelation about human personhood from Genesis

# The two times God spoke twice in Genesis 1- 3<sup>rd</sup> day

Genesis verse 9-

And God said:

let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place and the dry land...

And God said:

Genesis 11. let the earth bring forth vegetation, plants....

## The two times God spoke twice in Genesis 1-6th day

And God said:

- Genesis verse 24. Let the earth bring forth living creatures....live stock...creeping things...
- And God said, verse 26. Let us make man in our image

The only time God spoke directly to His creation and  
the only time He blessed

Genesis verse 28:

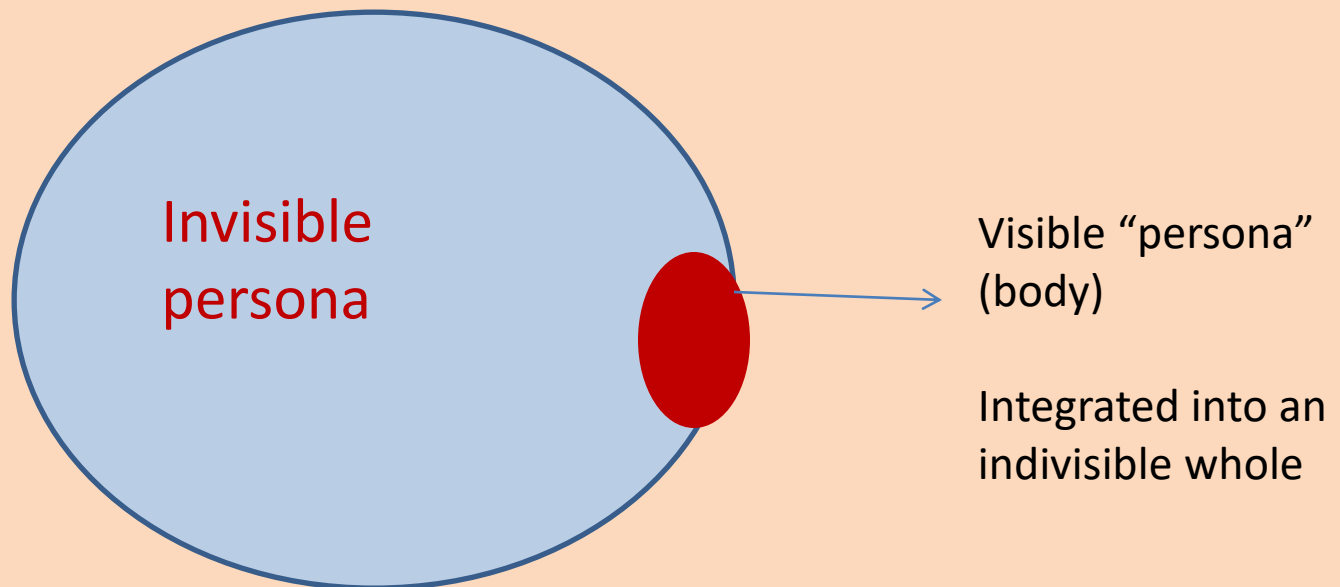
- And God blessed them and SAID TO THEM:
- Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...

# Human personhood- Uniqueness in creation

- Genesis 2:7- from the dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life- the only creation who had God's breath.
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- Heaven and Earth were in Man's making-AMPHIBIAN
- Genesis 2:24- "One flesh" principle- only for man and not for animals

# Human person

- There is far more to a person than his/her visible body-something grand and magnificent



# When does personhood begin?

- Sperm/Ova
- Fertilization
- Implantation (6 days)
- When circulation starts (day 22)
- When the fetus begins to look human (90 days)
- When the fetus kicks in utero (150 days)
- When the baby takes its first breath
- When the cord is cut

# Beginning of personhood

- I believe that life and personhood begins at fertilization because this is the “decisive” moment when the male and female have come together in union exercising their free wills.
- This is the moment when a community has been formed of two gametes, male and female and God who has breathed life into them.
- Whatever happens after the fertilization is “fait accompli” merely “quantitative”. To say that life begins at the moment of its first heart beat is to be very arbitrary.



# “Know” ability as a definition of personhood but whose?



- Anthropocentric know ability
- A mother not knowing her fetus
- A baby and the mother get to know each other
- Theocentric know ability
- It is about God's knowability
- Nothing to do about man's knowability
- Knowability is about community

# Personhood started in the mind of God

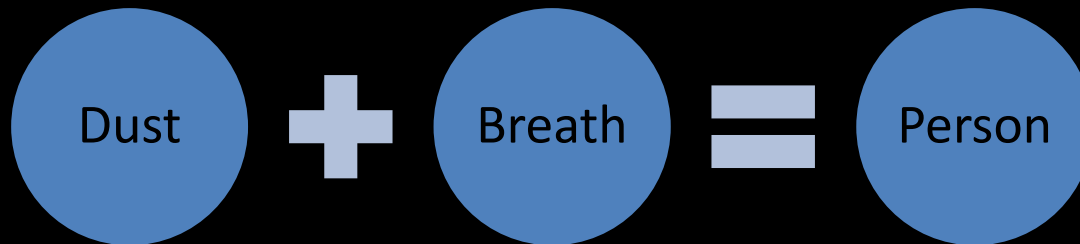
- **Jeremiah 1:4-5-** Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
- **Ephesians 1:4-** Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.
- Psalm 139:15,16-My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret..... ; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them

# Beginning of personhood Started in the mind of God

- Psalms 139: 13-16
- I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.
- <sup>15</sup> My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
- <sup>16</sup> Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

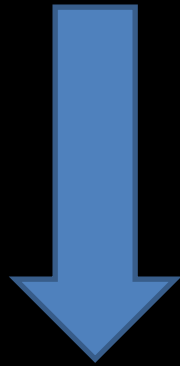
# I- Irreducibility of a person

- Genesis 2:7-Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.



# Reduction & Emergence

- Hydrogen and Oxygen- both support combustion/gases



- Water- a liquid not combustible.
- A product completely different from either oxygen or Hydrogen.

# Emergence & Reduction

- Human body is only 1 kg of salt, 3 kg of Calcium, Sodium, Potassium and 50 kg of water.

Breath of God

Emergence



- Body becomes a person of infinite worth

To reduce a person is a form of  
“degradation”

- A sure way of degrading a person is to “reduce” him into his/her constituents.

# Human person is “irreducible”

- The human person is more complex and radically different from its constituents.
- Examples:
  - MAID-Reduction to a “washing machine”
  - WOMAN-Reduction to a “sex object”
  - PATIENT-Reduction to a “commodity”



# Socrates- “reductionism” of women

- Socrates married Xanthippe who was much younger than he. She bore for him three sons, Lamprocles, Sophroniscus and Menexenus.
- He said of women: *Had it not been for the children, I would have no use for women.*

# Reducing God

- If we don't worship Him as Lord and think of Him only as an "insurance" or simply a "provider" is a way of degrading Him.

John 20:16- Jesus: "MARY"

Mary said: Rabboni

- In calling persons by their unique names (whole person) we respect and energize them

# The secret

- TREATING PERSONS AS AN INTEGRATED WHOLE CAN RELEASE PHENOMENAL ENERGY
  - Organizations
  - Doctors
  - Friends
  - Marriages/Parenthood

# II-Person versus an individual

- A person is not synonymous with an individual

# Narcissus and Echo



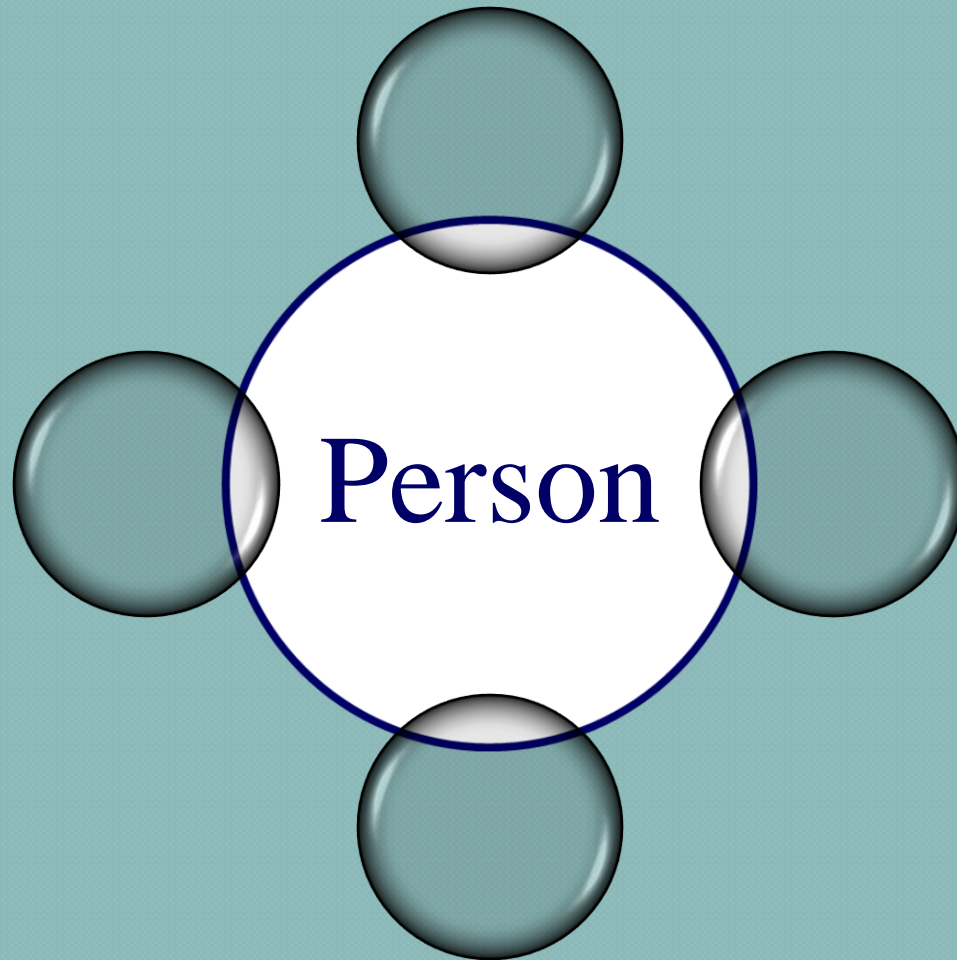
# Narcissus

- Son of river Cephissus
- Fell in love with his own image
- Erotic activity with his own image were frustrating
- Since he could not part with his image he dies at the edge of the pool.
- Dies and becomes a lily



# Person

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An Individual is a “corruption”

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Individual

# Individual versus a person

- An individual is “atomised”
- All by himself
- He always fights for his rights
- The “Me” generation
- Wants to be free of everything and everyone

# Jesus

- Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."—John 4:34.
- I and my Father are one- John 10:30
- Did you not know that I must be about “My Father’s business?” (Luke 2: 49)

When a son/daughter says to her parents...

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◎ This is my life... I will live it as I want it!!

She is being an individual!!

## When a woman says.....

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- ◎ This is my body and my uterus...
- ◎ I can do what I want with it...even abort if I wish..who are you to interfere?

An individual again

# Disconnection

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- ◎ Disconnection with God and with your neighbour is the surest way to becoming an individual

## III-Nourishing and starving the personhood

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◎ Loneliness kills

# Loneliness-Animals in a zoo

## Longevity

Zoo animals consistently live longer than their wild counterparts.





# What is the difference?

- Why do prisoners in solitary confinement die, but not the animals?

# Desert Monks- Solitary

- Anthony of Egypt (251-356) is the best known of these early hermit-monks.
- Pachomius
- Paul the Hermit

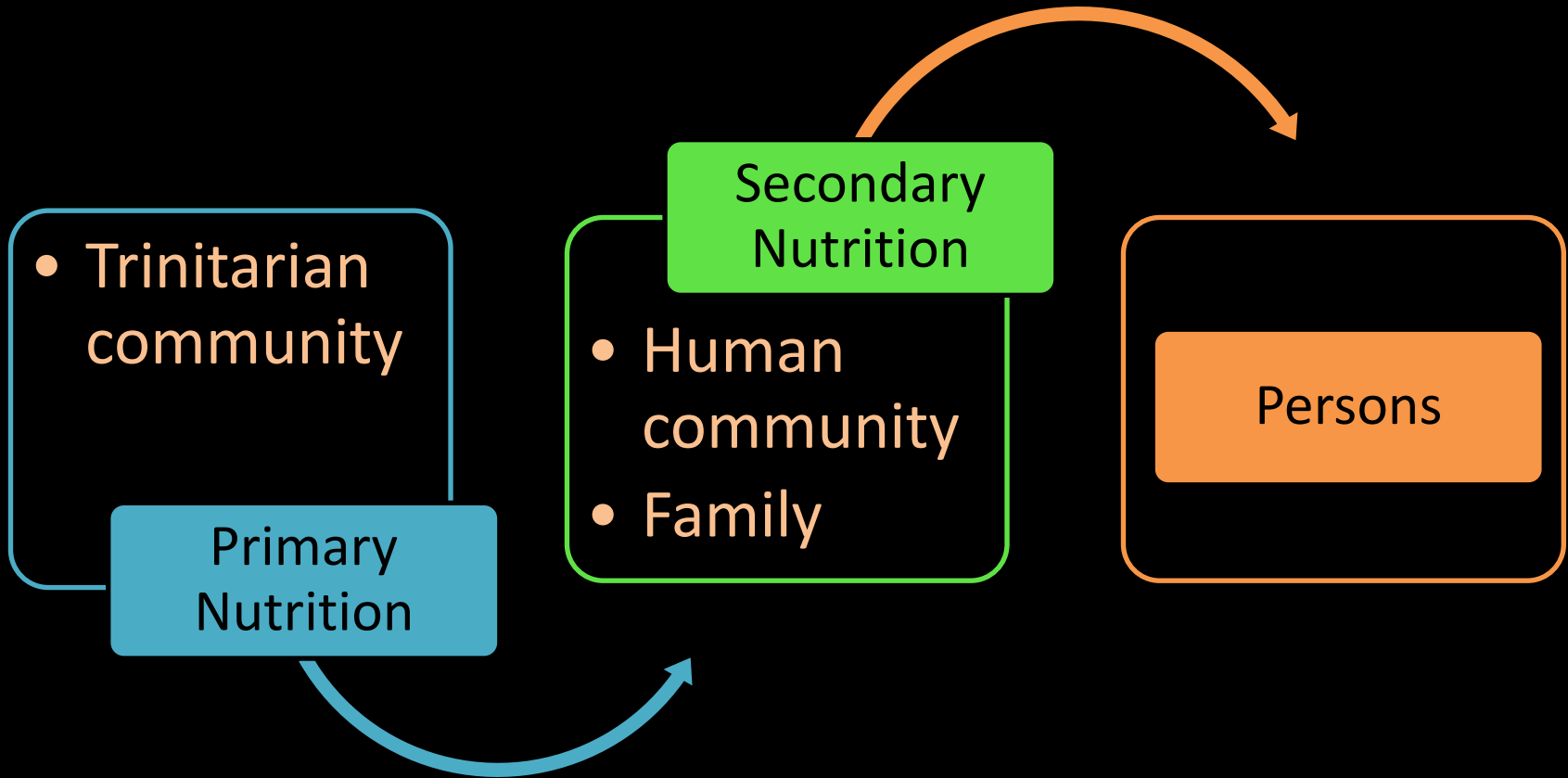
# Carthusian Cloister: The Keeping of Cell and Silence

Our principal endeavor and goal is to devote ourselves to the silence and solitude of cell. This is holy ground, a place where, as a man with his friend, the Lord and his servant often speak together; there is the faithful soul frequently united with the Word of God; there is the bride made one with her spouse; there is earth joined to heaven, the divine to the human.

# Nutrition for the personhood

- Relationship/Communion is then the nutrition for the personhood (I am the Bread of life)
- Loneliness/Individualism is then what kills a person. (Disconnection with every other)

# Nutrition for personhood



# Challenge of community

To live harmoniously in a community one has to

✓ *Give and Take*

✓ *One has to have the courage to accept criticism and change*

✓ *Learn to forgive*

# Understanding the Imago-Dei

- Principle of Intrinsic worth or value
- Not dependent on achievement or abilities or gifts

# Personhood blossoms only when freed

- Personhood resists control and manipulation
- Reason why God respects a free will
- Love and a free will are two sides of the same coin



# Issues pertaining to “personhood”

- The abortion debate
- The issues relating to reproductive technology
- Issues concerning Euthanasia
- Issues pertaining to resource allocation
- Issues pertaining to autonomy-freedom
- Issues relating to animal experiments

# Animals and personhood

- Creation
- Animal killing and killing a man
- Animal redemption
- Animal sacrifice

# Animals and personhood

- Animals did not have a helpmate only a sexual partner
- Story of more valuable than many sparrows
- Demoniac

# When personhood is misunderstood:

- Animals get equated with humans
- Killing of foetus
- Bestiality
- Commodification of medical care
- Euthanasia
- Marginalization of the disabled

According to a South Korean television network.

- *China: Baby Corpses Reportedly Cannibalized for 'Stamina' Pills*
- Chinese pharmaceutical companies are grinding up dead babies into stamina-enhancing pills
- The companies reportedly buy the corpses, store them secretly in refrigerators, place them in medical drying microwaves and grind them into powder. The powder is placed in capsules for sale as stamina boosters, it was reported.

# Dangerous scenarios

- An institution for the mentally retarded houses more than a hundred inmates. The State is unable to afford the maintenance of so many homes. The minister on one of his visits decides that the state could harvest one kidney, one lobe of the liver and both fibulae from every mentally retarded person as organ donations to help others. It would begin to pay for itself. A consent form was given to the mentally retarded which they promptly signed.

# Dangerous scenarios

- *Joycide* is a newly registered for profit Euthanasia company; they have state of the art techniques for assisting people who wished to die, achieve their objective in many diverse and painless and indeed “fun” ways. In return they were to sign off their organs for organ donation.

# Dangerous scenarios

The city of Forfan is a very animal loving city. They believe that all sentient animals have souls and therefore in its precincts the following laws relating to animals exist:

- Eating meat of mammals is banned
- All mammals should be baptised and christened and funeral services held when they die
- All animal experiments are banned
- Old age home for ageing and ailing animals be built
- Sexual activity between humans and mammals may not be punishable



# In conclusion...

*However deformed, however immoral, however brain damaged, however unskilled and unwanted a human being may be he is*

- More than matter
- More than animals
- More than angels
- And is made for God and in His image
- Will enjoy the fellowship of God and His saints with a glorified body and perfect personhood