

# The Humanization of Humanity:

## Christ-Likeness and the Renewal of the *Imago Dei*

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### Introduction

It is not an overestimation to aver that Wesleyan soteriology revolves around the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. This does not come as a surprise, especially since John Wesley himself, the forefather of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, gave the *imago Dei* a pivotal role in his theological reflection. In Wesley's *imago*-grounded soteriology, in particular, we find a retrospective look at the salvific economy that goes far back to and is grounded in the creation narrative, which is then complemented by his assessment of the present human predicament. This means that although Wesley appreciates the primordial pre-lapsarian human condition, his theological cogitation is not trapped in the ideal past, but actually highlights what is at hand, i.e. the contemporary human situation in sin and death. The discovery and affirmation of present human circumstances, however, is greeted by the eschatological hope offered by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Expressed in terms of the *ordo salutis* in relation to the *imago Dei*: (1) humanity was created in the image of God, (2) the image is marred, and (3) the image is restored.

This paper, however, is not exclusively interested in examining Wesley's theology. We are both concerned with the *imago Dei* and soteriology, but our discussion will move beyond Wesley's own formulation. This manoeuvre is important, if we are to see the relevance of Wesley and Wesleyan theology in the contemporary theological coliseum. We will follow the three-fold movement in the *ordo salutis* enumerated above, but we are going to relate this movement to the understanding of the *imago Dei* in the wider theological neighbourhood. Thus, we will engage in the different interpretations of the *imago Dei* expounded by non-Wesleyan theologians. It will be argued that Wesley's relational understanding stands closer to the biblical perspective, although some qualifications need to be made. It will be argued further that Wesley's relational view of the *imago Dei* needs to be complemented by a Christocentric approach. This is important, because one of the most significant soteriological understandings that has gained enthusiastic approval in recent years, particularly since Karl Barth and his protégées, is the humanization of humanity in Christ.

## Interpretations of the *Imago Dei*

There are only three texts<sup>1</sup> explicitly connecting humankind as created or made in the *imago Dei* – three in the Old Testament (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:5-6) and two in the New Testament (1 Cor 11:7; James 3:9) – and this fact may tempt scholars to relegate it as a peripheral concept. Although several references to the *imago Dei* are dispersed throughout the Scripture, popping out here and there, it is never taken up or singled out in detailed elaboration. Thus, one can point out the seeming disproportionality of the central place accorded to the doctrine of the *imago Dei* in Christian theology and the apparent little interest of it by the biblical writers. Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad, however, defends the Christian practice of giving weight to the concept, arguing that it in fact occupies a central place in the biblical narrative, no matter how modest its occurrences may be. He explains his position by presenting the premise that: “The central point of OT anthropology is that man is dust and ashes before God and that he cannot stand before His holiness.” With this in mind, what is surprising is not the scarce number of allusions to the *imago Dei*, but that it is even mentioned. Thus, von Rad adds that it is “highly significant that OT faith adopted this theologoumenon in dealing with the mystery of man’s origin.”<sup>2</sup>

Much of the published literature attempting to flesh out the meaning of the *imago Dei* is found in treatises concerning anthropology.<sup>3</sup> As Claus Westermann noted, “the main interest has been on what is being said theologically about humankind: what is a human being?”<sup>4</sup> Although some writings possess a narrower focus, such as human dignity, they are still concerned with the doctrine of humanity. Their anthropological concerns are virtually just echoes of each other.<sup>5</sup> Even well-recognized Wesleyan theologians such as Randy L. Maddox and Kenneth J. Collins, articulating Wesley’s theology, have placed their discussions of the *imago Dei* in their presentation of Wesley’s doctrine of humanity.<sup>6</sup> The unanimity in addressing the *imago Dei* in the context of theological anthropology, however, does not ensure that theologians consensually agree on the minute details of what the *imago Dei* consists in humanity. The history of Christian theology shows a wide array of interpretations.<sup>7</sup> Although there is a growing appreciation of

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<sup>1</sup> This statement has been left as in the original submission. The first response (see below, 47) mentions the error.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “*eikon*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; ed. Gerhard Kittel; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2: 390.

<sup>3</sup> An example would be G. C. Berkouwer’s *Man: The Image of God* (trans. Dirk W. Jellema; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 148.

<sup>5</sup> See R. Kendall and Linda Woodhead, eds., *God and Human Dignity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), chapter 3; and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Dominic Robinson, *Understanding the “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011), 5-27, for a short history of the different interpretations.

understanding the *imago Dei* as dominion among Old Testament scholars recently, as J. Richard Middleton claims, a consensus is yet to be achieved.<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to survey the different interpretations, and get mired down in the *minutiae* of intramural skirmishes in the process. Nevertheless, it is fitting that the broad picture is examined, so that the alternative proposal of this paper is better appreciated.

### Attributal/Qualitative Interpretations

It must be admitted that the Bible neither spells out nor elaborates what is meant to be created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27 passingly drops an indicative statement that humanity is created in the *imago*, but it provides no explanation as to what exactly the *imago* consists of.<sup>9</sup> Thus, with not much help from the Scripture itself, many interpreters have felt free to turn to extra-biblical sources – usually philosophical – to interpret the image. Hendrikus Berkhof’s analysis hits the bull’s eye: “systematic theologies have poured meaning into Genesis 1:26,” and their conclusions usually reflect their own *Zeitgeist*.<sup>10</sup> An example of this approach, and perhaps the most widely held throughout the Church’s history, is the attributal understanding, in which the *imago* is thought to refer to “certain characteristics or capacities inherent in human nature.”<sup>11</sup> Fuelled by a comparative approach, the question “What does it mean for humanity to be created in the image of God?” is replaced by “What makes humans *like* God and *unlike* animals?” If God has indeed placed humanity in a unique position vis-à-vis himself, creating us in his own image and likeness, then a special dignity exists that makes us god-like on the one hand and distinct from the rest of creation on the other hand. The search for qualities or attributes found in humanity thus becomes the primary procedure in framing anthropology. The *imago* is understood as a matter of “whats,” and enumeration of these “whats” is considered sufficient. But even for those who espouse this investigative formula, the list of qualities that they enumerate differs. The reason for the variegated conclusions, despite using the same methodology is that the identification of the *imago* is usually intertwined with the “values embraced by the particular cultures within which theologians were doing their work.”<sup>12</sup>

Thomas Smail labels this common procedure as “projectionism,” i.e., the projection of our human aspirations on to that which we wish to perceive. In terms of the *imago*, attributal formulations of the human-in-the-image-of-God tend to portray the idealized human being imagined and crafted by the theorist using preconceived tools. Smail argues that this projectionist

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<sup>8</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 24-29.

<sup>9</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (trans. Sierd Woodstra; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 142.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 89.

approach is precisely what Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud had in common, and which theologians seem to uncritically emulate.<sup>13</sup> In anthropological formulations, the projectionist projects his own imagined image of the perfect human being as a consequence of his frustration about himself in particular or in humanity in general. Hence, the idealized human being is ultimately a product of a Dionysian *hyper*.

Smail's judgment is sharp, but his point is not implausible. A brief look at the development of Western theology provides abundantly sufficient evidence that substantiates Smail's critique. Grenz affirms that it is indeed in the Western Church where the attributive view of the *imago* became solidified.<sup>14</sup> Although there were antecedents in the early church, Augustine's view of humanity created *ad Imagenim Dei* is thought to be the strong representative of this view. Augustine's dualistic view of humanity, grounded in and coupled with his Platonic inclination, and his doctrine of the *vestigia Dei*, predisposed him to emphasize the centrality of the soul and its intellectual dimension. This consequently led him to emphasize, especially in his later writings, that the divine *imago* is rationality, viewed as a structure of the human soul in itself. He writes: "For a great thing truly is man, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts."<sup>15</sup> Augustine's position became the bedrock of medieval thought, and was even further strengthened by Thomas Aquinas' assertion that *only intellectual creatures* such as angels and humans, strictly speaking, are made in the image of God.<sup>16</sup> Here, the emphasized quality is rationality again, because it is perceived as the primary content of the *analogia entis*.

### Teleological/Eschatological Perspective

Precipitated by the two different terms in Genesis 1:26-27, theologians have pointed out the distinction between created in God's *tselem* ("image") and in God's *demut* ("likeness"). *Tselem* primarily refers to representations, and is connected with the Hebrew term *sel*, "shadow." *Demut* is derived from the verb *damah*, "be like" or "resemble," and so it carries the meaning of "likeness" or "resemblance." Although contemporary exegetes and theologians are almost unanimous in concluding that these two terms are synonymous and interchangeable, there were theologians who capitalized on their assumed distinction to explicate their anthropology. Irenaeus may be the first to highlight the peculiarity of the terms, inadvertently setting the

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-24.

<sup>14</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 152-161.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.22; in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (first series; ed. Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 2: 257 [henceforth *NPNF*]. See also *On the Trinity*, IV.4 on Augustine's discussion of the *imago* of God as located in the rational soul, in *NPNF* 3: 184-185.

<sup>16</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 158.

parameters for the understanding of the *imago* for subsequent theologians. Irenaeus' concern is intertwined with his understanding of the effects of the Fall, and his distinction between *tselem* and *demut* provided the foundation in identifying what humanity lost and retained after the Fall.

What is important to highlight at this juncture is that for Irenaeus, the *image* refers to those qualities and ontological structures that constitute humanness, and the *likeness* refers to the potentiality that is yet to be achieved. Dominic Robinson, building on J. N. D. Kelly's work, summarizes the distinction:

Inasmuch as Irenaeus taught that human beings were created in God's "image" he meant that the first human enjoyed the power of reason and of freedom of will. Inasmuch as he taught that human beings were created in God's "likeness" they enjoyed a supernatural endowment through the action of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Irenaeus, thus, held an attributal view of the *imago*, although one is mistaken to assume that he was a pure attributalist. Ironically, just as Irenaeus is pointed out as the father of the attributal position, his understanding of the *similitudo* is also regarded as the basis for later theologians in rejecting the attributal position and endorse a teleological construal.

In contrast to the attributal position, in which the *imago* is understood to refer to irremovable qualities infused in humanity, the teleological interpretation regards creation in the *imago* as an eschatological phenomenon. Human beings are on a journey and are involved in a process of an ongoing ascent toward god-likeness. Justo Gonzalez explains: "The Triune God created man according to his image. But man himself is not the image of God; the image is the Son, in whom and by whom man has been created... Therefore, the image of God is not something to be found in man, but is rather the direction in which we are to grow."<sup>18</sup> This goes well with Irenaeus' view that Adam and Eve, when they were created, were not "perfect beings" (in the Latin *perfectus* sense), but were immature. As Irenaeus writes, "God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it."<sup>19</sup> He adds that creation is only the beginning of God's work in humanity, and that the whole human life is a progress from infancy to maturity:

Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover; and having recovered, should be glorified; and having been glorified, should see his Lord.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei,"* 12. See J. N. D. Kelly's analysis of Irenaeus' view of the *imago Dei* in *Early Christian Doctrines* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), 171.

<sup>18</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 165.

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.38.2; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 1: 521 [henceforth ANF].

<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.38.3, in ANF 1: 522.

This developmental, eschatological *and telic* understanding of the *imago* is noticeably not Augustinian in orientation, in that it rejects the idea that Adam before the Fall was created perfect, complete, and mature, and was endowed with “original righteousness.” Maturity is not a state given to humanity in creation, but is a human potential that may be achieved in the future. John Macquarrie, as a proponent of what Grenz calls “an existentialist developmentalism,” argues that “We must think of the *imago Dei* more in terms of a potentiality for being that is given to man with his very being, than in terms of a fixed ‘endowment’ or ‘nature’. Man is a creature, but as the creature that ‘exists’, he has an openness into which he can move outward and upward.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Relational/Personalist Alternative**

The attributal understanding of the *imago* that dominated the medieval theological scene, according to Grenz, was challenged by the Reformation theologians and subsequent interpreters. Paradigmatic is the sarcastic comment of Martin Luther that if the *imago* consists primarily of capabilities or qualities, then “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.”<sup>22</sup> H. Ray Dunning poses the same negative attitude towards the attributal position, and points out that the attributal “from below” approach that is grounded in the Aristotelian anthropological definition needs to be challenged and replaced by a more relational understanding in which the human being is viewed not as a *rational* animal, but a *relational* entity.<sup>23</sup> Quoting the ethicist Paul Ramsey, Grenz encapsulates:

The relational understanding of the *imago dei* [sic] moves the focus from noun to verb... Hence, the *imago dei* is less a faculty humans possess than an act that humans do. As Ramsey explains, “The image of God is... to be understood as a relationship *within which* man sometimes stand, whenever like a mirror he obediently reflects God’s will in his life and actions... The image of God, according to this view, consists of man’s

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<sup>21</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 231. Other proponents of the *telic* view are James Orr and Wolfhart Pannenberg. See Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), 140; and Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (trans. Matthew J. O’Connell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 50. See also Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 177-182.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures in Genesis,” in *Luther’s Works* (trans. George V. Schick; St. Louis: Concordia, 1958) 1: 61.

<sup>23</sup> H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 44.

*position* before God, or, rather, the image of God is reflected in man because of his position before him.”<sup>24</sup>

This relational paradigm is perhaps the most widely accepted theological interpretation today. Even recent Wesleyan studies are almost unanimous in pointing out that Wesley’s understanding of the *imago* falls under this perspective.<sup>25</sup> Exemplified by Mildred Wynkoop’s *A Theology of Love*, this relational matrix in understanding Wesley’s theology of the *imago* is typified by Collins’ judgment that “the *imago Dei* must be understood in a *relational* way as the emblem of holy love.”<sup>26</sup> Wesley himself affirms that “love is the very image of God,” and that “by love man is not only made like God, but in some sense one with him.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, just as God is love, so the *imago* found in humanity is found and expressed as love-in-relationships. Wesley’s high regard of relationality in his understanding of the *imago* is displayed most unambiguously in his sermon “The General Deliverance:”

What [is] the barrier between men and brutes? The line which they cannot pass? It was not reason. Set aside that ambiguous term: exchange it for plain word, understanding, and who can deny that brutes have this?... But it is this: man is capable of God; the inferior creatures are not. We have no ground to believe that they are in any degree capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God. This is the specific difference between man and brute—the great gulf which they cannot pass over.<sup>28</sup>

But what of Wesley’s more well-known three-fold characterization of the *imago* in his sermon, “The New Birth,” where he enumerates natural, political and moral image as constitutive of the *imago Dei*?<sup>29</sup> Collins argues that these three should be perceived as primarily relational as well. This means that the natural image, composed of understanding, will, and freedom, although they may appear at first as inherent human qualities or capabilities, are actually given in order for humanity to be able to have a genuine relationship with God. Similarly, the political image underscores humanity’s intended relationality, which is not exclusively vertical in orientation, but including a creaturely-horizontal dimension. Finally, the

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<sup>24</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 162; quoting Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), 255.

<sup>25</sup> Maddox names these Wesleyan scholars as Charles Luther Bence, “John Wesley’s Teleological Hermeneutic” (PhD thesis; Emory University, 1981), 72-73; Craig Alan Blaising, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Sin” (ThD thesis; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), 261-268; Barry Edward Bryant, *John Wesley on the Origin of Evil* (Derbys, England: Moorley’s Bookshop, 1992); Harmon Lee Smith, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Justification: Beginning and Process,” *DrG* 28 (1963), 91; Rob Staples, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection: A Reinterpretation” (PhD thesis; Pacific School of Religion, 1963), 248-249, 262.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 51. See also Mildred Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> John Wesley, “The One Thing Needful,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 4, *Sermons IV* (ed. Albert C. Outler; Bicentennial Edition; Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 355 [henceforth *BI*].

<sup>28</sup> Wesley, “The General Deliverance,” in *BI* 2: 441.

<sup>29</sup> Wesley, “The New Birth,” in *BI* 2: 188.

moral image “is that dimension of the *imago Dei* that highlights the crucial truth that it is not just any love in which humanity was created but it was *holy love*.”<sup>30</sup> The life of holiness and righteousness, or its obverse, is hinged upon the current relationship human beings have with God. As Collins writes, describing the effects of the Fall, “relational change with respect to God, the fount of all life and holiness, necessary resulted in disposition change.”<sup>31</sup> The corruption of the *imago* primarily entails alienation, then moral decay. “*Deprived* of [the] essential relationship, our various faculties inevitably become *debilitated*, leaving us morally *depraved*.”<sup>32</sup>

The relational view of the *imago* has several advantages over the other two alternatives. First, the individualistic anthropological inclination of the attributal and telic views is overcome and replaced by a more other-incorporating model. The essence of human-ness is discerned not by an introspection of an isolated being, but by an analysis of persons-in-relation. Secondly, the relational interpretation resonates more faithfully to a fully Trinitarian theology. Instead of establishing what the *imago* constitutes of through an unqualified monotheistic understanding of a self-sufficient entity, the *imago* is comprehended by recourse to the Triune Godhead – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in an eternal *perichoretic* relationship. Because God’s *ousia* is *koinonia*, and as Leonardo Boff argues, “community is the deepest and most fundamental reality that exists,”<sup>33</sup> the *imago* which we inherited is identified primarily as community- or communion-centered. Finally, the relational approach does more *theological* justice to the concept of the *imago*. It can be asserted that the attributal and telic approaches rely more on abstract philosophical speculation than on actual reflective engagement with God’s self-revelation in the Scripture and the overall context of God’s salvific plan and act.

#### **Fourth Alternative: a *Person-al* Perspective**

It was mentioned above that the relational interpretation of the *imago* is grounded upon pure *theos*-logy, i.e., an understanding of who the Triune God is. While this is indubitably meritorious and better, at least in comparison with the other two approaches, it is still too vague. At best, it can offer general statements about the nature of human beings as relational agents, but this broad picture lacks particularity and specificity. In short, even the relational approach, left on its own, is ultimately unable to offer a concrete response to the question, “What is the content of the *imago Dei*?” So what do we do, now that we reached a cul-de-sac?

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<sup>30</sup> Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity: Perfect Community* (trans. Phillip Berryman; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000),



It is here that Alain Badiou's proposal is prudent: "When a step forward is the order of the day, one may, among other things, find assistance in the greatest step back."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the real problem lies not in the inability of theologians to provide the answer, but in the way the question is posed and the consequent response it anticipates. Could it be that inquiring about the "what" is the wrong procedure after all? To ask "what is the *imago Dei*?" ultimately requires a substantialist-phenomenological answer. As such, Carl F. H. Henry's conclusion that "the Bible does not define for us the precise content of the original *imago*,"<sup>35</sup> is precise and illuminating. Indeed, the Bible does not offer precise statements about *what* the *imago* consists of. In fact, the New Testament seems uninterested about the *what*, and bypasses and changes the question into "Who is the image of God?"<sup>36</sup> The New Testament univocally affirms that Jesus Christ is the image of God.

The attributal and qualitative understanding of the *imago* does not relate well with the biblical affirmation that Jesus is the image of God. While the attributal persuasion seeks for qualities-in-persons, the New Testament asserts that the *imago* is a person. The person spoken of here, however, is not us. Douglas Baker's assessment, grounded in semantic nominalism, that it is us as human beings who are the image of God, finds no NT support.<sup>37</sup> As Smail logically comments, one cannot know what the image-copy looks like without knowledge of the original image.<sup>38</sup> The original image has to be revealed first, because if the focus shifts to the image-copy, then we return to a human-centred "from below" projectionist strategy in which our human image is ultimately the basis of formulating the divine *imago*. It may be said that humanity is the image of God, but only in a secondary sense. Jesus is the true image of God; humans, in turn are made in the light of Christ.

For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [in reality] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created... 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 means of the visible Word.<sup>39</sup>

Irenaeus' words epitomize a Christocentric hermeneutic, in which Old Testament indicatives and promises are interpreted in light of the New Testament fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Thus, when in

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<sup>34</sup> Alan Badiou, *St Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brazzier; Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2, *God who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One* (Waco: Word, 1976), 125.

<sup>36</sup> See C. Clifton Black, "God's Promise for Humanity in the New Testament," in *God and Human Dignity* (eds. R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 179-195, for an exposition of the Matthean, Johannine and Pauline visions of the *imago* as Jesus Christ.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas P. Baker, *Covenant and Community: Our Role as the Image of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), especially chapter 5.

<sup>38</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.16.2; in *ANF* 1: 544.

Genesis 1:26-27, God said “Let us make man in our image,” the image being referred to is the one who is yet to be revealed. It is a prospective statement, centered on the most tangible and concrete *Immanuel*. The *imago* declared in the creation narrative remains as a “suspense” to be unveiled in the coming of the Creator himself in flesh. As Grenz encapsulates, “This suspenseful ending of the story of creation means that Gen. 1:26-27, placed as it is in the context not only of its own literary tradition but also of the canonical book of Genesis and the whole biblical narrative, opens the way not only to the second creation narrative but also ultimately to a transition from a creation-centered to a Christocentric anthropology.”<sup>40</sup>

### Christ, the Image of God

Paul is undeterred in claiming that Jesus is the image of God (2 Cor 4:6), and explains what he means throughout his epistles. In his missive to the Philippians, he describes Jesus as “in the *morphe* (“form”) of God” (2:6), which, according to Ben Witherington, means that “Christ by right and by nature had what God had.”<sup>41</sup> As the form of God on earth, he thus functions as God’s image on earth. The clearest expression of this argument is found in Paul’s exaltation of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20. In here, Jesus is explicitly described as the *eikon* (“image”) of the invisible God (1:15a), the mystery once hidden but now revealed (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3-6; Col 1:26-27). Paul succinctly makes the important point that God and his nature are unknowable, the *imago* included, but Christ came to show us precisely what is beyond human investigation. We are sure that God is revealed in Christ because in Christ all the *pleroma* (“fullness”) of God was pleased to dwell (1:19). The totality of divine essence and all the attributes of God are in Christ. Hebrews 1:3 thus names Jesus as “the *apaugasma* (“radiance” or “reflection”) of God’s glory on earth and the exact *charakter* (“imprint” or “representation”) of God’s being. Jesus is not just a Platonic shadow or a Docetic hologram, but the very manifestation of God within space and time. To see Jesus is to behold God himself (John 14:9; 10:30). As C. K. Barrett writes, “Through Christ as the image of God men come to apprehend the *Göttlichkeit* of God—that is, to understand what it means really to be God.”<sup>42</sup>

In light of the above, there is a conspicuous shift from the Old to the New Testaments in their presentation of *who* the image of God is. Whereas the references in Genesis 1-11 refer to *adamah* – humanity in general – as the image of God, the Pauline corpus points to Christ – a particular human – as the exclusive *eikon* of God. But this paradigm shift should not come as a surprise. The New Testament writers peered into the Old Testament with the lens provided by their faith in Christ, the incarnate God. Jesus Christ is himself God, *Immanuel*, the divine-become-human. In this sense, the affirmation of Jesus Christ as the *imago* is intertwined with the

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<sup>40</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 202-203.

<sup>41</sup> Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 263.

<sup>42</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 132.

affirmation of his deity and Lordship. Jesus is the image of God precisely because he is God himself. There can be no better particularity than this. We should not, therefore, be shocked as well that the New Testament's consideration of Christ as the true *imago* led to the understanding of humanity as created in Christ. Paul writes that the rest of humanity, and the saved in particular, are "to be conformed to the image of the Son, so that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:9). This re-interpretation of creation in the *imago* is further elaborated in Colossians 1:16-17: "For in [Jesus Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Jesus Christ is the image of God, and we are created in, through, for and by Christ.

### **Jesus the Fully and True Human**

Inasmuch as the deity of Christ is to be confessed in the affirmation that Jesus is the *imago Dei*, to focus on the God-ness of Christ as the exclusive rationale for the affirmation is insufficiently one-sided. There is an inherent dilemma here that we need to face. The New Testament affirms that Jesus is the image of God, but the foundation of this confession is in the realization that Jesus is God.<sup>43</sup> But if we relate Jesus as the *imago* and our being created (and recreated) in Christ, we are faced with the question as to whether it is sufficient to interpret the *imago* only in light of Christ's God-ness. That we are created *by* Christ as God makes sense, but how about our creation *in* and *through* Christ? To pose the question differently, "When Paul refers to humanity as created in and through Christ as the *eikon* of God, did he mean to say that we are created in the image of the divine *Logos* or in the image of the human Jesus?"

Jesus, the image of God, is imaging God in his humanity. Jesus Christ as human is God's *tselem* and *demut*, representative and resemblance. It is logical that a thing cannot represent itself, or that the thing signified cannot itself be the sign. The representative should not be the one represented. Dick Eugenio cannot be his own representative and resemblance, and when he presents himself through himself, he does not represent as a representative or resemblance, but as himself. But this law seems to be violated in Christ's representation of God as God's *imago*. On the one hand, considering the deity of the incarnate Son, God represents himself through himself. God's personal and revealing presence is not technically a *tselem* or *demut*, but a being-there-as-he-is. On the other hand, when God was incarnate in Christ, he became something which he is inherently not, i.e. created and human. Hence, as human, and not only as God, he can be properly called the *imago* of God. Because he is representing God to humanity, he took upon himself the *morphe* of humanity, in order to reveal to us what it means to be created in his image.

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<sup>43</sup> "As we see from 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Christ's being in the image of God leads to the result that men should come thereby to recognize the divinity of Christ," in Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132.

## Adam-Christ Typology

The significant implication of the Pauline assertion that Christ is the *prototokos* (“firstborn,” Col 1:15b, 18b-c) of all creation is that in Christ, not only do we behold the *Göttlichkeit* of God, but also the human-ness of humanity. Jesus is the image of God not only because he is God representing God to humanity, but also because he is human, the *proto-anthropos*, revealing to humanity what it means to be human. Christology precedes anthropology. This is why Berkouwer summons his readers: “*Ecce homo!* Behold the man, the true man.”<sup>44</sup> Logic dictates that if Jesus the true human is the image of God, then we can only know what it means to be human created in God’s image by beholding Jesus, the archetypal human. Echoing John 14:6, just as no one can know the Father apart from the incarnate *Son*, no one can also know true humanness apart from the *incarnate* Son. It is here that un-Christological approaches to anthropology are brought to criticism. Autonomous existential “self-understanding” needs to be reviewed by Christo-anthropology. Cultural and regional anthropologies cannot be equated with biblical anthropology. Anthropological formulations guided by scientific knowledge of the physiological, biological, psychological and sociological aspects of human existence are of course not completely irrelevant. But it also does not mean that these un-theological approaches should either be the starting point or the final word.

Even biblical anthropology, moreover, needs to have its appropriate starting point. Two options are available: the creation of Adam or the life of Christ. Barth, following Irenaeus, chooses the latter, interpreting humanity (including Adam) in light of Jesus Christ. Commenting on Romans 5, he writes:

The primary anthropological truth and ordering principle... is made clear only through the relationship between Christ and us. Adam is, as is said in v.14 *typos tou mellontos*, the type of Him who was to come. Man’s essential and original nature is to be found, therefore, not in Adam but in Christ. In Adam we can only find it prefigured. Adam can therefore be interpreted only in the light of Christ and not the other way round.<sup>45</sup>

Barth’s preference is not without Pauline support. We must mention outright that like Paul, Barth’s concern is not purely anthropological, but is with anthropology *and* soteriology *together*. As such, the interest is not in the state of Adam as created in the *imago* before the Fall, but the state of humanity that Christ assumed and took upon himself in order to redeem. In fact, the main thrust of Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 is not the restoration of Adam’s lost

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<sup>44</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956),

righteousness (whatever this means), but the recreation of humanity in light of who Christ is and what he has accomplished for us.<sup>46</sup>

The *prototokos*, in light of the above, is a soteriological concept. Jesus Christ is our eldest brother, whose image is the pattern through which our lives and destiny as human beings find fulfilment. Our future is not bound up with Adam, who is created *in* the image of God, but in Christ, who is himself *the* image of God.<sup>47</sup> As Hermann Ribberbos writes,

The glory that Adam as the Image of God and Firstborn of every creature was permitted to possess was only a reflection of Christ's being in the form of God. Thus Christ's exaltation as the second Adam refers back to the beginning of all things, makes him known as the one who from the very outset, in a much more glorious sense than the first Adam, was the Image of God and the Firstborn of every creature... The new creation that has broken through with Christ's resurrection takes the place of the first creation of which Adam was the representative.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the narrative of Jesus Christ provides an all-encompassing perspective on human nature, life, purpose and destiny. The life of Jesus "spans the ages from the eschatological new creation, which it inaugurates, back to the beginning, to the creation of humankind in the divine image, which is Christ, who through his death and resurrection is the true *imago dei*."<sup>49</sup> The humanity of Jesus Christ is the center of human existence, with both retrospective and prospective implications.

### **"Like Us in Every Way"**

For Berkouwer, Barth's Christo-conditioned anthropology is problematic. He writes that this approach, i.e. beginning with Jesus of Nazareth, "is driven, by inner necessity, to resort to speculation which can lead only to a striking modification of Biblical formulations, as is clear... when compared to that of Hebrews 2:14."<sup>50</sup> Berkouwer's pointed critique of Barth is precise, and yet also one-sided. Here we are faced with a paradoxical dialectic once more. On the one hand, Colossians argues that humanity is created in the image of Christ, the *prototokos* through and in whom all creation is made. On the other hand, Hebrews argues that Christ became human by "sharing in [our] humanity" and that "he had to be made like his brothers in every way" (2:14, 17). In contrast to the Colossians-Barthian model, the writer of Hebrews insinuates that Jesus became incarnate by assuming an already existing humanity. To quote Berkouwer, "It is man's

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<sup>46</sup> Black, "God's Promise for Humanity in the New Testament," 190.

<sup>47</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 217.

<sup>48</sup> Hermann Ribberbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 145.

<sup>49</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 216.

<sup>50</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 97.

real situation which determines the mode of expression, man's lost and fallen state; and it is *from this situation*, in which man's fallen condition is impressive reality, that Scripture points to the Word becoming flesh."<sup>51</sup>

Romans 8:3 succinctly points out that God sent his own Son "in the likeness of sinful man." The incarnation is not only the appearance of the *proto-anthropos*, the entirely new human, but is also the assumption of the Son of what is old and existing. Humanity was created in the likeness of Christ, the archetypal human, but Christ is also made man in the likeness of humanity. Jesus Christ is both the image of God and in the likeness of sinful humanity. As the archetypal human, the *proto-anthropos*, and the image of God, he reveals what it means to be human beings in the *imago*; as the *anthropos pro nobis* he reveals the present predicament of human beings created in the *imago*. He is the human *with* God, the ideal humanity; but he is also the human *against* God, fallen and depraved. His humanity is both *new* and *old*; redeeming and redeemed.

So how do we make sense of this paradox? Instead of completely abandoning the idea that Christ the *prototokos* is the *original* human in favour of the idea that Christ the incarnate Son is the *remedial* human, we must conceive of the two as not mutually exclusive. One does not necessarily invalidate the other. We can still affirm, with Irenaeus and Barth that Christ is the primal human, and his incarnation is the arrival and manifestation of genuine humanity in the image of God. Our humanity is grounded in the human Christ, and we do not have an idea of what humanity-as-it-was-intended looks like apart from Jesus Christ. We do not have an idea of what being created in the image of God means apart from our gazing of God's own image, who is Christ. So, firstly, we are created in the image of Christ, the true human. Those who existed before the incarnation of the Son, including Adam and Eve, did not really know true humanity in God's image. But also, even though we are created in the *imago*, apart from Christ, and because of sin, we really do not know what the *imago* entails. As Luther comments, "When we speak about the image, we are speaking about something unknown.... we hear nothing except bare words."<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, even though as *homo creatus* we are created in the image of the true human, our extant predicament is that of being *homo peccator*. It is for this reason that Christ assumed a fallen humanity, becoming like us in every way, in order to redeem and restore us to his image. As Athanasius affirmed, following Irenaeus, Christ assumed our humanity in order to sanctify each part.<sup>53</sup> His becoming like us is salvific. As Thomas F. Torrance puts it,

The act of becoming incarnate is itself the *sanctification* of our human life in Jesus Christ, an elevating and fulfilling of it that far surpasses creation; it is a raising up of men

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<sup>51</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Luther, "Lectures on Genesis," I: 631.

<sup>53</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 43.

and women to stand and have their being in the very life of God, but that raising up of man is achieved through his unutterable self-humiliation and condescension.<sup>54</sup>

This is what Luther and Calvin taught as the doctrine of *mirifica commutatio*, or the “blessed exchange” in which Christ assumed what was ours, so that we might receive what is his. In the words of Paul, this is “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). The salvific movement is that we are created in the image of Christ, but we lost the image. So Christ assumed our sinful existence in order to restore us to what we should be. Salvation is essentially the “redemptive translation of man *from* one state *into* another brought about by Christ who in his self-abnegating love took our place that we might have his place, becoming what we are that we might become what he is.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Christ-likeness and the Re-novel of the *Imago Dei* in Humanity**

Humanity is created in the image of God. Christ is the image of God. Therefore, humanity is created in light of Christ, the *prototokos* and *proto-anthropos*. Thus, we are created in the likeness of Christ, or Christ-likeness. The human Christ, in particular, as the specific manifestation of God in space and time, is the true humanity through which all image-copies (human beings) are made. Christ is the original image, and we are the image-copy. And yet, as biblical revelation teaches us, sin marred our creation in Christ-likeness, turning us to become anti-Christians instead. The *imago diaboli* replaced the *imago Dei*; *imitatio diaboli* replaced *imitatio Christi*. As Wesley himself affirmed, instead of reflecting Christ in our lives, fallen humanity turned “partly into the image of the devil” and “partly into the image of the brute.”<sup>56</sup> Humanity as it is now, although created as essentially Christ-like, is corrupted. It is for this reason that Christian writers whose interests lie in spelling out human dignity by turning to the creation of humanity in the *imago Dei* as their argumentative launching pads can be critiqued. While this procedure appears plausible, it is neither realistic nor holistically biblical, for a mere return to Genesis 1:26-27 is insufficient in the theological description of human dignity. We are no longer only *homo creatus*, but also *homo peccatur*. It is in this paradoxical state of being both *homo creatus* and *homo peccatur* that human beings exist. As Smail pointedly summarizes, “Our glory is that we are made to be like God; our shame is that, as we are, we are very unlike him.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2008), 66.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 179.

<sup>56</sup> Wesley, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” in *BI* 2: 423.

<sup>57</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, 201.

## The *Imago* Corrupted

The typical question raised when discussing the effects of the Fall on the *imago* is: Is the *imago* completely lost? It can be pointed out immediately that the question is not a neutral question. The use of the term “lost” is itself already biased, and the question erroneously simplifies the problem to a mere “Yes or No” inquiry. Over the centuries, theologians have grappled with this question and have provided variegated responses. One of the well-known nuanced answers is from Irenaeus, who, by distinguishing between “image” and “likeness” argued that the *imago* is lost, but the likeness is not. With some qualification, Irenaeus’ approach is echoed in the Reformed distinction between the “broad” and “narrow” interpretation of the *imago*,<sup>58</sup> and Maddox claims that even Wesley’s distinction between the natural and moral image echoes Irenaeus’ schema.<sup>59</sup> The main thrust of this dualistic tactic is obvious: to recognize that “in one sense the image was retained after the Fall and in another sense it was lost at the Fall.”<sup>60</sup> In a sense, the Irenaean distinction offers a convenient way forward, but for many who consider the two terms as synonymous and interchangeable,<sup>61</sup> the question remains unanswered. It is here that the bias of the term “lost” surfaces. And when the question is reduced to a mere “Is it lost or not?” the respondent is trapped into choosing between only two paths. For the attributalist, the *imago* is not totally lost. Because we are created in the *imago*, which makes us what we are and separates us from the rest of creation, to lose the *imago* is to be dehumanized, or to be bestialized or demonized.<sup>62</sup> This approach considers the image of God as an “expression analogous to the picture of man given by idealism, in which man is praised as *mikrotheos*, somehow divine, a characteristic which can never, despite all appearances, be lost.”<sup>63</sup> For the teleologist, the image is not lost because it was never ours in the first place. The *imago* is the potentiality or the possibility offered to humanity which will be attained in the future, not a possession in the past.

The relational interpretation of the *imago* offers a more promising solution. If the *imago* is understood as relationality, or more precisely, the relationship between God and humanity, then we can affirm that the *imago* is not really *lost*; rather, it is *corrupted*. This is because relationship with God is an inescapable human experience. Whether humanity acknowledges it or not, it does not disqualify the fact that human existence is entirely dependent on its Creator and Sustainer. Our creatureliness or human-ness involves existence-by-grace. As such, humanity remains in the image of God as a dependent relational creature, although the relationship is corrupted because even though we exist by grace, instead of being grateful recipients, we live as

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<sup>58</sup> See Baker, *Covenant and Community*, chapter 1; Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, chapter 2.

<sup>59</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 68.

<sup>60</sup> Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Like Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 187; and Baker who argue that *demut* is actually a gloss of *tselem*, in *Covenant and Community*, 60-70.

<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Victor Shepherd interprets Wesley’s understanding of the Law inscribed in the human heart as “identical” with Wesley’s understanding of the *imago Dei*. Thus, “the *imago* is defaced but never effaced, or else the sinner would not be human.” See his article “John Wesley,” in *Reading Romans through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth* (eds., Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 155.

<sup>63</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 36.



ungrateful prodigal children. If we turn to Genesis 9:5-6, a passage which theologians frequently use to argue that the *imago* is not lost in Genesis 3, we can interpret it to mean that taking the life of another human is prohibited not because of the god-like qualities inherent in humanity, but because every human being is related to God in our dependence for existence. Killing is forbidden not because of the human potentiality that would have been achieved if the person was spared, but because only God has the right to give and take life away (1 Samuel 2:6).

## The Human Christ

The relational approach also offers a better understanding of the human life of Christ. The human-ness of Christ cannot be seen in terms of inherent human characteristics or attributes that make humanity human. There is no set of “standards for humanness” that Christ needed to subscribe in order to be fully human, for as discussed above, Christ is himself the standard for humanness. We are created in him, not the other way around. Similarly, the life of Christ cannot be interpreted in terms of the potentiality that Jesus reveals concerning human life and *telos*, as mistakenly taught by Rudolf Bultmann’s existentialist view,<sup>64</sup> Hastings Rashdall’s moral exemplar theory,<sup>65</sup> and English Modernism’s understanding of the potentiality of humanity for divine-human union.<sup>66</sup>

Over the last four centuries, interest in the humanity of Christ swelled up to proportions that previous generations did not anticipate or thought of. In biblical studies, the emergence of the *Leben Jesu-Forschung* movement that coincided with the developing sophistication in biblical criticism brought the focus on the life of the particular human, Jesus of Nazareth. In theology, negatively, liberal theologians looked at the human life of Christ as the resource for developing existential perspectives of human destiny and purpose. Positively, the influence of the Scottish theologian Edward Irving in the early nineteenth century and the profound writings of Barth in the twentieth century also proved to fuel the emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Even recent Calvin scholarship has focused on the salvific significance of the humanity of Christ.<sup>67</sup> Integrative theology, which recently gained momentum, also brought the advent of

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<sup>64</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958); and “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. Hans Bartsch; New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 18-19, 30. Bultmann utilizes Martin Heidegger’s discussion of the inauthentic existence *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 163-168.

<sup>65</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1919).

<sup>66</sup> See the discussion of Richard Bauckham about this group in “Jesus the Revelation of God,” in *Divine Revelation* (ed. Paul Avis; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), 178-180.

<sup>67</sup> Trevor Hart, “Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989), 67-84; Jonathan Slater, “Salvation as Participation in the Humanity of the Mediator in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: A Reply to Carl Mosser.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005), 39-58; and Bruce McCormack, “For Us and Our Salvation:

Pneumatic Christology. In contrast, but not in rejection, of Logos Christology, which highlights the divinity of the incarnate Son, Spirit Christology highlights the humanity of Christ in the power of the Spirit. It is precisely as a human that Jesus needed the Spirit to fulfil his mission from the Father.<sup>68</sup>

Pneumatic Christology can be expanded to become Trinitarian Christology, in which the humanity of Christ is perceived in light of the relationship of the human Christ to both the Father and the Spirit. It is here that the relational approach has a significant bearing. The human-ness of Christ is evaluated not in light of the existential structures that make him who he is, but in light of the relationships that constitute his humanity. Being is not conceived as essentially *being as*, but as *being with*. The identity of the human Christ does not rest on his individual qualities and attributes, but on his personal relationships. Jesus is the image of God precisely because of the perfect relationship that he embodies and lives out. It is not, however, because of the inescapable relationship of the human Christ that makes him the *proto-anthropos*, but because he chose, as human, to live out the relationships which humans should properly have. The equation may be put as:

- (1) God created humanity in his image.
- (2) Christ is the image of God.
- (3) Christ lived in perfect relationship with both the Father and the Spirit.
- (4) To be human in the image of God is to have perfect relationship with both the Father and the Spirit.

Firstly, as human, Jesus Christ lived in utter obedience to the will of the Father. The New Testament witness portrays Jesus as the one sent by the Father (Matt 15:24; John 3:16-17; 5:23, 36-38; 6:57; 10:36; Heb 3:1-2). The penetrating statement of Jesus in John 14:31 is sufficiently illustrative: “The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father commended me.” Jesus suffered, not because he was a masochist, but because of his “reverent submission” (Heb 5:7) to the Father’s will. In fact, we read the dramatic manifestation of Jesus’ obedience to the Father (and his capacity to disobey, should he choose to) in his prayer at Gethsemane: “He fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (Matt 26:39, 42). Torrance explains:

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Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition,” *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 1 (Spring 1993), 1-38.

<sup>68</sup> Harold Hunter, “Sprit Christology: Dilemma and Promise (2),” *The Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983), 266-267; James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). See Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1988), 92, where he recants his previous positing of Logos Christology and Pneumatic Christology as mutually exclusive.

Even in the fourth Gospel where the most profound theological teaching is found on the lips of Jesus, we have the strongest emphasis on the fact that Christ can do nothing of himself, and can say nothing of himself – he is entirely at one with, and obedient to, the Father who sent him. In the Gospels and in the Epistles is the obedience of Jesus to the God of Israel which is unflaggingly stressed. He knows himself to be under compulsion. He had come to do God’s will; he had come to suffer, and all that was written of him he had to fulfil – and though he shrank from it, or rather from the terrible cross and passion it entailed, he set his face like a flint toward it and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.<sup>69</sup>

We learn from Reformed theology that there are two aspects of Christ’s obedience: active and passive. *Active obedience* refers to the positive fulfilment of God’s saving will in the whole life of Jesus in his sonship. From the very beginning to the very end, he maintained a perfect filial relationship to the Father in which he yielded to him a life of utter love and faithfulness. *Passive obedience* refers to Christ’s submission to the judgment of the Father upon the sin which he assumed in our humanity. He willingly accepted the punishment of sin, death, and as Isaiah says, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (53:7; quoted in Acts 8:32).

Secondly, Jesus, according to Dunn, is the “uniquely appointed Man of the Spirit.”<sup>70</sup> He is truly the *proto-anthropos* because his human life is pervaded through and through by the presence of the Spirit. He is born of the Spirit (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35); baptized by the Spirit (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10); led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1); anointed by the Spirit (Luke 4:16-21); mobilized by the Spirit (Luke 4:14); drives out evil spirits by the power of the Spirit (Matt 12:28); and is even raised from the dead in the power of the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18). The Holy Spirit permeated the whole life of Jesus. In the course of his life and ministry, he was not acting independently from the Spirit’s dynamic influence and power. Throughout his entire life, Jesus lived as *Christos*, the Anointed One, like the anointed ones in the Old Testament (Exo 28:41; 1 Sam 10:1; 19:16; etc). Jesus himself was aware of his being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, something that is evident in his claim that he is the fulfilment of the one prophesied in Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:18-21).

So, if in relationship to the Father, he was submissive and obedient, in Jesus’ relation to the Spirit, he was dependent. The human Jesus lived his earthly life without recourse to his divine powers and privileges, but rather lived as a human in need, dependent upon another’s help, guidance and providence. In the words of Paul, he was in the *morphe* of God, but he chose not to consider equality with God, as independent, All-powerful, and Self-sufficient. Rather, “he made himself nothing, taking the *morphe* of a servant, being made in human likeness” and

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<sup>69</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the Early Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975), 46.

“humbled himself, and became obedient to death” (Phil 2:6-8). Here in the human Jesus we see a life yielding to God’s faithfulness in faith and trust, a life of thankful reception and appreciation of God’s providence and leading, and a life of utter reliance on God’s pleasing and perfect guidance.

### **Christ, the Humanizing Human**

It is true that the human Christ reveals to us what it means to be human in his advent, but this does not mean that humanity is automatically enabled to imitate Christ in his coming. Our being in the *imago* is distorted, and the appearance of the *imago* in Christ does not imply that all we have to do is to imitate the One we now behold. Thus, unlike liberal theology’s understanding of Jesus as moral exemplar, humanity cannot begin the process of imitation as if humanity is neutral and dormant all these times. The fact is that our humanity is fallen, and the healing of our corruption is an important foundation for our restoration in Christ-likeness. Fortunately, Christ is not only our *prototokos*, but our redeeming *prototokos*. He is our brother, but he also is a saving brother.

Important here is the fact that the humanization of humanity, or being restored to Christ-likeness, requires the undoing of our previous inhumanity. Christ’s coming and work involves not only a prospective enablement, but a retrospective element. This is the import of Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation, and the Pauline emphasis on the “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

The recapitulation to which [Irenaeus] bears witness calls man into account because it takes the form of a radical reversal of the essential direction of man’s life before God, from disobedience to obedience, from sin to faith, from apostasy to fellowship, and hence from death to life; and it is in this very reversal that the salvation of man is achieved. In the history of the New man the sinfulness of Adam is undone, and its horrific consequences eradicated.<sup>71</sup>

In short, Christ’s undoing of our inhumanity and the forgiveness of our sins is inseparable from his appearance as the *prototokos*. The prospective aspect of redemption, i.e. Christ-likeness, is intertwined with Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ our Brother is also Christ our Saviour. To be like him is to be saved by him. He is the humanizing human as the *prototokos* and as the *Christos*. As Saviour, he assumed every aspect of our human existence, redeeming and sanctifying each part, so that we may now live as proper humans before God. For instance, to be human involves having a personal relationship with the Spirit. But the indwelling presence of the Spirit cannot be experienced by humanity in sin, for the relationship between sinful humanity

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<sup>71</sup> Trevor A. Hart, “Irenaeus, Recapitulation, and Physical Redemption,” in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World* (eds. Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell; Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 171.

and the Spirit would be that of judgment and animosity. It is only because (1) Christ has forgiven us and (2) has received the Spirit in his humanity that

he is in a position to transfer in a profound and intimate way what belongs to us in our human nature to himself and to transfer what is his to our human nature in him. That applies above all to the gift of the Holy Spirit whom he received fully and completely in his human nature for us. Hence... the eternal Spirit of the living God has composed himself, as it were, to dwell with human nature, and human nature has been adapted and become accustomed to receive and bear the same Holy Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

By being restored to relationship with the Father and the Spirit, humanity is humanized. If, in light of Christ's life, to be human is to be person-in-relation, then to be humanized in Christ also implies the restoration of human personhood. It is in this sense that Jesus is not only the humanizing Human but also the personalizing Person, for in his life and work he not only "redeems us from the thralldom to depersonalizing forces [but] repersonalizes our human being in relation to himself."<sup>73</sup> By sharing in his humanity, we experience a *summorphos* existence, a life of mirroring and participation in a particular way of being as the new humanity.<sup>74</sup>

### **Living as Humanized Humans**

If we are created in Christ-likeness, which sin corrupted, then the re-newal leads to being re-made in Christ-likeness. "The miracle of restoration, the renewal of man's nature as a salvation, in eschatological and Christological perspective [involves] a destining to be 'conformed to the image of the Son'."<sup>75</sup> This renewal of the *imago* or conformity to Christ, however, entails not some sort of deification or divinization. As Elaine Graham writes, the "*imago Dei* cannot be used to justify narratives of the ascent of superhuman beings to become omniscient, omnipotent immortal demi-gods."<sup>76</sup> Rather, salvation involves "an affirmation of the essential finitude of human nature, not an escape from it."<sup>77</sup> When we are summoned to imitate Christ, we are not encouraged to imitate his divine life. In the first place, this is impossible. In the second place, to imitate divinity is idolatry. This means that there is a type of human imitation that goes against the purposes of God for humanity. There is a god-likeness that humans are prohibited to attempt to attain. In fact, the story of the Fall illustrates this aberration. When the serpent tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge, he told her that

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 246.

<sup>73</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 69.

<sup>74</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 228-230.

<sup>75</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 45.

<sup>76</sup> Elaine L. Graham, "The 'End' of Human or the End of 'Human': Human Dignity in Technological Perspective," in *God and Human Dignity* (eds. R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 276.

<sup>77</sup> David H. Kelsey, "Human Being," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks* (eds. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Philadelphia: Fortress), 170.

eating the fruit would result in them becoming “like God” (Gen 3:5). God created us to be humans, and sin is the undoing of humanity to become god-like or gods. This is precisely what happened at the Fall, and in terms of the *imago*, Smail describes the transition as the change from “the likeness of reflection” to “the likeness of replacement.”<sup>78</sup> James Luther Mays expresses Adamic arrogance and its consequence: “that the human being should claim independent sovereignty over life puts him in conflict with the divine.”<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, our renewal in Christ-likeness is a renewal of our lost human-ness. Jesus lived as a fully human on earth, showing us the original copy of what we should be and should have been as humanity before God and others. Unlike Adam, who, in his self-will, became disobedient to the will of the Father, the human Jesus was completely obedient to the Father’s purposes, even dying on the cross. Unlike Adam, who relied on his own wisdom or on the faulty wisdom of Eve, the human Christ relied on the Holy Spirit for every single aspect of his human existence. Unlike Adam, who wanted to become “like God” (Gen 3:5, 22) but actually died (Gen 2:17; 3:19), the human Christ did not consider equality with God and lived humbly, and was exalted by God “to the highest place” (Phil 2:9). Salvation involves becoming like Christ, in his relationship with the Father and the Spirit in his human existence. To be renewed in Christ is not to become supra-human or to become children of Krypton. To be renewed in the image is to follow Paul’s admonition: “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

To exist and live in Christ-likeness, therefore is to be humanized and to be fully human, possessing the same perfect relationships that the human Christ had with the Father and the Spirit in his earthly life. The fulfillment of our human-ness is to remain as humans, obedient to the Father’s will and dependent upon the Spirit’s sustaining presence. We are truly human when we exist in childlike faith, and we become less human when we begin to assert our own will and rely on ourselves. We are truly Christ-like when we, with humility and submission, offer our bodies as living sacrifices and instruments of the Father’s purposes (Rom 12:1-2; 6:13, 19), and when we allow the Spirit to become our Teacher to guide us into all truth (John 16:13) and to empower us to continue the mission of Christ on earth (Acts 1:8). We are truly Christ-like when we humble ourselves and pray, just as Jesus himself lived in humility and prayer (Phil 2:5-8). We are truly Christ-like when our prayers are “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10; 26:39) and “May your Spirit come upon us and cleanse us” (Luke 11:2). To be Christ-like is to “do exactly what [the] Father command[s]” (John 14:31) and to be “full of the Spirit” (Luke 4:1).

It is only in being Christ-like in our relationship with the Father and the Spirit that our human-ness as created in God’s image is also fully Trinitarian. Smail’s proposals in *Like Father, Like Son* that we are renewed in the *imago Trinitatis* if we display the image of the initiating

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<sup>78</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, 202.

<sup>79</sup> James Luther Mays, “The Self in the Psalms and the Image of God,” in *God and Human Dignity*, 37.

Father, the image of the obedient Son and the image of the creative Spirit, is quite far-fetched.<sup>80</sup> If we are to remain faithful to the New Testament testimony that Jesus Christ is the image of God (Col 1:15), then the restoration of our corrupted image entails not a Father-likeness, Christ-likeness and Spirit-likeness together, but only Christ-likeness in his human life. Far from being insufficiently Trinitarian, Christ-likeness, when understood in terms of Christ's relationship with the Father and the Spirit, actually offers a better and more realistic picture of Trinitarian human-ness. To be human in the image of God is to be like Christ, who was completely obedient to the Father and dependent on the Spirit.

## Conclusion

This paper argued that traditional interpretations of the *imago Dei* (1) as inherent qualities in human nature, (2) as an eschatological goal that needs to be achieved, or (3) as an inherent relationality, are theologically inadmissible and biblically insupportable. It is true that God created humanity in his image, but the image is not revealed until the life of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God (Col 1:15). With this Christocentric view of humanity, we can interpret our creation in the image of God – who is Christ – as being created in Christ-likeness. The portrayal of Christ's life in the Gospels explains what human-ness as created in Christ-likeness entails, which is to live in perfect submission and obedience to the Father and to be completely dependent upon the guidance and sustenance of the Holy Spirit. Because of sin, instead of remaining Christ-like, humanity became inhuman un-Christ-like or anti-Christ. Humanity in sin exists in disobedience and independence, subverting the will of God and singing “my way,” and thriving in the ideals of William Ernest Henley's *Invictus*. To live in sin is to be self-reliant, self-willed, and self-fulfilled. The renewal of the *imago*, offered by Christ himself as well, is the restoration of humanity's Christ-likeness, living as Christ lived in relationship with the Father and the Spirit. It entails submission, obedience and dependence. As Graham writes, “to aspire to *imago Dei*, to see human fulfilment in the image of God as revealed in Christ, properly leads to humility rather than to self-aggrandizement.”<sup>81</sup> It is to exist as a creature, and to humbly recognize our contingent existence every day. To be renewed in the *imago*, therefore, is to be human, just as Jesus Christ himself was human.

But how is this related to Wesleyan theology? On the one hand, the proposal of this paper builds upon the Wesleyan relational view of the *imago Dei*, and hence the relationships of Christ with the Father and the Spirit were highlighted as that which constitute his human-ness. On the other hand, it stands as a corrective to our insufficiently Christocentric interpretation of the *imago Dei*, which leads to a neglect of some important aspects of sanctification. To fail to consider the humanity of Christ in soteriological formulation, Dianne Leclerc asserts, results in a

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<sup>80</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, chapter 5.

<sup>81</sup> Graham, “The ‘End’ of the Human,” 277.

moralistic understanding of sanctification. She laments: “I believe this has been neglected in our tradition – the goal of being truly human.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, a Christocentric view of the *imago Dei*, with an emphasis on the human Christ in relation to the Father and the Spirit, provides a new dimension of our understanding of what it means to be renewed in the *imago Dei*: Christ-likeness and human-ness.

The proposal of the paper is admittedly incomplete. The arm of the pendulum tended to remain at the vertical relationship of the human Christ to the Father and the Spirit which inadvertently led to the neglect of the horizontal relationship of Christ to other humans and the rest of the created order in his earthly life. This paper in no way argues for the insignificance or the lesser significance of what it did not include. Rather, the apparent neglect is due to lack of space and time. Future projects will need to look at the relationships of Christ to humanity and to the created world, and spell out their implications to our understanding of the *imago Dei* and Christ-likeness. Even the celebrated moral aspect is not dealt with here (Eph 4:22-24), although it is by no means, considered unimportant. For now, the emphasis belongs to the soteriological and anthropological implications of the life of the human Christ in relation to the Father and the Spirit.

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<sup>82</sup> Dianne Leclerc, “Holiness: Sin’s Anticipated Cure,” in *The Holiness Manifesto* (eds. Kevin W. Mannoia and Don Thorsen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 122.