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MINISTRIES

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A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll

Imago Dei Research Brief

From Pastor Mark Driscoll

Prepared by a research team

“We become what we think of ourselves...What determines one’s being is the image one adopts.”¹

I. Imago Dei in Christian Theological Tradition

Christian theology, almost since its beginning, has considered it important to maintain the belief that the activity of God in creation involves a likeness or similarity, for all the disparity, between the human creature and the Creator. However, the manner in which this should be conceived has been interpreted in various ways through the history of Christian theology.

The most helpful and concise historical survey of the image of God is by Anthony Hoekema.² Traditional interpretations of the image of God in humanity can be organized in three ways: substantive views, functional views, and relational views. The substantive view has been the dominant view for most of the history of Christian theology. The image of God, according to this view, is identified as some definite characteristic or quality within the makeup of man. This quality can be physical, spiritual, or psychological. Proponents of the substantive view divide the meanings of the words “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26-27. The relational view conceives of the image of God as something that is not resident within human nature but rather as the experiencing of a relationship. The functional view sees the image of God not in terms of the makeup of a human, or a human in relationships, but rather in something one does. It is a human function, usually in the exercising dominion over creation.³

The substantialist interpretation of the *imago Dei*, often considered the traditional interpretation, focuses on particular elements or aspects of human existence as the locus of the image. The range of examples and options are diverse and include human reason, human spirituality, the upright stature of human being, conscience, will, freedom, love, and, in some cases, the body. Humankind in God’s image, according to this view, means that as it was created by God, the human species possesses certain characteristics or qualities that render it similar to the divine being. These characteristics or qualities are built into *anthropos*. They are “capacities,” “qualities,” “original excellences,” or “endowments” that inhere in humanity’s creaturely substance. Paul Ramsey writes that in this mode of thought the *imago Dei* refers to “something within the substantial form of human nature, some faculty or capacity man possess” which distinguishes “man from nature and from other animals.”⁴

¹ Abraham Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), pp. 7-8.

² Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 33-65.

³ For another helpful summary of these views see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 517-36.

⁴ Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), p. 250.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus wrote his chief work, *Against Heresies*, to refute Gnostic errors. Irenaeus differentiated between “image” and “likeness” in Gen. 1:26-27. Man’s image is his capacity for reason and choice, and his “likeness” is his moral and spiritual accountability to God. In the beginning, God created man in his image and after his likeness. Man lost his likeness to God in the Fall but he retained the image of God. Only redemption through Christ could man’s likeness to God be regained. He wrote: “The Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating himself to man and man to himself, that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not yet shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, he confirmed both these: for he both showed forth the image truly, since he became himself what was his image; and he re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through the means of the visible Word.”⁵ According to Irenaeus, the image of God meant man’s rationality and his freedom. These were retained, according to Irenaeus, after the Fall.

Augustine

Augustine followed Aristotle’s classification that the image of God is the powers of the soul/memory, the mind/intellect, and the will. In chapter 4.6 of *On the Trinity*, Augustine writes: “The Image of God is to be sought in the immortality of the rational soul, how a trinity is demonstrated in the mind. Therefore neither is that trinity an image of God, which is not now, nor is that other an image of God, which then will not be, but we must find in the soul of man, i.e., the rational or intellectual soul, that image of the Creator which is immortally implanted in its immortality. For as the immortality itself of the soul is spoken with a qualification; since the soul too has its proper death, when it lacks a blessed life, which is to be called the true life of the soul; but it is therefore called immortal, because it never ceases to live with some life or other, even when it is most miserable; - so, although reason or intellect is at one time torpid in it, at another appears small, and at another great, yet the human soul is never anything save rational or intellectual; and hence, if it is made after the image of God in respect to this, that it is able to use reason and intellect in order to understand and behold God, then from the moment when that nature so marvelous and so great began to be, whether this image be so worn out as to be almost none at all, or whether it be obscure and defaced, or bright and beautiful, certainly it always is.”

Thomas Aquinas

Unlike Irenaeus, Aquinas does not make much of a distinction between “image” and “likeness.” Aquinas understood the image of God in man to be man’s intellect or reason. He writes: “The image of God, in its principle signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman.”⁶ Since angels have more “perfect intellects” than man, Aquinas understands the image of God to be found more perfectly in angels than in men.⁷ There are three stages of the image of God: “The first stage is man’s natural aptitude for understanding and loving God, an aptitude which consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.6.1.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.93.4.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.93.3.

men. The next stage is where a man is actually or habitually knowing and loving God, but still imperfectly; and here we have the image by conformity of grace. The third stage is where a man is actually knowing and loving God perfectly; and this is the image by likeness of glory... The first stage of the image is found in all men, the second only in the just, and the third only in the blessed.”⁸

Martin Luther

Martin Luther did not see a difference between “image” and “likeness.” Luther did not agree with Augustine that the image of God consisted of man's memory, will, and mind. Luther comments: “I am afraid that since the loss of this image through sin we cannot understand it to any extent. Memory, will, and mind we have indeed; but they are most depraved and most seriously weakened, yes, to put it more clearly, they are utterly leprous and unclean. If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.”⁹

Luther writes: “The image of God, according to which Adam was created, was something far more distinguished and excellent, since obviously no leprosy of sin adhered either to his reason or to his will. Both his inner and his outer sensations were all of the purest kind. His intellect was the clearest, his memory was the best, and his will was the most straightforward all in the most beautiful tranquility of mind, without any fear of death and without any anxiety. To these inner qualities came also those most beautiful and superb qualities of body and of all the limbs, qualities in which he surpassed all the remaining living creatures. I am fully convinced that before Adam's sin his eyes were so sharp and clear that they surpassed those of the lynx and eagle." He was stronger than the lions and the bears, whose strength is very great; and he handled them the way we handle puppies. Both the loveliness and the quality of the fruits he used as food were also far superior to what they are now. But after the Fall death crept like leprosy into all our perceptive powers, so that with our intellect we cannot even understand that image. Adam would not have known his Eve except in the most unembarrassed attitude toward God, with a will obedient to God, and without any evil thought. Now, after sin, we all know how great passion is in the flesh, which is not only passionate in its desire but also in its disgust after it has acquired what it wanted. Thus in both instances we see neither reason nor will unimpaired, but passion greater than that of cattle. Is this not a serious and pernicious leprosy, of which Adam was free before sin? Moreover, he had greater strength and keener senses than the rest of the living beings. To what extent is man today surpassed by the boars in their sense of hearing, by the eagles in their sense of sight, and by the lion in his strength? Therefore no one can picture in his thoughts how much better nature was then than it is now. Therefore my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly; that is, he was without the fear of death or of any other danger, and was content with God's favor.... Therefore when we speak about that image, we are speaking about something unknown. Not only have we had no experience of it, but we continually experience the opposite; and so we hear nothing except bare

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.93.4.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, in Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), vol. 1, 60ff.

words.”¹⁰ For Luther, like Calvin, the restoration of the image of God is only found in the renewing power of the gospel. “The Gospel has brought about the restoration of that image. Intellect and will indeed have remained, but both very much impaired. And so the Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more according to that familiar and indeed better image, because we are born again into eternal life or rather into the hope of eternal life by faith, that we may live in God and with God and be one with Him, as Christ says (John 17:21).”¹¹

John Calvin

John Calvin understood that man possessed the image of God in its perfection before the fall. Calvin saw no distinction between “image” and “likeness.” For Calvin, the image of God is found in man’s soul: “For although God’s glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of God’s image is in the soul.”¹² Calvin also granted that “although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.”¹³ Hoekema comments on Calvin’s view of the *imago Dei*: “In his original state man was capable of communicating with and responding to both God and other human beings.”¹⁴ Calvin does not believe that the image of God has much to do with the notion of man’s dominion on the earth: “Nor is there probability in the opinion of those who place likeness to God in the dominion bestowed upon man, as if he only resembled God in this, that he is appointed lord and master of all things.”¹⁵

Calvin wrote the following comments on Colossians 3:10: “We are renewed after the image of God. Now, the image of God resides in the whole of the soul, inasmuch as it is not the reason merely that is rectified, but also the will. Hence, too, we learn, on the one hand, what is the end of our regeneration, that is, that we may be made like God, and that his glory may shine forth in us; and, on the other hand, what is the image of God, of which mention is made by Moses in Genesis 9:6, the rectitude and integrity of the whole soul, so that man reflects, like a mirror, the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God. He speaks somewhat differently in the Epistle to the Ephesians, but the meaning is the same. Paul, at the same time, teaches, that there is nothing more excellent at which the Colossians can aspire, inasmuch as this is our highest perfection and blessedness to bear the image of God.”¹⁶

Sometimes Calvin seems to indicate that the *imago Dei* was totally obliterated by the fall. This is not the case. The following passage from *Institutes* provides a helpful summary of Calvin’s view of the *imago Dei*: “Our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory. This, however, cannot be better known than from the remedy provided for

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, in Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), vol. 1, 62-3.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, in Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), vol. 1, 64.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, I.15.3

¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, I.15.3

¹⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 43.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15.4.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on Colossians 3:10*.

the corruption of nature. It cannot be doubted that when Adam lost his first estate he became alienated from God. Wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity. For although Paul, contrasting the quickening Spirit which believers receive from Christ, with the living soul which Adam was created (1 Cor. 15:45), commends the richer measure of grace bestowed in regeneration, he does not, however, contradict the statement, that the end of regeneration is to form us anew in the image of God. Accordingly, he elsewhere shows that the new man is renewed after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:19). To this corresponds another passage, ‘Put ye on the new man, who after God is created,’ (Eph. 4:24). We must now see what particulars Paul comprehends under this renovation. In the first place, he mentions knowledge, and in the second, true righteousness and holiness. Hence we infer, that at the beginning the image of God was manifested by light of intellect, rectitude of heart, and the soundness of every part. For though I admit that the forms of expression are elliptical, this principle cannot be overthrown—viz. that the leading feature in the renovation of the divine image must also have held the highest place in its creation. To the same effect Paul elsewhere says, that beholding the glory of Christ with unveiled face, we are transformed into the same image. We now see how Christ is the most perfect image of God, into which we are so renewed as to bear the image of God in knowledge, purity, righteousness, and true holiness... I presume it has already been sufficiently proved, that the image comprehends everything which has any relation to the spiritual and eternal life. The same thing, in different terms, is declared by St John when he says, that the light which was from the beginning, in the eternal Word of God, was the light of man (John 1:4). His object being to extol the singular grace of God in making man excel the other animals, he at the same time shows how he was formed in the image of God, that he may separate him from the common herd, as possessing not ordinary animal existence, but one which combines with it the light of intelligence. Therefore, as the image of God constitutes the entire excellence of human nature, as it shone in Adam before his fall, but was afterwards vitiated and almost destroyed, nothing remaining but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity, so it is now partly seen in the elect, in so far as they are regenerated by the Spirit.”¹⁷

According to Calvin, the renewal of the image of God in man is a process that God works in believers over the course of their life-long sanctification by the Spirit. Calvin writes in his *Commentary* on 2 Cor. 3:18: “Observe, that the design of the gospel is this — that the image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us during our whole life, because God makes his glory shine forth in us by little and little.” This advancement in renewing the image of God in man will not be fully seen until the life to come: “Its full lustre, however, will be displayed in heaven.”¹⁸

Jacob Arminius

Jacob Arminius sets forth very clear and concise statements concerning depravity and the will. Much of his understanding is formed by his interpretation of Romans 7, Romans 9, and the

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15.4.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15.4.

imago Dei.¹⁹ He disagreed with Calvin's view that the image of God in humanity has been completely "corrupted" so that "whatever remains is frightful deformity."²⁰ In a letter to Lord Hippolytus a Collibus, Arminius writes: "Concerning grace and free will, this is what I teach according to the Scriptures and orthodox consent: Free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true spiritual good, without grace. That I may not be said, like Pelagius, to practice delusion with regard to the word 'grace,' I mean by it that which is the grace of Christ and which belongs to regeneration. I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the due ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good."²¹

Again in the "Declaration of Sentiments" Arminius writes: "This is my opinion concerning the Free will of man: In his primitive condition as he came out of the hands of his Creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform the true good, according to the commandment delivered to him. Yet none of these acts could he do, except through the assistance of Divine Grace. But in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good."²²

J. I. Packer

J. I. Packer provides a succinct answer to the question, "What does Genesis mean by man being made in the image of God?" Packer writes: "The Bible indicates that my body, though not me, is integral to my humanity, which would be reduced without it. Scripture promises me resurrection. Plato thought I would be better off without a body, as many think today, but that is wrong. I have a mind, including a conscience; also feelings and desires, along with my powers of mental and physical action. Thus endowed, I read the Bible as God's Word, teaching me what I should think and do about this puzzling, complex reality that I know myself to be. Genesis 1:26-27 declares that God created mankind of both sexes, male and female, in his image and likeness. *Image* and *likeness* were once thought to express different things, but they mean about the same. This passage shows us, first, our unique and special dignity (God speaks of no creature other than man as his image-bearer), and, second, how we are meant to live. *Image* means representative likeness—which tells us at once that we should be reflecting, at our creaturely level, what Genesis 1 shows God is and does. Therefore we should always act with resourceful rationality and wise love, making and executing praiseworthy plans just as God did in creation. He generated value by producing what was truly good; so should we. We should be showing love and goodwill toward all other persons, as God did when he blessed Adam and Eve (1:28). And in fellowship with God, we should directly honor and obey him by the way we manage and care for that bit of the created order that he gives us to look after, according to his dominion mandate (26,28).

For us, then, as for Adam and Eve before the Fall, and for the Lord Jesus himself—the incarnate Son whom Paul hails as the Father's true image (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15)—being the

¹⁹Clark Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), p. 236.

²⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 189.

²¹J. Arminius, *Writings II*, trans. J. Nichols (Baker, 1956), p. 472.

²²J. Arminius, *Writings I*, pp. 252-3.

image of God means actually living this way, moment by moment and day by day. But, like Adam and Eve and everyone else save Jesus, we fail here constantly, however good our intentions as believers. And so, in spades, do all unbelievers who, being under the power of the anti-God force Paul calls sin (Rom. 3:9), lack good intentions (Eph. 2:1-3, 4:17-24). That does not mean, of course, that they are all as bad as they could be; it simply means that sin in the human system, our legacy from Adam, drives us all the time to be self-centered and self-seeking, and so robs us of the power to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength.

So a distinction has to be drawn. We still bear the image of *God formally*—that is, we still have in us the abilities that, if rightly harnessed, would achieve a fully righteous, Godlike life—and so the unique dignity of each human being must still be recognized and respected (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), as a gesture of honor to our maker. But we have lost the image *substantially*, and it takes God's grace-gift of union with Christ to restore it fully. Through this gift we share his resurrection life in regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Hereby we "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24), and are progressively transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus, "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus the *substantial* image is renewed. God's work of restoring the image starts in the heart, with inward illumination, our embrace of Christ, and motivational change at the core of our being (2 Cor. 4:4, 6, 5:17). Born-again believers want God more than they want anything else. In daily life our strongest desire is to love and worship and serve and please and honor and glorify the Father and the Son, who saved us.

Also, we find ourselves wanting to do good to others every way we can, and most of all to share with others our knowledge of new life with God in Christ. Thus all our duty becomes all our delight at the deepest level, and from our new motivation comes that imitation of God and of Christ that is every Christian's calling (1 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 1:6)—and which is precisely expressing the image of God in daily life. True imaging of God in Christ-like action starts with the Christ-like motivation of the regenerate, Spirit-indwelt heart. Two humans, living in God's image, were the crown of God's creation. Our fallen race, acting out the image of Satan, ruins his creation. A new humanity, the company of believers recreated in Christ's image, will adorn and enjoy the new heaven and earth that are promised. Praise God!"²³

Karl Barth

The "image of God" has often been conceived in Western theology in an individualistic sense, but Karl Barth interprets the doctrine in a different manner. Barth's *imago Dei* doctrine turns away from the tedious but entrenched practice of identifying the image of God with some "quality of humanity" and necessitates the thinking of humanity in relational terms.

Karl Barth writes that the *imago Dei* "is not a quality of man."²⁴ The "endowments" are only secondary, they are seen as means, not ends. Barth refuses to locate the image of God in humanity in any kind of anthropological "description of the being of man, its structure, disposition, capacities, etc."²⁵ Barth contends that previous theologians all made similar mistakes in failing to look carefully at the Scripture that describes humanity's creation in the

²³ J. I. Packer, "Reflected Glory," *Christianity Today*, December 2003, 56.

²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrane (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 184.

²⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 195.

image of God.²⁶ He believed that the best interpretation of Genesis 1: 26-27 is given, implicitly, within the passage: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

As in this sense man is the first and only one to be created in genuine confrontation with God and as a genuine counterpart to his fellows, it is he first and alone who is created ‘in the image’ and ‘after the likeness’ of God. For an understanding of the general biblical use of this concept, it is advisable to keep as close as possible to the simple sense of the “Godlikeness” given in this passage. It is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man’s peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists as man himself consists as the creature of God. He would not be man if he were not the image of God.²⁷

Barth continues that God desired to create a being “which in all of its non-deity and therefore its differentiation can be a real partner; which is capable of action and responsibility in relation to Him; to which His own divine form of life is not alien...”²⁸ With this emphasis, the discussion is being moved out of the sphere in which the human is being accessed for its attributes and into one where what matters is its relatedness.

The fact that humans were created male and female means for Barth that humans were endowed by God with the possibility of confrontation between man and woman. Barth writes: “Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female...?”²⁹ Barth speaks of the image as the “plurality of man,” or “being man means being-in-togetherness: as man and wife.”³⁰ Thus the *imago Dei* for Barth is the togetherness, the plurality of the I-Thou relationship: man can be an “I” to woman and woman can be an “I” to man and man can also be a “thou” to woman and woman can be a “thou” to man.

Barth calls this “confrontation” the image of God because this same confrontational relationship exists between God and humanity. Barth says that “image has a double meaning: God lives in togetherness within Himself [the Original], then God lives in togetherness with man [first image], then men live in togetherness with one another [a second image].”³¹ To say that the *imago Dei* has a double meaning adds another innovative dimension to the traditional understanding. Rather than *imago Dei* meaning reason, personality, or responsibility, here it refers to the I-Thou relationships of both God-human (“real man”) and human-human (humanity). Barth sees the I-Thou-ness of humanity not only as a reflection of the inner Godhead, but also as a reflection of the I-Thou form of “real man.” God is a being who confronts and enters into an I-Thou relationship with humans. Humanity’s capacity for a similar relationship with each other means therefore that humans have been created in the image and

²⁶ Barth says: “People have said that the image of God was ‘reason’, ‘personality’, ‘responsibility’, but I don’t find any of these in the text. Luther and Calvin spoke of ‘original righteousness’, but I do not find that either.” *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 57.

²⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 183.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

²⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 195.

³⁰ *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, p. 57.

³¹ *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, p. 57.

likeness of God: “Man is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation [between the I and the Thou] in God Himself: created as a Thou that can be addressed by God but also an I responsible to God; in the relationship of man and woman in which man is a Thou to his fellow and therefore himself an I in responsibility to this claim.”³²

Between God and humans there is no analogy of being (*analogia entis*) but an analogy of relation (*analogia relationis*): “Thus the *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive for God, and then for man created by God. To remove it is tantamount to removing the divine from God as well as the human from man.”³³ Both I-Thou relationships, God-human and human-human, are the *imago Dei* and because they are both images they are signs of one another. Thus, humanity points to and reflects each human’s destiny which is to realize that humans are covenant partners of God. In other words, God created humans for covenantal relationship with Himself and for relationship with each other. Concerning this point Barth writes: “That real man is determined by God for life with God has its inviolable correspondence in the fact that his creaturely being is a being in encounter- between I and Thou, man and woman. It is human in this encounter, and in this humanity it is a likeness of the being of its Creator.”³⁴

The anticipated question “How do we know about the image of God in man?” is answered by Barth’s Christocentrism. Barth writes:

The humanity of Jesus, His fellow-humanity, His being for man as the direct correlative of His being for God, indicates, attests, and reveals this correspondence and similarity. It [Jesus’ humanity] is not orientated and constituted as it is on a purely factual and perhaps accidental parallelism or as the basis of a capricious divine resolve, but it follows the essence, the inner being of God...It is this inner being which takes this form, for all the disparity of sphere and object, remains true to itself and therefore reflects itself...Hence, the factuality, the material necessity of the being of the man Jesus for His fellows, does not really rest on the mystery of an accident or caprice, but on the mystery of the purpose and meaning of God, who can maintain and demonstrate His essence even in His work, and in His relation to this work.³⁵

The substantialist concept of the image locates the image in humanity as a quality of human nature, while the relational concept conceives of the *imago Dei* as an inclination or proclivity occurring within relationship between Creator and creature. The image of God is something that happens as a result of this relationship. The creature images its Creator because and insofar as it is “turned toward” God. To be the image of God does not mean to have something but to *be* and *do* something: to image God.

II. Imago Dei in the Scriptures

³² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 198.

³³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 185.

³⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, p. 203.

³⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, p. 220.

Specific references to man as created in the image of God are infrequent in the Bible. The key texts on the imago Dei from the Scriptures can be organized into three groups: the creation of man, Jesus Christ, and the Christian being restored in Christ.

Imago Dei and the creation of man:

Genesis 1:26-27 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 5:1-3 - This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

Genesis 9:6 - Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

1 Corinthians 11:7 - For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

James 3:9 - With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

Imago Dei and Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 4:4 - In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Colossians 1:15 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Hebrews 1:3 - He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Imago Dei and the Christian being restored in Christ:

Romans 8:29 - For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers

1 Corinthians 15:49 - Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:22-24 - Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Philippians 3:20-21 - But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Colossians 3:9-10 - Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

It is not enough simply to search the Bible for the phrase “image of God.” Sinclair Ferguson writes, “While statistically the phrase is infrequent, the interpretation of man which it enshrines is all-pervasive.”³⁶ Gerhard von Rad writes: “The central point of Old Testament anthropology is that man is dust and ashes before God and that he cannot stand before his holiness. Thus the witness to man's divine likeness plays no predominant role in the OT. It stands as it were on the margin of the whole complex. Yet it is highly significant that OT faith adopted this theologoumenon (i.e. theological opinion) in dealing with the mystery of man's origin.”³⁷

Gerald L. Bray provides a helpful and concise panoramic view of the doctrine of the image of God in man from a biblical-theological perspective: “The term 'image' can translate both the Hebrew *selem*/Greek *eikon*, and the Hebrew *demut*/Greek *homoiosis*, though the latter is more usually rendered as 'likeness'. For many centuries it was generally assumed that the 'image' of God comprises the human characteristics of personhood which remain after the fall of Adam, whereas the 'likeness' comprises those removed or destroyed at the fall. This distinction reflected intertestamental Jewish speculation, which held (in direct contradiction of Genesis) that God's image gave the human soul the ability to distinguish between good and evil. As time went on, the rabbis argued, this ability diminished, and so the image was corrupted.

In the 16th century, Hebrew scholars concluded that the two words were synonymous, but the influence of the ancient tradition generated the (unfortunate) belief that the image/likeness was lost, or severely corrupted by the fall. In recent years it has generally been agreed that the Bible nowhere speaks of a loss of the image/likeness, and that there are passages which imply that it is still intact. Human beings are created in God's image; therefore they should not be killed (Gen. 9:6) or cursed (Jas. 3:9). Neither of these texts would have any meaning if the image/likeness had been lost at the fall, and so the traditional view cannot be sustained.

The appearance of the words in Genesis 1:26-27 is of the greatest importance for biblical anthropology. There it is said that both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God, a statement which reinforces the equality of the sexes. However, this must be balanced against 1 Corinthians 11:7 where Paul explains that a man must not cover his head because he is the image of God, whereas a woman ought to cover hers, because she is the image of the man. This does not contradict the Genesis statement, because it is through the man that the woman shares in God's image, given that she was created out of him. It is possible that the biblical picture reflects the ancient Near Eastern idea of images as statues representing the king and therefore partaking of his authority in some way. If that is true, the designation of Adam as the image of God might mean that he was intended to be God's viceroy on earth.

In the Genesis passage, God says 'Let *us* make man in *our* image' (NIV; author's italics).

³⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair Ferguson, David Wright, and J.I. Packer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 328.

³⁷ Gerhard von Rad, “eikon,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), vol. 2, p. 391.

Augustine believed that the plural referred to the Trinity, and developed a number of theories about the supposed threefold nature of the human soul. It has also been suggested that the plural refers to the angels, and that they are therefore also created in God's image, a view which was supported by Thomas Aquinas, though the Bible nowhere confirms it. Paul says that we shall judge the angels (1 Cor. 6:3), so although we are lower in the order of creation than they are (Ps. 8:5-6), there is no indication that we are dependent on them in any way.

In the NT, the word 'image' occurs twenty-three times, but 'likeness' appears only once, in James 3:9 (see above). The ten occurrences of 'image' in Revelation and the one in Hebrews are irrelevant to our subject. In the Synoptic Gospels, 'image' is used in the parallel passages about paying taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24). Possibly Jesus meant to imply that, just as the coins belonged to Caesar because his image was on them, so human beings belong to God because his image is in us. This is true, but as it is not explicitly stated in the text, we must be careful not to build too much on it.

This leaves nine occurrences of the word in the Pauline corpus, only one of which (1 Cor. 11:7, already mentioned) is undoubtedly connected with the Genesis doctrine. Romans 1:23 may well contain a pun based on it: Paul claims that after the fall we exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness (*homoioima*) of the image of mortal man; but as this 'likeness' is immediately coupled with those of birds, animals and reptiles, the reference is probably to idols and not the image of God in us.

The other occurrences are of two kinds. Some refer to Christ, as the 'image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4) or 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15); the rest refer to us, who are being made in his image. The latter reminds us of the creation account, but the term 'image' is used somewhat differently by Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:49, for instance, he says that whereas we have previously borne the image of the earthly, we shall be recreated in the resurrection, so that we shall then bear the image of the heavenly. Here 'image' clearly refers to our humanity, which we have inherited from Adam, and which will be transformed by Christ, and not to our link with God, which is the meaning of the word in Genesis 1:26. It has sometimes been argued that the 'image of God' in Christ reflects his status as the second Adam, but the real point of the passages which refer to it is to explain Christ's relationship with to God the Father, not his relationship to the human race. In his case, being the image of the invisible God means that he is fully divine, which Adam was not.

It can be concluded that the 'image (likeness) of God' refers to a permanent aspect of our created nature, which was not affected by the fall. It is the special characteristic of the human race, which distinguishes us from other creatures and makes our salvation a matter of supreme concern to God. At the same time, the word 'image' is often used in the NT so as to allude to the creation account in Genesis, without specifically referring to it."³⁸

³⁸ Gerald L. Bray, "Image of God" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 575-6.