

Created in the *Image* of God: Meaning and Implications for Humanity

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ABSTRACT

Despite the efforts of Christian theologians throughout the centuries exploring the meaning of being created in the image of God, the question of who the human person is and the implications of his/her being created in God's image have remained religiously agonising. This study approached the subject by addressing the question: What do the scriptures try to tell us about human beings when they describe them as the image of God? The Old Testament texts describing man as God's image, Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 5:1, 2, and Genesis 9:6, were examined. The New Testament understanding and various uses of the image of God were also explored. Drawing upon scripture, the implications of humanity's creation in God's image were considered in relation to the Creator and the created world. The study concluded that being in God's image was not intended to deify or idolise humanity, because, unlike the rest of creation, human life is not an end in itself. The quality of the image of God was no license to exploit creation and subjugate it to one's desires. It not only suggests authority and dignity but also includes humility and responsibility.

Keywords: Image of God, Likeness of God, Creator, Creation, Humanity

INTRODUCTION

The question of what it means for humankind to be created in the image of God is a religiously agonising question that has generated different opinions. Throughout the centuries, Christian theologians have attempted to come to terms with what the scriptures say about who the human being is. The scope of this topic is overwhelming, and there are many ways to approach it. For instance, it is possible to concentrate attention on the Old Testament presentation of humankind, or the New Testament understanding. One could also compare Paul's understanding of human beings with that found within John's writings. The question could, as well, be approached by investigating what the Old Testament means when it uses terms like 'heart' (Genesis 6:5) or 'spirit' (Genesis 2:7; Proverbs 20:27) to characterise humankind, or we could examine the *old man-new man* relationship. All these seem to underscore the assertion of various scholars that an essay like this can only deal with the biblical view of humankind from a somewhat limited perspective.¹ This paper approached this subject from only one vantage point; namely, what do the scriptures try to tell us about human beings when they describe them as the image of God? In the background of this exploration was the attempt to establish the powers and the limits of humankind, God's image bearer, in relation to the Creator and the created world. Therefore, this paper is structured as follows: First, it examined the Old Testament teaching on the image of God; then, it assessed the New Testament teaching about the image; and third, drawing upon scripture, it proceeded to discuss the implications of the imaging role of the human person as God's special creature.

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Only three texts in the Old Testament explicitly present the theme of the Image of God. They are Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 5:1, 2, and Genesis 9:6. In addition to this limitation, Joseph Fichtner² suggested that among the

¹Mario, Aguilar I. and Louise, Lawrence J., *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach*. (Leiden: Deo, 2004).

² Joseph Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God: A Christian Anthropology* (New York: Alba House, 1978).

ancient writers, there was not a great interest in describing humankind in terms of the image of God. This lack of extensive discourse on humanity as God's image is, perhaps, a caution to measure our emphasis accordingly.

The first text, Genesis 1:26, 27, is a record of God's final creative act on the sixth day of creation:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind *in our image, after our likeness*; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So, God created humankind *in his own image, in the image of God* he created them; male and female he created them.

The second text, Genesis 5: 1,2, contains the genealogy from Adam to Noah. It begins: "This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the *likeness of God*. Male and female, he created them, and he blessed them and named them humankind when they were created."

The third text, Genesis 9:6, falls within the context of God's blessing upon Noah immediately after the flood. God says to Noah, "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for *in his own image* God made humankind."

A Linguistic Interpretation

In these texts, the English word "image" translates the Hebrew word *selem*, and the English "likeness" translates the Hebrew *demut* (except in Genesis 5:1, where "likeness" translates *selem*).³ The first task is to find out the meanings of these words from their usage in the Old Testament. In the remainder of the Old Testament, *selem* is used, except in Genesis 1:27 and 9:6, to refer to the physical likeness of a person or thing, and these images are almost uniformly abominable.⁴ However, the two exceptions of this usage broaden the possibilities of the meaning of this word. In Psalm 39:5, 6, we read: "You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight. Surely, everyone stands as a mere breath! [Selah] Surely man goes about as a shadow! [*selem*]." The rendering of *selem* as "shadow" points to its meaning as a resemblance or reflection of something greater. It certainly is not a material idol or the like. Thus, we have some evidence that *selem* is not bound to denote a physical image.⁵ Similarly, in Psalm 73:20, Asaph, speaking of the wealthy heathen, says, "They are like a dream when one awakes, on awaking you despise their phantoms." Thus, with the rendering of *salmam* as "their phantoms", we are not dealing with a concrete, tangible image, but again, a more abstract likeness.⁶ In line with the above, *selem*, for Von Rad, "means predominantly an actual plastic work, a duplicate, sometimes an idol...; only on occasion does it mean a duplicate in the diminished sense of a semblance when compared with the original..."⁷

The second important word, *demut*, has greater flexibility than *selem*. It is used in a concrete sense almost synonymously with *selem* and in the abstract sense of resemblance.⁸ Although the abstract quality is there, *demut* is used uniformly in connection with a tangible or visual reproduction of something else. So again, as with *selem*, the usage of *demut* is very strongly in the direction of a physical likeness.

The next question is whether or not a substantial distinction is meant between these two words when God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). The evidence is against any serious distinction. If the author conceived of an important distinction between *selem* and *demut* in verse 26, which is God's resolution to create, then why did he omit *demut* in verse 27, the record of the very act of creation? The most obvious explanation for this 'oversight', either by God to create humanity in God's likeness or by the author

³ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 35.

⁴ Numbers 33:52, molten images to be destroyed; 1 Samuel 6:5, images of your tumours and images of your mice; 2 Chronicles 23:17 and 2 Kings 11:18, images of Baal; Ezekiel 7:20, abominable images made of ornaments; Ezekiel 16:17, images of men made of gold and silver; Ezekiel 23:14, images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion on a wall; Amos 5:25, images of other gods and kings; Daniel 2:31-35, the image made of five substances; Daniel 3 (twelve times), the image sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide.

⁵ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 37.

⁶ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 37.

⁷ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 56.

⁸ Isaiah 40:18, what likeness will you compare with God; 2 Kings 16:10, the model of the altar; 2 Chronicles 4:3, in the furnishing of the temple there were figures of gourds; Ezekiel 10:1, the likeness of a throne.

to record it, is that there was really no oversight and that nothing is lost from humanity or from the meaning of the text by this omission. Another bit of evidence which points to the interchangeability of these two words is that in Genesis 5:1 and 9:6, only one word is used to denote the image: *demut* in 5:1 and *selem* in 9:6. Finally, concerning Genesis 1:26, we must recall that repetitions are common in Hebrew poetry for the sake of emphasis, variety, and rhythm, e.g., Psalm 59:1, 2; 104.⁹ This passage (verses 26 and 27) is poetic, and the repetitions of verse 27 are apparent. "So, God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." It is understandable in this context that the author would use two different words with no fundamental distinction intended.

Unique Features of God's Image at Creation

Having considered the meaning and possible uses of the words, *image* and *likeness*, we now ask what the author of Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:1, 2; and 9:6 really intended to convey about the image of God in humankind. To answer this, we consider the features of the creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1 that are unique to humankind: 1) Humanity is the final creation;¹⁰ 2) only humanity is stated as being in the image of God;¹¹ 3) only humanity is given dominion over all the earth;¹² 4) only before the creation of humanity was there divine counsel;¹³ and 5) only humanity is explicitly stated as being created male and female.¹⁴ Each of these features has something to contribute to our understanding of God's image in man. First, that humanity was the final creation gives rise to such statements as "Humanity is the crown of creation, the end toward which it was all directed."¹⁵ But this tells us nothing about the nature of God's image.

Second, and by far the most important feature of Genesis 1, is the actual statement that humanity is in God's image. Based on the exposition of the terms above, it would be difficult to deny that the author means the human being's physical appearance as the image of his Maker. As von Rad says, the marvel of a human being's bodily appearance is not at all to be excluded from the realm of God's image. This was the original notion, and we have no reason to suppose that it completely gave way to a spiritualising and intellectualising tendency. Therefore, one will do well to split the physical from the spiritual as little as possible: the whole of the human being is created in God's image.¹⁶ In other words, that God's image in the human being goes beyond the physical is not ruled out, but it turns out that the Genesis writer intends to give no information in that regard.

The third feature of the creation narrative is that only humanity is given dominion over the whole world. According to Gerhard von Rad, "This commission to rule is not considered as belonging to the definition of God's image; but it is its consequence, i.e., that for which humanity is capable because of it."¹⁷ This makes sense because, even though the author may not intend to tell us any more about the content of the image, it is the most natural way of handling the language of the text. The text speaks less of the nature of God's image than of its purpose. There is less said about the gift itself than about the task.

The fourth unique feature of humankind's creation is the divine counsel which preceded it. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness.'" In this feature, Karl Barth finds significance in determining the nature of the image. As he puts it, "A genuine counterpart in God Himself leading to a unanimous decision is the secret prototype which is the basis of an obvious copy, a secret image and an obvious reflection in the coexistence of God and humankind, and also of the existence of humanity itself."¹⁸ In other words, the divine deliberation indicates the "I-Thou" character of God's existence, of which humankind is a copy. Therefore, the image of God in humankind consists of humankind's addressing and being addressed as a "Thou."¹⁹ However,

⁹ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 38

¹⁰ Genesis 1:26 – Humanity was created last on God's last day of creation, the sixth day.

¹¹ Genesis 1:27.

¹² Genesis 1:28.

¹³ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁴ Genesis 1:27; 5:2.

¹⁵ Mary Charles B. Muckenhirn, *The Image of God in Creation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 36.

¹⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 56.

¹⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 57.

¹⁸ Karl Barth, "The Doctrine of Creation," *Church Dogmatics*, III/I, ed. G. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 197.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, "The Doctrine of Creation," 179.

in the three texts where the actual statement that the human being was created in God's image occurs (Genesis 1:27; 5:1; 9:6), no plurality is mentioned. Also, the plural is used elsewhere when God deliberates before an important act. In Genesis 11:7, 8, in the story of the Tower of Babel, we read: " 'Come, *let us* go down, 'and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the *Lord* scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth...." Two things can be said on the basis of this text. First, it appears that the plural "let us" may be a way of pointing to God's own self-deliberation.²⁰ Second, when the author uses the plural, we cannot insist that he intends any essential connection between what the plural implies about God's nature and the immediate object of God's action.

The fifth feature of the creation account unique to humanity is the explicit statement that humankind is created male and female. This is reaffirmed in Genesis 5:2. Again, Barth finds here the specific locus of the image of God in man as a "Thou." "Man can and will always be man before God and among his fellows only as he is man in relationship to woman and woman in relationship to man."²¹

It is important to note that in Genesis 9:6, all the author tells us is a consequence of humankind's possessing the image of God. Because humankind is made in the image of God, "whoever sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall his blood be shed." The most important thing about this text is that it comes after the Fall of mankind into sin. Thus, there is no indication that humanity has lost the image. The benefits of being created in God's image remain preset realities after the Fall.²²

The following conclusions may be drawn from the foregoing discussion: That the human being is in the image of God means that the human being as a whole person, both physically and spiritually, is, in some sense, like the Maker. Just what the nature of this likeness is, we are not told. But we are told what really matters: even as sinners, we bear God's image. As a result of this image in us, we have dominion over the earth and the right to live out our days on the earth. Beyond this teaching about the strict phrasing of the "image" of God in humanity, the Old Testament is silent.

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The primary word for "image" in the New Testament is *eikon*. Secondary words are *homosiosis* and *charakter*. *Eikon* appears in twenty verses throughout the New Testament, twelve of which explicitly denote physical representations.²³ In one verse, it refers to the Law as not being the true image of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). Twice, it is used to denote Christ as the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15), and five times it relates humankind to the image of Christ or God (Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 11:7, 15:49, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 3:10). James uses *homeostasis*, saying that human beings "are made in the *likeness of God*" (James 3:9). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews (1:3) uses *charakter* to say that Christ is the express *representation* of God's nature.²⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the image of God, but "image" in a radically different sense than we found in the Old Testament. "He is the image of the invisible God.... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:15, 19; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4). To have seen Jesus was to have seen God (John 12:45, 14:9). Jesus is the effulgence of God's glory and the representation of God's very nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 1:14). Now if Christ is the image of God, in what sense does the New Testament see humans as being in God's image? Some key texts are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Bearing the Image of the Heavenly

The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (15: 35-50) answers the question, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (v. 35). After discussing in detail the resurrection of the dead, Paul gives the summary statement: "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"

²⁰ Muckenhirn, *The Image of God in Creation*, 38.

²¹ Barth, "The Doctrine of Creation," 186.

²² Barth, "The Doctrine of Creation," 186.

²³ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 40.

²⁴ Fichtner, *Man, the Image of God*, 44.

(verse 49). The context makes it clear that Paul is thinking in personal terms: Adam is the earthy, and Christ is the heavenly. This "image of the heavenly" has to do with the nature of the resurrection body. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (verses 42-44). Thus, to take on the "image of the heavenly" is to be *incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual*.²⁵

The above text does not suggest Paul thinking in terms of the image of God in Genesis 1:26 at all. He is concerned with teaching about the Resurrection, and the metaphor "image of the heavenly" is helpful. He is not teaching a recovery of the image at this point (lost at the Fall) because he is contrasting the resurrection body with what Adam was by the act of creation (prior to the Fall): "So also it is written, the first Adam became a living soul. The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit" (verse 45). Paul is not contrasting a fallen body with a redeemed body, but a natural body with a spiritual body: "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.... The first Adam is of the earth; the second Adam is of heaven" (verses 44, 47). This passage thus serves as a preliminary warning that the mere appearance of the word "image", even "the image of the heavenly," does not mean the author is thinking in terms of Genesis 1:26, 27.²⁶

The Image of Christ as the Destination of the Elect

In Romans 8:29, 30, Paul writes: "For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." In this passage, the phrase "conformed to the image of his Son" defines the destination to which the elect of God are appointed.²⁷ Verse 30 specifies that the one who is predestined to be in God's image is called, justified and glorified as a means to that end. Being conformed to Christ's image appears to be the same boundaries with glorification. Thus, the meaning attached to "the image of his Son" is the glorification of the saints.

Two other features of this text are important for our purposes. First, a necessary implication of Paul's remarks is that we are not now conformed to the image of Christ, at least not fully. Being completely conformed to Christ's image awaits the final glorification, which is the future. Second, it is God who conforms us to the image of his Son. God predestines, God calls, God justifies, and God glorifies. The human being is entirely the recipient here. The possibility of conceiving Paul's meaning of the image in this text as a restoration of a lost image will depend on whether or not Paul indeed thinks humanity has lost the image of God, which was given in creation.²⁸ In 1 Corinthians 15:49, Paul uses the "image" terminology, and he definitely does not intend any direct connection with the "image" of Genesis 1:26.

Renewed Image; Not a Restoration of Created Image

In none of the texts so far discussed, Paul seems to move within the idea of Genesis 1:26, 27. Nowhere is the image viewed as something restored, something which humanity once possessed and then lost. In fact, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 presents Paul's thinking not in terms of redemption but in terms of the natural order, the order of creation. The key thought is: "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God...." (1 Corinthians 11:7) Verse 8, which says that woman was made from man, and verse 14, which speaks of "nature itself," make it clear that Paul is thinking here of the divinely established order of creation. Therefore, when Paul says that humankind is in the image of God, he means first that this image is the image given in creation and, second, that humankind is indeed *now* in that image.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:7 is made explicit by James (3:9). In giving a warning about the improper use of the tongue, he says, "With it, we bless the Lord and Father, and with it, we curse human beings, who are made in the likeness of God." James, therefore, comes alongside Paul in teaching that human beings are created in God's image and are now in that image, so that certain practical consequences ensue, just as they did in

²⁵ De Graaff, Arnold H. and Olthuis, James H. Eds. *Towards A Biblical View of Man: Some Readings* (Toronto: Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, 1978), 18.

²⁶ De Graaff and Olthuis, *Towards A Biblical View of Man*, 18.

²⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 318.

²⁸ De Graaff and Olthuis, *Towards A Biblical View of Man*, 18

Genesis 1:26 and 9:6.²⁹ The inference which may be drawn from the above is this: since Paul views the image of God as a present possession common to man by virtue of creation, the image of God which man newly attains in regeneration cannot be a restoration of the image bestowed in creation. Thus, both the Old and New Testaments concur that the image of God given to man in creation is not lost, even in the presence of sin.³⁰

In conclusion, the New Testament teaching on the image of God in humankind could be captured in the following summary statements:

- 1) The various practical admonitions of the New Testament are based on the assumption that all human beings retain God's image given in creation.
- 2) It is a dominant Pauline teaching that human beings receive the image of God in regeneration.
- 3) Jesus Christ is God's image and fullness. Therefore, human beings receive the image of God by sharing in what Christ is.
- 4) The image of God that Christians receive is really, but only partially, possessed in this life.
- 5) Receiving the image of God through Christ means sharing in Christ's knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and glory. It means becoming like Christ.
- 6) The Christian life is a process of increasingly attaining these virtues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMAGING ROLE OF HUMANITY

In Genesis 1:27, treated above, we read three times that *God created humanity* as if to emphasise that humans are definitely God's creatures, no more and no less. Psalm 100:3 admonishes: "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." Similarly, we read in Job:

Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; you will turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? And you clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit (10:8-12).

Though the writer of the Book of Job describes the procreative process, this whole process is understood as the work solely wrought by God. It is beyond the imagination of the Old Testament writers that nature should do its part and God should do the rest or that natural process would involve automation.³¹

The passages about the creaturely situation of humans serve to emphasise, at least, that we are not God. Through the prophet Ezekiel (28:1-10), God rebuked the affront of the prince of Tyre who, in his pride, declared himself as god. According to verse 26 of Genesis chapter one, being created in the image of God does not imply a special ontological quality, but is an assertion about the function to rule over the rest of creation.³² This is also expressed in Psalm 8, where the psalmist writes: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet" (Ps. 8:4-6).

The concept of being created in the image of God not only suggests authority and dignity but also includes humility and responsibility. In Micah 6:1-8, God demanded Israel to remember God's saving works in the past and learn to be humble. The prophet tells Israel: "God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the

²⁹ Fichtner, Man, the Image of God, 42

³⁰ Fichtner, Man, the Image of God, 42

³¹ Schwarz, The Human Being, 27.

³² De Graaff and Olthuis, Towards A Biblical View of Man, 18

Lord require of you but to *do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.*" The New Testament presentation of Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), who showed humility as a virtue by accepting death (Philippians 2:8), strengthens this requirement of humility from humanity made the likeness of God.

In the words of Hans Schwarz, "Being created in the image of God is not intended to deify or idolise humanity; it is also no license to exploit creation and to subjugate it to one's desires. Being created in the image of God means rather to work in God's place as God's administrator or representative."³³ The New Testament, especially in the letters of Saint Paul, reinforces this understanding. To be created in the image of God means to be ethically shaped in conformity with God and to act in a manner for which God serves as a prototype (Phil. 2:5; Rom. 15:5). In this way, God's self-description, which he reveals to Moses in the book of Exodus 34:6-7a becomes the model: "*The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.*" Being created in the image and likeness of God, humans are, therefore, to represent God and to "model their conduct according to God."³⁴

Furthermore, to say that humans are in the image and likeness of God is to recognise the unique qualities and features of human nature which allow God to be made manifest in humans. Thus, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being made in the image of God means that they are the creatures through whom God's steadfast love and righteous purposes can be made known and actualised. Psalm 107:43 states that the wise are expected to understand God's steadfast loving kindness: "Let those who are wise give heed to these things and consider the steadfast love of God." Our experience of God as a loving and caring God should give us pointers to how we, as God's image, ought to be experienced by others. Our practice of justice and righteousness, which are the most often-used attributes of God, should manifest God's steadfast, loving-kindness.³⁵ Since every human is an expression of God, no human can love God without loving other humans.

We can also understand man's likeness to God when contrasted with creatures not made in God's image, such as those that lack the capacity for self-consciousness, moral or spiritual reflection, and growth. The rational structure of humans (their capacity for deliberation and free decision-making) makes them different from all other creatures.³⁶ It is because of this freedom that humans have a centeredness and completeness, which allows them to self-actualise and participate in a sacred reality.

There is, however, a dimension of this understanding that speaks to the limits of human freedom. Freedom has value only when it is freedom for the good, freedom with responsibility. The prophet Ezekiel emphasised the importance of human responsibility in the passage about retribution: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:20). It is therefore not a freedom to do whatever one wants to do. Rather, it is the freedom to live according to God's intentions. Everything God created, God described to be "very good". Human freedom should lead to maintaining and preserving this "very good" character of creation. As the image of God, humanity is to direct and channel everything in the way of the "very good". Our postmodern experience as solitary, isolated, individual human beings shows ever more clearly the precariousness of our existence if we no longer understand ourselves as created in God's image.³⁷ Exploiting creation and destroying its natural resources have nothing to do with representing God but portray human egotism.

The human imaging of God points essentially to the mystery of the human person. Human beings cannot resolve this mystery without facing up to their relationship with God. They cannot fathom their ultimate meaning and purpose by peering within themselves psychologically, measuring themselves sociologically, tracing their

³³Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 23.

³⁴Schwarz, *The Human Being*, 23.

³⁵Nicolae Roddy, "Biblical Anthropology: Why the Patristic Distinction Between Image and Likeness Matters," in *Studies in Orthodox Hermeneutics: A festschrift in Honor of Theodore G. Stylianopoulos*, ed. Eugen J. Pentuic et al. (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2016), 260.

³⁶Schwarz, *The Human Being*, 24.

³⁷ Schwarz, *The Human Being*, 24.

ancestry anthropologically, or in any other humanistic way.³⁸ If finite human beings became the measure of everything, they would end up absolutizing themselves and seeing themselves as infinite.

Whatever the interpretation, “image” specifies the human being's relationship to God and to fellow humans. To deny this divine-human relationship is to lose sight of the essence of the human role as God's image bearer. The threefold occurrence of image (*eikon*) in the famous Synoptic parallel in which Jesus replies to the Pharisees' question about paying taxes to Caesar (Mt. 22:20; Mk. 12:16; Lk. 20:24) may have some bearing on this matter in that Jesus may be implying that whilst the coin bears the image of Caesar, humans bear the image of God and so ought to give themselves to God. Closely related to this is the religious tradition of Israel, in which the erection of images of God was strongly forbidden. This connects with God's intention of creating the human person as the sole divine image. The Israelites were so strongly forbidden to serve images because as long as they were enslaved to these imitation images, “their calling as God's image bearers was frustrated.”³⁹ The Old Testament associates such images with emptiness (Zech. 10:2), vanity (Eccl. 1-2), greed (Jer. 9:23-24; Job 36:18), sexual passions (2 Chron. 21:11), etc. With images such as these that enslave human beings, we fail to mirror the God whose sole image we are.

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament gives no detail about the nature of the image of God. Although the New Testament describes what it means to be a new creation in Christ, it does not explicitly relate this new creation to the image of God in the Old Testament. The image of God in humanity, understood as something implanted in Adam at his creation, is mentioned only twice in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 11:7 and James 3:9. Other passages simply allude to it. The New Testament, like the Old Testament before it, says nothing about a loss, corruption or defacing of the creation image of God in humanity; on the contrary, both Paul and James use it as the basis for their particular teaching. It is probably significant that both New Testament passages deal with relationships between human beings - in Paul, between man and woman; in James, simply between people in general. However, there is the understanding that God, making humans in God's image and likeness, thus established a relationship with humans. Based on this, we have tried to determine what such a relationship could imply for humans created to be God-like. From the fact of creation and its consequences for humanity, it is clear that human beings are not God. We are only human despite our longing to overcome finitude. Acknowledging that we are creatures in a relationship with God and growing in the knowledge of God's will is essential to our image-bearing role: The image of the wise servant doing the Creator's will.

In summary, the real meaning of humanity's creation in the image and likeness of God is that, unlike the rest of creation, human life is not an end in itself. A dog or a rose may come into existence and complete its life cycle without engaging with its Creator. The dog may do a number of things that, if they were done by a human, would constitute a sin and even a crime. The human being is different. Humanity alone is given the privilege of fulfilling its earthly existence in relation to God, and this entails responsibility for its actions. In God's image, humanity's *primaeval* uniqueness as a creature, its historical tragedy in Adam, and its eschatological hope of redemption in Christ are found.

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³⁸ Schwarz, *The Human Being*, 25.

³⁹De Graaff and Olthuis, *Towards A Biblical View of Man*, 13.

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