

Substance, Relation, and Function: A Case for the Holistic Account of the Imago Dei.

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Introduction

The substantial view of the Imago Dei long dominated the world of Christian thought. This view deposes an intrinsic quality within the human being that is in itself like God. However, with the development of Reformed theological thinking, the popular view in the realm of theology concerning the Imago Dei has shifted towards the relational and functional treatments of the image of God.¹ Both the relational and functional views of the Imago Dei suggest that humans reflect the image of God by means of something we *do* as opposed to something that we *are*. Thus, this question arises: is the Imago Dei something that is *inherent* or *inherited*? In other words, are we, human beings, born possessing the image of God or is it something that we develop over the course of our lives? The substantial view holds that the Imago Dei, whatever part of the human being that entails, is essential and inherent within man while the relational and functional views are open to the possibility of the development of the image. Is the Imago Dei gifted to humanity or earned? Is the image received or developed?

It is my intention to demonstrate that the argument to pinpoint one of the three major views of the Imago Dei as primary is reductionistic. I also purport that each view is supported by biblical evidence and sound, complimentary theology. It is my belief that the three views of the Imago Dei are accommodating and not in opposition to one another. To make this argument, first, I will briefly survey the history of the interpretation of the Imago Dei in Scripture and in the history of theology, and, second, I will provide support for a holistic view of the Imago Dei by observing the incarnation of Christ, and, finally, present possible opposing views to my premise.

The Traditional Image

To begin, I will explore the treatment of the Imago Dei in the history of Christian thought. Vernon O. Elmore boldly stated in his work *Man as God's Creation* that "Man is not an accident."² Modern popular scientific theory would claim that man, indeed, happened by accident; a result of happenstance and evolutionary progression. However, the biblical belief in the Imago Dei screams in the face of that understanding, echoing Elmore's statement that man does not exist by serendipitous chance. To support belief in the Imago Dei, that man was created with purpose by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent creator, is to accept that any understanding of anthropology outside of the Scriptures is deficient. Elmore eloquently wrote, "The study of humanity without considering the Scriptures is like studying light without considering the sun."³ In this light, our comprehension of the Imago Dei is of the

¹ F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 11-37.

² Vernon O. Elmore, *Man as God's Creation*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1986), 23.

³ *Ibid*, 25.

utmost import. Anthony Hoekema stated that the Imago Dei is “the most distinctive feature of the biblical understanding of man” and also that it is “the heart of Christian anthropology.”⁴

As the heart of theological anthropology lies within the Imago Dei, the heart of the image is found in Scripture. Genesis 1:26-27 is the staple scriptural reference and foundation for a biblical understanding of the Imago Dei, which states, “God created man in his own image.” That man was created in God’s image is repeated in Genesis 5:1 and echoed in the condemnation of murder in Genesis 9:6.⁵ The Hebrew words used in these passages are *selem*, meaning “image, to carve, or to cut from,” and *demut*, meaning “likeness, form, or a sculpted artistic representation.”⁶ The use of these descriptive words suggests that man was both created *from* God and *reflects* God in some way. Origen and Irenaeus both interpreted the “image” and “likeness” of God as two separate attributes to varying degrees.⁷ However, G. C. Berkouwer claimed that the two terms are used interchangeably in Genesis 5 and 9 for no special reason and, therefore, do not represent two separate entities but one.⁸ Both of these terms are repeated in the New Testament: “image” in 1 Corinthians 11:7 and “likeness” in James 3:9. Charles Sherlock observed that the only other Old Testament use of the image of God is in reference to a forbiddance of idol worship in Exodus 20:4-5, which is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:8-9.⁹ Apart from the aforementioned references, the New Testament does not directly mention man as being created *in* God’s image, but rather the future or current transformation of man *into* God’s image, through Christ, and concerning Jesus as the perfected example of the image of God.¹⁰ J. Richard Middleton noted that the majority of biblical references to the Imago Dei are concerned with depicting Jesus as the “image par excellence,” or the perfect representation of God in man.¹¹ Berkouwer wrote that, despite its brevity in the whole of Scripture, the Imago Dei has remained an integral concept in Christian theology.¹² When the whole of scriptural references are considered, it is clear that the Imago Dei is intended to be understood within the context of our interconnection with God, through Jesus Christ.

⁴ Hoekema, 11; 66.

⁵ “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.” -Gen. 9:6. Genesis 9:6 states that man should not be murdered because he made “in his image.” To destroy a human being is to destroy the image of God.

⁶ *selem* (סֵלֶם); *demut* (דְּמוּת); James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1952; 7512.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 462.

⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Man: The Image of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 69.

⁹ Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 32.

¹⁰ We *are being* conformed into his image: Romans 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18, Eph 4:23-24, Col 3:10. We *will be* conformed to his image: 1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:21. Christ as the Imago Dei: 2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15, John 14:8-9, Heb. 1:3, John 1:14.

¹¹ J. Richard Middleton, “Image of God,” *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 394.

¹² Berkouwer, 66.

Based on the use of Scripture to define the Imago Dei, a trio of views exist concerning the image. The predominant treatments of the Imago Dei in the theological guild can be narrowed to three broad categories: substantial, relational, and functional. The substantial perspective considers some part of the human being to be intrinsically related to God. Contrarily, the relational and functional mostly deny the intrinsic nature of the Imago Dei and rather assign practical aspects, something that a person experiences or does, respectively.

The substantial view asserts that there is an intrinsic characteristic within the human being that is God-like. Middleton wrote that this view is succinctly defined by asking in what ways are humans *like* God and *unlike* animals?¹³ The substantial view is most often held in regard to a human attribute that is not physical, although it is often misinterpreted as referring to our physical selves. Sherlock wrote that anthropomorphism (attributing human qualities to God) is idolatry and should therefore be curbed.¹⁴ Rather than focusing on the physical, the substantial view most often suggests the Thomistic treatment of the Imago Dei which suggests that it exists within man's ability to reason, his intellect, or her soul. The substantial view holds that the Imago Dei is an innate trait of humanity. Irenaeus taught that Adam, a perfect human being, maintained the image of God but lost his "likeness" after the fall.¹⁵ Origen viewed the image of God as being granted at the moment of creation, suggesting that the image of God is given at birth or conception.¹⁶ Like Berkouwer, Martin Luther observed that "image" and "likeness" were not separate attributes and determined that the Imago Dei is present within fallen man whether or not it is exercised or acknowledged.¹⁷ Despite subtle differences, all substantial views can be summed up in the understanding that the Imago Dei resides within the human being as something that the human *is*.

The relational view proposes an existential explanation of the Imago Dei, suggesting that mankind represents the image of God through our *experience* with God. This idea was present in the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner and other earlier theologians, but was popularized in the 20th century by Jurgen Moltmann who considered the whole of humanity to represent the Imago Dei, not the individual person.¹⁸ Middleton wrote of the relational aspect of the Imago Dei, "God is relational within himself, man is relational with man, and a relationship exists between God and man."¹⁹ And G. C. Berkouwer asserted that man is presented in many different ways but always in juxtaposition to his relationship with God.²⁰

¹³ J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, (Grand Rapid, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 18-19.

¹⁴ "God can not be defined, and any endeavor to do so on our part constitutes idolatry." Sherlock, 32.

¹⁵ Hoekema, 35.

¹⁶ Erickson, 462.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hoekema, 29; Erickson, 463; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 79.

¹⁹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 23.

²⁰ Berkouwer, 33.

Correspondingly, the functional view presents the Imago Dei as something that the human being *does*; as a role for mankind to play. Drawn from Genesis 1:28, the functional view is a pragmatic approach that models itself on the concept of Lordship.²¹ Eugene H. Merrill wrote, “Humankind is *in* the image of God but also serves *as* the image. Humans have resemblance to God, even if limited, but stand in God’s place in the administration of God’s creation.”²² Noreen L. Herzfeld wrote that mankind only reflects God’s image when we are performing as “God’s representatives on earth.”²³ Both the relational and the functional views lie in contrast with the substantial view in that they often partially or even wholly reject the Imago Dei as an intrinsic trait of humanity.

In the theological realm, these three perspectives are often found at odds with one another. I assert that this argument is in vain, with greater good served in observing how these three views compliment one another rather than how they are opposed. The substantial, relational, and functional views of the Imago Dei agree that the Imago Dei is somehow present in the whole of humanity. All three views agree that the image was not lost in the Fall of man—some remnant of how humans relate to God is left even though the man is corrupted. The image is distorted, but not lost. Martin Luther based his understanding on Genesis 9:6, since murder was prohibited because a fallen, sinful man was still considered to be in the image of God.²⁴ Additionally, all views agree that the image can not be lost or destroyed, nor is it present in any one person more or less than another. The sole difference between the three views of the Imago Dei is pragmatic, asking whether or not the image is associated with a particular purpose or role (dominion, intellect, reason, relation, etc.)? Hoekema wrote, “Is ‘image of God’ only a description of the way in which the human being functions, or is it also a description of the kind of being he or she is?”²⁵ The answer to this question lies not in the three views’s contrariety but rather in their compatibility. As in the three persons of the Trinity, the three aspects of the Imago Dei work in a complimentary way, composing a holistic Imago Dei that is at the same time substantial, relational, and functional.

The Holistic Evidence

Hoekema suggested that, in order for the Son, a member of the Trinity, to become human, humanity would have to be created in such a way to make the incarnation possible.²⁶ In other words, there is something special about the make-up of the human being that enabled the Son to become

²¹ “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.’” Gen. 1:28.

²² Eugene H. Merrill, “Image of God,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 444.

²³ Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 21.

²⁴ Erickson, 462-463.

²⁵ Hoekema, 69.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

human. Hoekema wrote that “the Incarnation confirms the doctrine of the image of God.”²⁷ The Son could not assume the form of a being that did not have something in common with God.²⁸ Hoekema stated that a certain quality that is present within humanity made possible the incarnation of Christ. The incarnation serves as the lynchpin for the holistic view of the Imago Dei in that the qualities that were exemplified by the Christ are also present in humanity as a whole. The constitution of man consists of something supernatural; an eternal, unexplainable trait of humanity. Man is relational both in respect to God and to other humans. And finally, mankind serves a functional role in the world, God’s creation.

The elevated status of humanity is particularly strong within the Hebrew text of the creation account in Genesis 1. According to Jeffrey J. Niehaus, the Hebrew language and style used in Genesis 1:27 contains a level of nuance that is simultaneously simple and intricate. Utilizing what Niehaus describes as “external synonymous parallelism,” the author used a series of interlocking chiasm patterns that emphasize the importance of man in the creation account.²⁹ Niehaus wrote, “[these verses] place the creation of humans at a high level, at the apex of God’s creative acts in Genesis 1:1–27, both positionally and aesthetically.”³⁰ The aloft nature of humanity is seen within the biblical words themselves, in the language used to describe mankind. In Genesis 2:7, we see that God “breathed” life into the dust that he formed into man — a treatment received by mankind alone in creation.³¹ This elevated place in creation suggests that the relationship between God and man was unique, unparalleled, and God-given.

In his commentary on the book of Genesis, Wayne Sibley Towner described humanity as being “alone in the world.” Towner intended to emphasize that humans alone have been given a special privilege in creation as that which God created to be most like himself. Describing mankind as the pinnacle of God’s creation, Towner wrote, “We human beings are the culminating achievement of God, the top of the hierarchy of the creatures...”³² In Genesis 1:28, Adam is told to subdue the earth and to rule over the animal kingdom. This significant responsibility is bestowed upon man who is created most like God, described in Psalm 8:5 as “a little lower than God.”³³ In this context, being “like God” appears to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “The biblical verse is actually three verses in the structure of the Hebrew poem. Each of the verses is a bicolon. None of the bicola contain parallels within themselves, but they do contain parallels between each other—a phenomenon sometimes referred to as *external synonymous parallelism*. Conclusions are warranted regarding biblical anthropology because of the parallelism between the bicola... The creation of humans is emphasized by an interlocking pattern of chiasms between the first two cola (a b /b’ a’ and a c/c’ a’). The third colon follows with more synonymous parallelism (c’ a’ b’/c’ a’ b’). The chiasmic pattern and the threefold declaration of God’s creative act emphasize what he has done.” Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 60.

³⁰ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants*, vol. 1, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 61.

³¹ “Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.” -Gen. 2:7.

³² W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 30.

³³ Middleton, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 395.

refer to both the inherent nature of man and his ability to “lord” over creation. Towner furthered his motif of “aloneness” by stating that man alone is also held accountable for his treatment of that which he is charged to oversee.³⁴ There is no doubt that Scripture suggests a functional role of dominion on behalf of humanity.

In the philosophical realm, a distinction has long been recognized between the animal kingdom and mankind. Descartes described animals as “mechanical automations,” absent of awareness and emotions.³⁵ Elmore stated that what sets the human being apart from the flora and fauna is the soul and asserted that humanity possesses a “spiritual identity.”³⁶ Both the physical and the spiritual qualities of man compose a human being—a unique pairing in creation. Berkouwer stated that Scripture does not differentiate between the bodily and spiritual aspects of the Imago Dei, suggesting that the two are interrelated, not separate.³⁷ John W. Cooper asserted that Scripture clearly teaches both a *holistic* and *dualistic* view of human nature, the combination of a body and soul to constitute a person.³⁸ Beyond the ability to reason, make and use tools, develop language, and form communities lies an intrinsic value that can not be quantified; something bestowed to man by the creator that sets humanity apart. In affirmation of man’s God-given status over the animal kingdom, Nico Vorster expressed that humans are gifted with “an inherent dignity that animals do not enjoy.”³⁹ Elmore wrote that mankind “bridges the gap between God and His world.”⁴⁰ A relationship between God and man undoubtedly exists that is not granted to other creatures, one that allowed that “bridge” to exist so that the Son could become a man.

It has been established that human beings are unique among God’s creation, and part of that uniqueness lies in the presence of both a body and an immortal soul. According to Robert Sherman, human beings are uniquely equipped to receive the Son as one of its species. Sherman wrote, “human nature is, at root, endowed with all that it needs for God-consciousness; the coming of Christ does not effect... a qualitative change in that nature.”⁴¹ Sherman asserted that there was no need for any characteristic of humanity to be altered in order to receive the Son as a human being, rather he was able to become human because the human condition was solely prepared to receive him. Matthias J. Scheeben wrote that humanity is uniquely qualified to achieve unity with the divine. Scheeben stated that humanity “essentially bears within itself the ability to be drawn to a higher whole, or, is by nature receptive to being

³⁴ Towner, 30.

³⁵ Elmore, 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Berkouwer, 77.

³⁸ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1989), 231.

³⁹ Nico Vorster, *Created In the Image of God: Understanding God’s Relationship with Humanity*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 38.

⁴¹ Robert Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth*, (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2005), 187.

taken up into a higher person.”⁴² Scheeben also inferred that the hypostatic union of Christ’s divine and human natures could not be achieved by any other being or created material.⁴³ In other words, God could not have become a rock or a tiger because neither of those created things were designed to achieve an higher existence. Oliver D. Crisp stated that, in order for the son to be incarnated as a human, he must be introduced to the combination of a body and soul, “rightly related.”⁴⁴ I am partial to Crisp’s use of the phrase “rightly related” in its simplicity of illustrating the complex idea of a physical entity paired with an immortal soul.

In Hebrews 10:1-18, the author describes Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for the covering of sin; one who was distinctively qualified to take on the task because of his lone existence as both God and man. From this text, Charles Caldwell Ryrie developed one of his seven purposes of the incarnation: to provide an effective sacrifice for sin. Ryrie wrote:

Without the Incarnation we would have no Savior. Sin requires death for its payment. God does not die. So the Savior must be human in order to be able to die. But the death of an ordinary man would not pay for sin eternally, so the Savior must also be God. We must have a God-man Savior, and we do in our Lord.⁴⁵

It was, and is, imperative for God’s salvific plan to be effective that the Savior be both God and man. Ryrie also wrote in his sixth purpose statement for the incarnation that the Savior must be human so that we may have a sympathetic high priest.⁴⁶ Similar to his explanation of the effective sacrifice, Ryrie stated that God can not be tempted, so Jesus had to be human in order to be tempted.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Jesus was not only fully human but the perfect example of what it means to be human—a perfect image of God. Vorster wrote that “God’s being and character is reflected in a perfect manner in the life of Christ.”⁴⁸ Ryrie observed that Jesus’s humanity was affirmed by his birth, his relation with other humans, his human experience, and his possession of a soul, while his deity was affirmed by his heavenly attributes, his miracles, and that he referred to himself as “one” with the Father.⁴⁹ Christ was able to have a fully human experience while also maintaining his deity because of the remarkable, mysterious combination of body and soul that fabricates a human being. Moreover, this arrangement was necessary so that the work of Christ could be effective for mankind: a man was needed to save man.

⁴² Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics, Book 5: Soteriology, Part One: The Person of Christ the Redeemer*, (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020), 299-300.

⁴³ Scheeben, 302-303.

⁴⁴ Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 26; 44-45.

⁴⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 280.

⁴⁶ Hebrews 4:14-16.

⁴⁷ Ryrie, 281.

⁴⁸ Vorster, 17.

⁴⁹ Ryrie, 286; John 10:30.

The extraordinary condition that is observed in the personhood of Christ is one of mystery and awe, but one that Scripture tells us is both tangible and effective. It is required of us, then, that we suspend our disbelief and accept what we can not explain. We mistakenly view the Imago Dei as something that we possess or that we must maintain or develop when it is God, in actuality, who is responsible for both. Sin distorts the image of God in humanity, but it cannot destroy it because God chooses to maintain the image given to us. Even after the Fall, humans maintain that inherent part of the Imago Dei that God chooses to preserve within us. It is for this reason, wrote Vorster, that Christ can assume human nature.⁵⁰ Were it not for the intentional creation of mankind as a receptacle for the Son, an inherent value gifted by God to the *homo sapien*, the incarnation would not have been possible and what has been accomplished in Christ for salvation would not have occurred.

Interestingly, Hoekema observed that there are substantial, relational, and functional aspects to the image that all bear import. Brandon D. Crowe declared that the incarnation in and of itself was not sufficient for salvation, rather it is the actions of Christ in his incarnated state that make salvation possible.⁵¹ Berkouwer said the same of man when he wrote, “The image of God does not consist of qualities in themselves, but in created man’s life [in action], and in functioning.”⁵² It is evident that the Imago Dei consists of both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of equal significance. Jerry A. Johnson articulated this idea when he wrote, “The image of God cannot be reduced to one attribute or any combination of attributes of man. The biblical portrait is more holistic. The entire man, as a human being, images God.”⁵³ By this reasoning, the Imago Dei consists of both *inherent* and *inherited* attributes.

Berkouwer suggested that perhaps we view the incarnation in a skewed manner. Often we consider Jesus as having shared in our nature, but rather we should observe that we share that of Christ. Berkouwer wrote, “We participate in Jesus’s nature; not He in ours, but we in His.”⁵⁴ This theory suggests that Christ was always intended to be made incarnate and that humanity was created to share his likeness. Human beings, then, were created with the incarnation in mind; with a likeness to God which enabled the incarnation.

It has been demonstrated that mankind is and was uniquely qualified to receive the Son as its Redeemer, that Jesus was completely human, and that, in the purest form, he existed as both divine and human. Scripture conveys that Jesus was fully human (John 1:14), that he grew in relation with God and with man (Luke 2:52), and that he exercised his command over creation (Matt. 8:23-27). These qualities of Christ illustrate his existence as human substantively, relationally, and functionally. As Christ reflects the image of God, so does man. As God in man, Christ’s nature also reflects that of the Trinity.⁵⁵ It bears

⁵⁰ Vorster, 16.

⁵¹ Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 201-202.

⁵² Berkouwer, 55.

⁵³ Jerry A. Johnson, “Image of God,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 806.

⁵⁴ Berkouwer, 95.

⁵⁵ Scheeben, 94-95.

to claim, then, that the triune nature of God is represented in the Imago Dei that is present in Christ and that is also gifted to the creature, man. Scheeben described the Father as the first of the three persons of the Trinity, suggesting that the Father serves as the principle for the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ In the same way, the substantial element of the Imago Dei serves as the principle for the relational and functional aspects. Humanity is more than substantial, but not less. This does not mean that the substantial element of the Imago Dei is more important, but that it serves a purpose in supporting the relational and functional facets. Therefore, the Imago Dei, in the holistic view, consists of both inherent *and* inherited qualities, both gifted and developed, represented by attributes that are substantial, relational, and functional.

Opposition to the Holistic View

It is arguable that the role of man as God's elevated creature within creation acts as a functional outlook on the Imago Dei. One could say that the Imago Dei is predominantly displayed by the role man plays within creation, "lording" over the earth and its inhabitants. Merrill certainly agreed with this view when he wrote, "Humanity does not so much share with God his essential reality, but rather, is a representative of that reality. That is, humankind has a functional role to play, a role that requires no ontological commonness with God."⁵⁷ Herzfeld stated that humans represent the image of God when they "function in God's stead, as God's representatives on earth."⁵⁸ To me, there is a danger in this language that gives the impression of man serving in the place of God as opposed to man being used by God to represent himself within creation. This subtle change in perspective changes the implications of the Functional view from a role of *lord* to one of *servant* which, in my opinion, is a more Christ-honoring approach. While the functional aspects of the Imago Dei are most certainly present and mandated by Genesis 1:28, I believe that it falls under the umbrella of a holistic view of the image as one of the means by which the image presents itself.

In the same way, the relational aspects of the Imago Dei fall under the same category in that they are a means by which the Imago Dei is exercised but not its essential quality. Contrarily, Joel B. Green described the image of God as "fundamentally relational," asserting that the significant trait of the Imago Dei is its capacity to transcend the physical.⁵⁹ Berkouwer stated that Scripture does not concern itself with the structure of man but rather man's relationship to God.⁶⁰ Although that is true, I do not believe that we should dismiss the physical body or ontological selves as possessing their own significance nor that we should focus on the relational aspects solely, rather in how the two coincide in representing the image of God through man.

⁵⁶ Scheeben, 97-99.

⁵⁷ Merrill, 443-444.

⁵⁸ Herzfeld, 21.

⁵⁹ Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 63.

⁶⁰ Berkouwer, 59-60.

In total, valid Scriptural evidence exists for all three views which, for the most part, are in agreement with one another. If the evidence points towards each perspective in some way and to none in particular, the logical conclusion is to follow the evidence and submit that all three views are viable. If there are no biblical or logical defeaters for any particular view, a holistic view is the best explanation. Moreover, what is lost in the holistic view? By allowing the complimentary relationship of the substantial, relational, and functional, none of these aspects are diminished or skewed in any way. Moreover, the three views appear to be in agreement and perhaps could even be proven to strengthen one another.

Conclusion

In this paper I have observed through biblical and historical evidence that there is a strong case for a holistic view of the Imago Dei. I have also presented support for a shared intrinsic quality between man and God that allowed the incarnation, which is the holistic Imago Dei. It is my conviction that the substantial, relational, and functional characteristics of the Imago Dei are equally crucial and serve to compliment one another in a manner reflective of God's triune nature. It is my belief that a holistic view of the image of God, as opposed to one restricted to substantial, relational, or functional aspects, proves most beneficial to theological discourse.

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