

A young boy with dark hair is shown from the side, holding a purple toy gun. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the image.

tearfund

# MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
*IMAGO DEI* FOR ISSUES IN  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

International development is not easy to define and incorporates a broad range of disciplines and endeavours to improve the quality of life of people around the world. It seeks to end extreme poverty and enable people across the globe to live and flourish. It seems as if it should be uncomplicated: we know the kind of world we want to see and we work hard to try and bring it about. But of course, it isn't – because what does it mean to develop, to be developed? In all communities and cultures people have different ideas about what a developed society would look like, and what it would take to create and sustain one. Currently international development practice engages with law, governance, economics, food and water security, healthcare and education, diversity and human rights, infrastructure and sustainability.

The way in which we do development work is part of a larger conversation and debate: what kind of world do we want to live in and be a part of making? This is a question we should all ask ourselves, as we make decisions that will impact more than our own lives. It is certainly one that all development organisations should, and do, ask themselves: what is the end goal of our work? As we consider this question, we need to think about the assumptions that underpin our answer. If, for example, we want to end extreme poverty and to enable people all around the world to live and flourish, then we need to think about what we mean when we talk about poverty and about flourishing, and why we think this way. At their core these discussions are about how we understand our human identity: the question of the meaning of life.

As a development organisation, Tearfund continually aims to reflect on and improve in all areas of its work, and is a signatory of a number of professional codes of practice. As a distinctively Christian organisation, one of the lenses through which we examine our work is theological: developing our understanding of the world as it is described in the Bible and discussing what this means for the work we do: we ask ourselves what ideas like development and flourishing mean for people who are called to seek the kingdom of God.

Tearfund has already produced documents exploring what we mean by poverty and human flourishing.<sup>1</sup> The transformation we seek reflects the values of God's kingdom – that the future world we hope to see is one in which all people can truly flourish: in themselves, in relationship with each other, within their environment, and with God. At heart, understanding flourishing requires us to think about the nature of human identity: who and how were we made to be? Only if we understand that can we understand what it might take for us to flourish.

In this short book, and the occasional papers we hope will follow, we plan to further explore the question of our identity as humans. Here we will be looking at the concept of the *imago Dei*, the belief that humans were made in the image of God. We will be asking what it means to image God, and what believing that this is the essential core of our identity means for international development and humanitarian aid work. What does it mean for the way we think about mission, about justice, about economics and wealth or about human rights? Are there distinctively Christian ways of understanding these ideas that should drive our practice and our aims? We think that the answer to this question is 'yes', and here we want to explain why, and what this looks like, to provoke discussion and develop our practice further in ways that will enable humans to flourish – bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

## The image of God

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26)*

What does it mean to say we are made in the image of God? Each of the essays in this collection will explore the concept of the *imago Dei* in relation to a particular topic, seeking to help us think about how best to apply our theology to our work: but first, we need to establish that theology. How or where do we show the image of God and what does that mean for our understanding of who we are, how we should be and what we can and should do?

Historically, theologians have looked at the idea of the image of God in terms of our minds and our bodies. Many have asked whether and how we might resemble God in the way that we look and the way that we think. Most attention has been

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1. Tearfund, *Overcoming Poverty Together* (London, 2012); Tearfund, CAFOD and Theos, *Wholly Living* (London, 2010).

given to our minds and spirit. For example, Athanasius focused on our rationality, because Jesus was the Word, the logos, and he is the one who reveals God to humanity, while Augustine, thinking about the Trinity, focused on three faculties of the soul – *memoria, intellectus, amor* (memory, intellect, love). The Reformers argued that the image of God was seen in humanity's original righteousness, arguing that the image of God was then broken in us by the fall.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last half-century or so, however, theologians have moved away from a mind-body dualism and towards a more unified, metaphysical approach<sup>3</sup> – as Gerhard von Rad commented, 'One does well to separate as little as possible the bodily and spiritual; the whole man is created in the image of God.'<sup>4</sup> We were created as physical and spiritual beings, the mind and body cannot be separated from each other and they were intended to reveal, together, God in the world. One might say that the image of God runs through our cores like the lettering in a stick of rock, a part of our nature which, perfectly expressed, would mark us as the people we were created to be. It is a mark of our identity and, in a broken world, of our potential.

In Genesis we see not only that humans are made in the image of God, but that this image is connected with the life they were created for in the garden. In the New Testament, we see God revealed in the incarnation of Christ, who teaches us more about the nature and mission of God and what it means to bear God's image in the world. *Wholly Living* uses three categories to outline the ways in which we possess God's image and reveal that to the world around us:

**1. Substantive:** we share some of God's substantial characteristics, and are endowed with certain gifts. These have been understood to include many or all of the following: rationality, morality, self-awareness, creativity, productivity, and generosity. In this way we show the image of God in our characters and the ways we are called to be.

**2. Functional:** we share in part of God's role with regard to creation, expressing authority over it in a way consistent with the fact that our substance also reflects

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2. For more discussion of this see Paula Gooder's essay below.

3. This connects with a growing understanding that God created humans with a body for a reason, and that we shouldn't think of ourselves as souls unfortunately tied to a body. See for example: Dave Bookless, *Planetwise* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2008); Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2002); James KA Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Cultural Liturgies) (Baker Academic, 2009); Nick Spencer, Robert White and Virginia Vroblecky, *Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living* (Brazos Press, 2009); Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (SPCK, 2012).

4. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), p 56.

the image of God – with creativity, generosity, love and a desire to conserve.

**3. Relational:** we are created to exist in relationships, just as God, as Trinity, exists in relationship. We are made to be in relationship with him, other people, and the rest of creation in a way that reflects God's relational existence, in which communion and love spill over into creativity and creation.<sup>5</sup>

The 'image of God' was an idea that was not unknown in the ancient Near East, where it was traditional for a king to erect his statue in the territory he controlled in order to signify his real – if not physical – presence and his authority in that land. By making humans his image bearers, God both marks us as his, and signifies his presence in his creation, marking it all as under his authority and care.<sup>6</sup> To flourish, we need to be able to express this identity, as we were created to.

As these essays will consider in more detail, this means particular things for how we live our lives, the ways in which we treat other each other and the way we treat the creation of which we are a part. It means acknowledging our shared created-ness with each other and with creation, our shared dependency on our creator and our interdependence on each other as a key guide to our behaviour. It means understanding our ability to be creative and productive, rational, self-aware, and decisive, but also our responsibility to exercise these powers in ways that contribute towards the good of the whole creation, expressing our generosity, morality, and continual interdependence. Paul writes to the Ephesians:

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin.' Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. (4:25–29)*

He is reminding them that we are called to live in ways that support the well-being of the community. The meaning of our lives as beings made in the image of God is not to have but to give, as God gives to us. We are blessed and given an abundant creation that we may share these things with each other, glorifying the God who created them and us.

Of course, since the Fall, the image of God is now seen and expressed imperfectly

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5. Tearfund et al., *Wholly Living*, (2010). It is important to note that these elements are not divisible from each other in anyone - but they are useful categories to aid our thinking.

6. DJA Clines, 'A Biblical Doctrine of Man', *CBRF Journal*:28 (1976): 9–38, p 20

in all of us, and our application of the theology of the *imago Dei* has to recognise how difficult it is to live as we were intended and how, on our own and in our time we will not be able to create utopia. However, that does not mean that the understanding that Scripture gives us of being made in the image of God and the vision of human flourishing it provides should not inspire and guide us. As the *Wholly Living* report states, recognising that humans are created in the image of God shows us something important about ourselves:

*It insists that all humans have the capacity for creativity and productivity; all are formed by and thrive in relationships; all have a responsibility for ensuring that everyone may contribute to our common good; all have a duty to treat the natural world as something of more than instrumental value and to steward it sustainably; and all prosper when given the opportunity to be generous. Human flourishing is served when all are afforded the freedom to give and to receive in relationships of mutual understanding and respect. God gives freely and generously, and in response we are called to share justly what has been given.<sup>7</sup>*

We should remember that this was what we were made to be, and what we will be restored to be in Christ and in the new creation, recognising that this potential lies within us still. And, of course, Christ offers us the certain hope that the image of God in us will be restored and that we will one day live in harmony in the new creation:

*As the second Adam, Christ is the head of the new humanity; therefore as Adam shares the image with his descendants, so Christ shares the image with His descendants, namely those that are 'in Christ.'<sup>8</sup>*

As Christ's death and resurrection inaugurates the kingdom of God, which will not be fully revealed until Christ returns, so the image of God is restored in us, but will not be fully revealed – it cannot be, for we are still learning how to express it. The creation will not be perfected again until the end, but it is still at the core of our identity. And yet, the image is already in us, as the kingdom is already begun, and in Christ and with the Holy Spirit we are able to show the image of God in us, to seek and reveal the kingdom of God in and to the world in which we live.

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7. Tearfund et al., *Wholly Living* (2010), pp 27–28.

8. DJA Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', (2010), in *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), p 102.

## This collection

*Being made in the Image of God means we have an irreducible, objective worth – and that everyone else does.*<sup>9</sup>

As we have noted, being made in the image of God means that we have certain attributes and abilities - and certain responsibilities: to God, each other, and creation. In this collection of essays we will be exploring how all of this applies as we reflect upon what it means to flourish in every aspect of our lives, and what it means for Tearfund and other Christian organisations and churches as they seek to enable the transformation and flourishing of those living in poverty all around the world.

Paula Gooder starts us off, exploring the way that God made humanity in his image as a key part of his creation and his intention for its flourishing. She discusses what this means for our identity and place within the world, especially in its call to us to think seriously about our relationship with the God who shapes and guides us, and with the creation he placed us in.

Chris Wright takes this forward by asking what the fact that we are made in the image of God means for our understanding of what God is doing in the world since the Fall, and what this means for our understanding of 'mission'. Here we see that poverty is an essential concern for the church and that dealing with it is a part of our mission. Chris demonstrates this by looking at five dimensions of human life that are rooted in our identity as God's image bearers, and how these are affected by the Fall and then by the redemption offered by Christ. He then uses the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion to show that we are called to express all of these dimensions in our participation in the mission of the church to seek the kingdom of God, which will include the restoration of the image of God in humanity.

Andy Crouch then explores how this mission to restore our ability to image God challenges our tendency to separate out evangelism, the verbal proclamation of the gospel, from the pursuit of justice in our societies. He describes the way that idolatry and injustice defile the image of God in the world and identifies evangelism and social action as the means by which we overcome them. In doing so he explains how evangelism and social action are inseparable and argues that Christian mission must aim at both or it will fail to truly end suffering and enable humans to flourish. Without this, the image of God cannot be fully restored to the world.

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9. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice* (Hachette UK, 2010), p 82.



Vinoth Ramachandra looks at the value or worth that being made in the image of God gives to humanity and discusses its importance for the development of human rights and for underpinning a richer understanding of human rights than secular language can provide.

He argues that it is the Bible, not western political tradition, that emphasises the essential value of the person and the importance of ensuring justice for all. The image of God, he tells us, is the fundamental underpinning of human rights, which are due to all regardless of race, gender, or ability.

Brian Fikkert looks at one way that our ability to flourish is being stunted by the world in which we live, as he discusses the difference between the human created in God's image and the idea of the *homo economicus* that is prevalent in the economic and development work of the contemporary western world. He argues that the system which most of the 'developed' world works within (and towards which we are encouraging most of the 'developing world') sets humans in a world in which a fear of lack drives our actions rather than a belief in the abundant blessings of God's creation. This damages community and reduces humans to something less than they were created to be, preventing them from truly flourishing.

Finally, Krish Kandiah moves us from a discussion of the image of God through a number of lenses, in order to show us what our identity and mission as image bearers means in the context of the coming revelation of the kingdom of God, arguing that we, too, will be transformed, once again able to fully bear the image of God in the new creation. He ends by challenging us to think about what this means for our work in aid and development, as we seek to reveal the nature of the kingdom of God in the world today.

Together these essays aim to encourage us to think about what it really means to be human, made in God's image, and to reflect upon how we can grow as people who reflect this image in all aspects of our daily lives – including our work. We have included some questions for reflection at the end of each essay which are intended to help you begin to process your thoughts, to bring them into your discipleship journey so that they can be expressed in the person you are and the way that you live.

# **PART OF A FLOURISHING WORLD**

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**THE IMAGE OF GOD AND GOD'S  
CREATIONAL INTENTIONS**

Paula Gooder

## THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

The idea that we are created in the image of God is one of the most influential concepts in biblical theology. More has been written on it than almost any other idea within the Bible and it has informed the way the western world thinks about many things. One of its greatest influences has been on the way we think about the worth and value of other human beings. Indeed, it is often argued that the theology of humanity created in the image of God is what informed and gave rise to the human rights movement, through the writings of John Locke. At the heart of *imago Dei* theology is an understanding of the fundamental equality of all human beings no matter what their race, gender or economic status. Even today the concept of the fundamental worth of all human life, created in the image of God, continues to shape western views of humanity and equality.

### The image of God in Genesis

Given its profound significance in both Jewish and Christian thought then, it is somewhat surprising to notice the scarcity of references to the idea in the Old Testament. This vitally important theology only really appears in the book of Genesis in three similarly worded phrases:

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)*

*This is the written account of Adam's family line. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them 'Mankind' when they were created. (Genesis 5:1–2)*

*Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. (Genesis 9:6)*

Apart from these references the language of the image of God disappears from biblical tradition until the New Testament when, as we shall see below, it returns in a very particular form. The importance of the idea that we are created in the image of God far exceeds the number of times it is mentioned in the Old Testament. The few times it is mentioned, however, demonstrate that even in Genesis the idea was beginning to be used to develop a theology of human worth which was rooted deep within the creation ordinance of God. We see this particularly in Genesis 9:6 which prohibits murder precisely because human beings are created in God's image.

If we step back a little in the chapter we can see this theology shaping a very important understanding of the nature of human beings in contrast to animals. Just two verses earlier, in Genesis 9:4, God allowed humans to eat meat, but declared its 'lifeblood' should not be eaten. Literally the Hebrew says 'You shall not eat flesh with its life, its blood'. The word translated life is the Hebrew word *nephesh* which is elsewhere in the Old Testament translated as 'soul'. In other words, the same animating principle – *nephesh* – animates both human beings and animals. Of course, this raises the question of what the difference is then between human beings and animals. The answer given in Genesis 9:6 is different from that normally given in Greek philosophy, where human beings are different from animals because they are rational and animals are not. In Genesis the answer is that humans are different because they are made in the image of God. What makes us human and not just animals is that we bear God's image in the world. An essential part of the human identity is being created in the image of God.

## Images and idols

So far so good, but the challenge is not to recognise the importance of being made in God's image but to work out what it means. This question has been debated extensively by theologians for hundreds of years and there has been very little agreement on the subject. Indeed, Karl Barth observed that throughout Christian history the content of the meaning of 'the image of God' has been shaped by the theological ideas and cultural assumptions of the times in which the interpreters were writing.<sup>1</sup> Before we begin, therefore, we need to acknowledge both the difficulty of the task and that we too are likely to fall into the same trap of reading what the image of God means through the lens of our own age.

A place to begin is with the two words used in Genesis 1:26; 5:1–2 and 9:6. The words translated as 'image' and 'likeness' in Genesis 1.26 are *selem* and *dēmût* respectively. Interestingly, although in Genesis 9:6 the word *selem* is used, in 5:1 it is *dēmût* on its own which is used to describe humanity's likeness to God. This

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1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), p 192ff.

suggests that the terms are seen as largely synonymous, and that the repetition of image and likeness is more to do with Hebrew parallelism than it is to do with further definition. In other words, one of the key features of Hebrew poetry is the repetition of a phrase with slightly different wording to emphasise a point. This is most likely what is happening here. God is not saying two things about humanity but one thing in two ways – he created human beings in his image and likeness.

This brings us back to the question of what these two words are meant to convey about us and about God. A lot of the time in the Old Testament both *selem* and *dēmût* are used to describe the external form of something. Indeed, *selem* is often used to refer to idols. Take for example Numbers 33:52 which commands the Israelites to 'Destroy all their carved images (*selem*) and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places.' Although neither *selem* nor *dēmût* are the words used in God's prohibition against creating idols found, among other places, in the Ten Commandments, there is a clear connection between the prohibition and the creation ordinance.

The Israelites were forbidden to make idols because God, who was beyond form, should be worshipped directly and not in the form of a lump of wood or stone. The prophet Isaiah stresses the ridiculousness of idols in Isaiah 44:16–17. In talking about a carpenter with a lump of wood he says:

*Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.' From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, 'Save me! You are my god!'*

The Old Testament writers are clear that God cannot be known in this way in lumps of wood or stone. The 'image of God' theology provides the other half of the argument. God cannot be known in a lump of wood, but can be glimpsed in humanity. We should not create physical representations of God – idols – because God has already done that himself. In creating humanity God created a representative of himself on earth, not to be worshipped – since only God can be worshipped – but to reveal the nature of God in the world.

## Image as a representative

This idea of being the representative of God on earth is suggested also by the second half of Genesis 1:26. Intriguingly, these two vitally important half verses are often treated separately: the first to talk about the image of God; the second to reflect on our attitude to the environment. In reality of course the two are interwoven, with the second half telling us more about what it means to be created in God's image. If we look at the verse again this becomes clearer:

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'*  
(Genesis 1:26)

When we look at the verse in detail it is clear that the reason we are created in the image of God is so that we can rule over the world that God has also created. The word translated as 'rule' in the NIV is elsewhere translated 'have dominion over' (e.g. in the NRSV and ESV). This word has been interpreted by some in the past as giving human beings permission to use and abuse the created world exactly as they chose. A number of Old Testament scholars, however, have pointed out the close connection between being created in God's image and having dominion over the created world.<sup>2</sup> This implies that we are to relate to creation as God would and to care for his world as he would wish. This again pushes us to an understanding that being God's image means being a 'representative' of the transcendent, invisible God in the world that he created.

This implies that one of our human vocations is to seek the flourishing of creation – human, animal and inanimate – in the way in which we live our lives. The dominance we have over creation is the dominance a shepherd might have in caring for a flock of sheep. It is the kind of dominance a loving creator would have for the world he created. We represent him as his image and care for the world as he would.<sup>3</sup> To be God's image, then, involves relationship both with God and with the world he created: right relationship with God must by its nature yield a right relationship with the created world and all the creatures God created.<sup>4</sup>

This reminds us that the relationship is two-way not just one-way; as images of God we relate both to God and to the world. We image God in the world that he created and bring the praises of his creation to him. Being the image of God is profoundly relational and cannot be conceived without recognising the two-directional nature of that relationship from God to the world and back again.

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2. See for example DJA Clines, 'The image of God in man,' *Tyndale Bulletin* (1968), pp 53–103; N Lohfink, 'Subdue the earth? (Genesis 1: 28)' in *Theology of the Pentateuch Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (T&T Clark, 1994); John W Rogerson, 'The Creation Stories: Their Ecological Potential and Problems,' in DG Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (T&T Clark, 2010), pp 21–32.

3. For more on this image see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p 32.

4. For more on this see Wayne Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

## Image as physical or spiritual form

A question that has returned time and time again in discussions about being the image of God is whether the language of an 'image' stretches to imply being a representation as well as being representative. In other words, we noted above that *selem* and *dēmût* are often used in the Old Testament to denote the external appearance of something. This raises the question of whether we image God physically or just spiritually. There can be no doubt at all that imaging God is spiritual and that the Spirit plays a vital role in the Old Testament understanding of image and idol. Jeremiah 10:14, for example, states that the images made by a goldsmith 'are a fraud; they have no breath in them'. The Hebrew word for breath here is *ruah* or spirit. This again is why human beings can be God's image where a lump of wood cannot, because God's Spirit can dwell in humanity where it cannot in wood. God's Spirit is what animates us into bearing God's image in the world.

The question is whether our bodies have any role in representing God. Christian history has been strongly divided on this point, not least because it raises the question of whether women's bodies as well as men's bodies can represent God (or both together), and therefore what kind of body God might have. The adjudication of a number of Old Testament scholars is a precise and complex one, but important nevertheless.

At this point we need to return to Genesis 5:1–2 and read on. In verse 3, intriguingly, the words image and likeness are used again but in a different context: 'When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.' (Genesis 5:3) Here the point seems to be a family likeness: Adam had a son who was like him both physically and spiritually. He was not an exact replica but bore a strong family resemblance.

How then does this apply to our imaging of God? The challenge here is the question of whether God can be said to have a body or not. One important factor is the recognition that when God makes himself known on earth he takes human form (see for example the encounter with Abraham at the Oak of Mamre in Genesis 18). This does not necessarily imply, however, that he is always in this form. God is transcendent and without human form but chooses to take a human form when he reveals himself to us.

As a result, scholars conclude that human beings are not created 'in' God's image, in the sense that God has a body which our bodies represent, but 'as' God's image. God is transcendent and formless and does not need a human form. In being the image of God we are the bodily representation of a God who needs no body. Our bodies do not represent God's body but they nevertheless reveal something of the nature of God in the world. Indeed, it is the entirety of our being – body and spirit –

that is God's image in the world. This is why, throughout biblical tradition, what we do with our bodies is so important.

## The Fall

Before we leave the Old Testament for the New, we need to pause for a moment to reflect on what happened to God's image in us at the Fall. As with so much else to do with a theology of the image of God there is vast disagreement about this. The early church fathers often chose to speak of the image being marred. So for example Irenaeus attempted to distinguish between 'image' and 'likeness' arguing that we kept the image but lost the likeness of God. John Calvin and many of the reformers went further and argued that God's image in us was almost entirely destroyed at the Fall,<sup>5</sup> but other writers are less clear about this and suggest that God's image remains. Karl Barth, for example, argues that 'neither in the rest of the Old Testament nor in the New is there any trace of the abrogation of this ideal state, or of the partial or complete destruction of the *imago Dei*.'<sup>6</sup> Alongside this, in Jewish thought, is the idea that though God's image remained in human beings certain things were lost, one of these being the 'lustre' upon the face of Adam, in other words the shininess of the image was tarnished.<sup>7</sup>

The reason that this remains so hard to decide is the lack of mention of God's image in the Old Testament after Genesis 9. The only way to come to a view on the matter is to step outside of the Bible and to draw conclusions based on our view of sin and its corrosive effects. It is worth noting, however, that the notion of the image of God does appear in Genesis 5 and 9 (ie after the story of the Fall in Genesis 3), which implies that we may assume that the image remains after the Fall. So little is said of it, though, that it is hard to draw firm conclusions from the evidence. Genesis 5 and 9 certainly do not appear to imply that humanity is no longer created in God's image. Perhaps it is that we continue to be created as God's image in the world, the question is how well we achieve that fundamental human vocation.

## New Testament

We cannot leave an exploration of the idea of the image of God in the Bible without turning our attention to the New Testament. One of the reasons why the notion of being created in God's image is so very important in Christian tradition is

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5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: James Clark, 1953); Martin Luther, *The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1858), p 91.

6. Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.1*, p 183ff.

7. Genesis Rabbah 12.6.



its significance in the writings of Paul and Hebrews. The idea of the image of God is translated by at least four different Greek words: *eikōn* (the word most closely connected to the Hebrew word *selem*, normally translated image and used over twenty times in different contexts); *homoiosis* (the word closest to *demût*, used only in James 3:9 to talk about people being in the likeness of God), *morphē* (the word most often translated 'form', most importantly in Philippians 2:6–11 where it is used of the form of God and the form of a slave) and character (used only in Hebrews 1:3 to talk about Christ being the exact representation of God's being).

The use of these words reveals that the notion of the image of God had moved on significantly by the New Testament period. Whereas in the Genesis passages being the image of God 'represents' God in the world, in Colossians 1:15 we see Christ described as the image of God, and in 1:19 as the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (see also 2 Corinthians 4:4). This appears to invite us to make a connection with John's gospel (e.g. 12:45 and 14:9) where the word image is not used but the idea is put forward that to see Christ *is* to see God. What happens then is a shift in the image language from being a mirror-like image to being a window. Where we image God in the world reflecting him like a mirror, Christ is the one who allows us to see God directly. Where we try and fail to represent God in the world he created, Christ is so perfect an image, so true a representation, that through him we can encounter the fullness of God's nature.

## Conclusions

Even this very brief exploration of the image of God reveals why the idea has been so very important throughout Christian history. God's creation ordinance in creating us as his image in the world invites us to think seriously not only about ourselves and our relationship with the whole created world, but about our relationship with God. Our fundamental human vocation is to be people who image God in the world. This calls us into a deeper and truer relationship with the one whom we seek to image, as well as focussing our attention outwards into the world as we seek to care for the world as God would care for it and to seek to see God's image in every human being that we encounter.

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## *Questions for reflection*

Gooder describes the importance of the making of humanity as the image of God in creation, showing that it is at the root of our identity and place in the world, and highlighting the claims that it makes upon us in terms of our relationships with God and creation.

1. How do you ensure that you are growing in your relationship with God?  
How might you grow further?
2. How do you relate to creation as a person made in the image of God?  
Are you caring for it as you think he would?
3. How does your life and work show that these things are priorities  
for you?

# MADE FOR MISSION

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WHAT DOES BEING MADE IN THE  
IMAGE OF GOD MEAN FOR OUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION?

Christopher JH Wright

## THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

Paul's vision of being transformed into the image of Christ reminds us of two things: first, however we understand what it means to say that God created human beings in his own image, we must include Christ at the centre of that understanding as the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15); and secondly, whatever effects the Fall had upon the image of God in human life, the ultimate purpose of God includes the transformation of redeemed human beings into that image, in the likeness of Christ himself (Romans 8:29). In other words, our understanding of the image of God cannot be confined to the creation narratives in Genesis alone. It must be both Christological and eschatological. And for both reasons, that means that it must also be missional. For the mission of God is the restoration and reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth (including humanity of course), through and under Christ (Ephesians 1:9–10; Colossians 1:20) – an ultimate goal that will be completed only when Christ returns and the new creation is established forever.

Integral mission means, among other things (which we shall come to shortly), integrating all our missional activity around the centrality of the Biblical narrative, from creation to new creation, centred on the good news of what God has done in Christ for the redemption of the world. It is a narrative in six 'acts':

1. **Creation.**
2. **The Fall.**
3. **God's promise to Old Testament Israel**  
(and through Israel for the world).
4. **The promise-fulfilling Christ-event**  
(his conception, birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension).
5. **The post-Pentecost mission of the church to all nations**
6. **The return of Christ, final judgment, and new creation.**

So we shall frame our discussion with that great narrative in the background.

## FIVE DIMENSIONS OF HUMANITY

In this essay, I plan to start by going back to the beginning and observing some of the key dimensions that are integral simply to being human. In my view, the image of God is not a thing (or a collection of things) we possess, but rather it is what we are. It is what uniquely constitutes our humanity. The image of God is not adjectival – some quality that attaches to us. Rather it is adverbial – it defines the way in which, and the purpose for which, God created us. To be human is to be the image of God. As we examine the early chapters of Genesis, then, to see what it means to be human, we must include all that we find within our understanding of being made in the image of God. Whatever we find to be truly human will be part of the image of God.

Our structure in this section will be firstly to outline five dimensions of our humanity as they are revealed in the creation narratives. Then, secondly, to observe the catastrophic effects of the Fall in all five areas. Thirdly, we will consider how God's redeeming work includes all five areas. That will lead us on, in the second main section, to consider the implications for integral mission.

In what follows it is important to note the form of words used in each heading. We are not talking about distinct 'parts' of a human being (spirit, body, mind etc), as if they could be separated from each other. Rather we are talking about different dimensions of human life and experience, different aspects of the whole integrated reality of a human being.

### Spiritual

While all creatures are, by definition, created by God, the human being was created in a unique way and for a unique purpose, in relation to both God and the rest of creation. While all animals 'look to God' for the means of survival (Psalm 104:27–28), human beings have a unique 'vertical' relationship with God. We are creatures who know our creator and are capable of a personal relationship with God through being constituted persons. Personhood in spiritual relationship to God is undoubtedly an essential dimension of being made in God's image.

This universal God-relatedness of all human beings is a fundamental biblical revelation, and one that is essential to our theology of mission. All human beings can be addressed by God (in their own context, culture and language, without

needing permission, translation or cultural contextualisation). And all human beings are accountable to God; that is – they are morally responsible to their creator, whether or not they are conscious of that in the Christian/biblical terms that we might use. We consider this a little more below.

## Creational

*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'* (Genesis 1:26)

God created the human species with the intention that we should exercise God's delegated dominion (rule) over the rest of creation. And by making us in the image and likeness of God, God equipped us for that task. Among the many implications of being made in God's image, this is the one that Genesis puts in the foreground: having been made by God in God's own image, human beings are instructed and equipped to exercise dominion within the rest of creation. It seems clear that what God is doing here is passing on to human hands a delegated form of God's own kingly authority over the whole of his creation.

Genesis describes God's work in regal terms, even without using the word 'king'. God's creating work exudes wisdom in planning, power in execution, and goodness in completion. These are the very qualities that Psalm 145 exalts in 'my God the King', in relation to all his created works. There is a righteousness and benevolence inherent in God's kingly power, which is exercised towards all that he has made:

*These are, of course, royal qualities; without using the word, the author of Genesis 1 celebrates the Creator as King, supreme in all the qualities which belong to the ideal of kingship, just as truly as Psalms 93 and 95–100 celebrate the divine King as Creator.<sup>1</sup>*

The natural assumption, then, is that a creature made in the image of this God will reflect these same qualities in carrying out the mandate of delegated dominion. Whatever way this human dominion is to be exercised, it must reflect the character and values of God's own kingship:

*The image is a kingly pattern, and the kind of rule which God entrusted to human kind is that proper to the ideals of kingship. The ideals, not the abuses or failures: not tyranny or arbitrary manipulation and exploitation of subjects, but a rule*

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1. Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Sheed and Ward, 1992), p 98.

*governed by justice, mercy and true concern for the welfare of all.*<sup>2</sup>

So our account of what it means to be the image of God, and its implications for integral mission, cannot ignore our relationship with the rest of creation. There is an ecological dimension to our very humanity, which necessarily impacts whatever we consider to be our mission in relation to human need.

## Social

Genesis 1 sets human male-female complementarity closely alongside the image of God. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' (Genesis 1:27)

The implication from the tight parallelism seems clearly to be that there is something about the wholeness of human gender complementarity, and the mutual relationship it enables, that reflects something true about the very nature of God. Not that God himself is sexually differentiated, but that relationship is part of the very being of God, and therefore also part of the very being of humanity, created in his image. Human sexuality reflects within the created order something that is true about God within his divine, non-created being.

So humanity, then, is created in relationship, for relationship, and for a task that requires relational co-operation – not only at the basic biological level that only a man and a woman can produce children in order to fill the earth, but also at the wider societal level that both men and women have their roles of mutual assistance in the great task of ruling the creation on God's behalf.

God's creative intention for human life, right from the start and projected into the new creation, includes social relationship. Loving horizontal relationships between people, starting with marriage but extending to include all other social relationships, are part of God's desire for human life.<sup>3</sup>

## Physical

Genesis 1 places the creation of human beings in the sixth day, along with all the other land creatures. We are physical creatures just as much as they. And Genesis 2:7 tells us that God, 'Formed the man (*ha 'adam*) from the dust of the ground.' We are of the same stuff as the rest of the material creation. Far from that being in any sense ignoble or demeaning, however, it simply means that we share in the

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2. Ibid.

3. See Christopher JH Wright, *The Mission of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2006), pp 427–28.

goodness of all the rest of creation. Though it is a false trail to imagine (as it has been imagined) that the upright posture of our physical bodies or some feature of our faces represents the image of God, nevertheless we must include our bodies within our theology of the image of God, and therefore also within our theology of mission.

Our commonality with the rest of the creatures is a matter, not of anxiety, but of wonder and gratitude in Psalm 104. For we, along with all other animals, have the same basic needs of food, water, sleep, and shelter – and the creator provides all these necessities of life in abundance for them and for us as part of his indiscriminate generosity (104:10–30). So then, we are animals among animals. We are creatures, earth-creatures – Adam, from the soil, *adamah* (or humans from the *humus*). And as such, of course, we are also a part of that fullness of the earth which is the very glory of God. Createdness is glory, not shame. Our shame lies elsewhere.

## Intellectual

When God says he intends to make a creature in God's own image and likeness, we naturally ask, 'What picture do we already have of the God who declares this intention?' Genesis 1 has already shown us the God who thinks, decides, plans, speaks, executes and evaluates. Any creature made in God's likeness will have capacities similar in principle, if not in scope and power.

Human intellectual capacity seems almost inexhaustible (another notable way in which we reflect something godlike even in our finite humanity). But two aspects seem particularly relevant to our missional focus:

### 1) All human beings are addressable by God

Human beings are the creatures to whom God speaks. In the creation narrative we find God speaking words, not only of blessing and fruitfulness, but also of instruction, permission and prohibition, followed later by questions, judgements and promises. The human is the creature who is aware of God through rational communication and address. To be human is to have the capacity of being addressed by the living creator God. Granted, as Paul says, in our sin and rebellion we have universally suppressed and perverted this awareness of God. Nevertheless, the word of the gospel has its life-giving potential precisely because even sinners and rebels are people made in God's image and capable of hearing God's voice.

### 2) All human beings are accountable to God

The man and woman in the creation narratives are the creatures who must give an answer when God addresses them. Even in hiding from God, they must answer God. This too is a universal phenomenon, independent of culture and religion. Psalm 33:13–14 is an astonishing assertion. Every human being on the planet is



known by God, considered and evaluated by God, called to account by God.<sup>4</sup>

Putting all these together, then, we obtain an understanding of the image of God: the human person, functioning in all these dimensions, and living in relationship to God, to the rest of creation and all physical creatures like ourselves, and to one another. Inasmuch as human beings are both the agents of mission, and the object of mission, any mission that claims to be fully biblical in its understanding of humanity must necessarily embrace such breadth and integration. When those who are created in the image of God and being transformed into the image of Christ seek to love and serve in Christ's name others who are likewise created in the image of God, then the integrated wholeness of our humanness must be exercised and addressed at both ends of the missional relationship.

## FALLEN

But why does such mission exist at all? Because, of course, our human collusion with satanic evil, and our freely chosen rebellion and disobedience (as narrated with such profound simplicity in the story of the Fall in Genesis 3), has infected and perverted every one of those dimensions of our humanness. Even in our sin, we are still human beings made in God's image. But the created goodness and perfection of that image has been twisted and ruptured by sin and evil. The effects are monstrous. The Old Testament illustrates them in all its literary genres. Undoubtedly the best New Testament theological reflection on them is Paul's in Romans 1:18–32, where every one of these dimensions is apparent.

### Following the order above:

1. **Spiritually**, we are alienated from God. We chose to distrust God's goodness, to reject God's authority and to disobey God's command. And the result was spiritual 'death'. We are, in Paul's words, 'Dead in sin'. (Ephesians 2:1)
2. **Creationally**, we live in a cursed earth and we add to its suffering by our human destruction, greed, pollution, cruelty and folly. And as the earth suffers, so do its inhabitants because we are creatures, as dependent as all creatures on our physical environment. We cannot divorce environmental degradation from human injustice and poverty – they are very closely linked.

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4. See Christopher JH Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp 422–33.

**3. Socially**, the immediate effects of the first sin were fear in the presence of God and shame in the presence of one another. Sin immediately infected the sexual harmony of man and woman, and went on to corrupt the family and then wider society. The narratives of Genesis 4–11, and the whole of the following Old Testament history, show sin and evil permeating the structures of human society, escalating through the generations, and perverting whole cultures.

**4. Physically**, we are subject to death, and all that precedes it in the disease, decay, disasters and accidents that attack our vulnerable mortality.

**5. Intellectually**, our thinking is darkened, not only in finding what we think are good reasons for disobeying God's command (as Eve did), but then in justifying and excusing our actions by blaming others (as both Adam and Eve did), and finally denying the reality and authority of God altogether, and substituting things within creation itself as objects of our worship.

Humanity, then, collectively and individually, is caught within this comprehensive web of sin and evil. Every dimension of the image of God is distorted in multiple ways. The scale of the human predicament is unimaginably great and the Bible's diagnosis of it is relentlessly radical. Happily, the Bible's answer to our predicament is equally comprehensive and radical.

## REDEEMED

It would be impossible to survey the whole biblical story of redemption and show how each one of the dimensions of human life in the image of God is addressed in various ways. I have sought to do that elsewhere in much greater detail. But even if we confine ourselves to the centre and climax of that story – the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ – it is evident that God's redemptive purpose and accomplishment addressed every area in which the image of God in our humanity has been fractured.

**1. Spiritually**, God has overcome our alienation by dealing with the guilt of our sin and rebellion, bearing it in the person of his own Son on the cross (Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:24, etc).

**2. Creationally**, God has accomplished the redemption and reconciliation of all creation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus (Colossians 1:20), such that in the new creation there will no longer be any curse (Revelation 22:3).

**3. Socially**, God has destroyed the barrier of enmity between Jew and Gentile, and

by implication ultimately also all forms of hatred and alienation between nations. The cross and resurrection are God's answer to Genesis 11 as well as Genesis 3 (Ephesians 2:14–16).

**4. Physically**, in the bodily death and resurrection of Jesus, God has defeated death, the great invader and the enemy of all human flourishing (Hebrews 2:14 etc.).

**5. Intellectually**, God has confounded the folly and darkness of the world through the wisdom of the cross and the light of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5; 2 Corinthians 4:4–6).

The gospel, then, cannot be reduced only to the first of that list. The gospel is good news not only about how individuals may be forgiven and have eternal life. It is good news about how creatures made in the image of God can be restored, through faith in Christ, to the goodness and perfection of that image in every dimension of their lives – in relation to God, to one another, and to creation. As The Cape Town Commitment expresses it:

*Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society, and for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.<sup>5</sup>*

## FIVE MARKS OF MISSION

What then is 'integral mission'? It is significant that The Cape Town Commitment, just quoted, does not begin to discuss what our mission should be (with whatever accompanying adjective), until it has first clarified the mission of God, from which all our mission must flow. And it sees the mission of God as fundamentally the driving impetus behind the whole Bible story – as can be seen in the multiple biblical allusions from both Testaments in this paragraph.

*We are committed to world mission, because it is central to our understanding of God, the Bible, the Church, human history and the ultimate future. The whole*

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5. The Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), Part 1.7A.

*Bible reveals the mission of God to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity under Christ, reconciling them through the blood of his cross. In fulfilling his mission, God will transform the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation in which there is no more sin or curse. God will fulfil his promise to Abraham to bless all nations on the earth, through the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the seed of Abraham. God will transform the fractured world of nations that are scattered under the judgment of God into the new humanity that will be redeemed by the blood of Christ from every tribe, nation, tongue and language, and will be gathered to worship our God and saviour. God will destroy the reign of death, corruption and violence when Christ returns to establish his eternal reign of life, justice and peace. Then God, Immanuel, will dwell with us, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever.<sup>6</sup>*

We may well say, 'Hallelujah, Amen!' to that. Praise God for the great mission that God himself will assuredly accomplish. But we are left with the 'So what?' question. What about us? Who are we and what are we here for? What is the mission of God's people? How can we articulate an understanding that is as comprehensive as that, and as integrated as the view of the image of God we have been outlining?

There have been many attempts to define and describe the mission of the church. One that I find helpful was produced by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984. It was conceived as a mission statement for the worldwide Anglican Communion and was adopted by the Lambeth Conference of bishops in 1988 as the 'Five Marks of Mission'. It stated that:

*The mission of the church is the mission of Christ.*

- 1. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom*
- 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service*
- 4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society*
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth'*

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6. Ibid. 1.7.

7. *Anglican Consultative Council Meeting, Bonds of Affection* (1985).

These could be summarised in a few words: evangelism, teaching, compassion, justice, and care of creation. It is a remarkably comprehensive and holistic list, and each of the five items can be shown to have deep roots in the whole Bible. Furthermore, I believe that all five 'marks' can be linked, directly or indirectly, to the Great Commission of Matthew 28, provided we put at the integrating centre of all of them the opening affirmation of the Great Commission – the Lordship of Christ over all creation:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...*  
(Matthew 28:18–20)

They could be presented diagrammatically as follows:

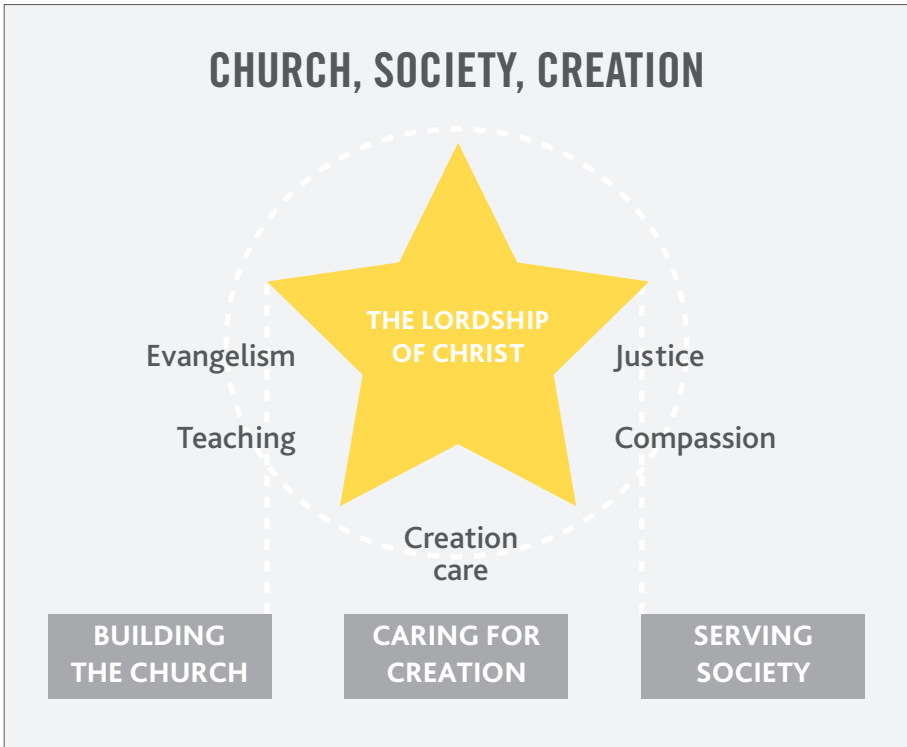


**That last point is essential. All of those five dimensions of mission depend on the Lordship of Christ:**

1. **In evangelism** – we proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord, King and saviour.
2. **In teaching** – we bring people into maturity of faith and discipleship, in submission to Christ as Lord.
3. **In compassion** – we follow the example of the Lord Jesus, who 'went about doing good'.
4. **In seeking justice** – we remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is the judge of all the earth.
5. **In using and caring for creation** – we are handling what belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ by right of creation and redemption.

**Keeping things simpler, we could group them into three major missional tasks:**

1. **Building the church** (through evangelism and teaching), bringing people to repentance, faith and obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. **Serving society** (through compassion and justice), in response to Jesus sending us 'into the world', to love and serve, to be salt and light, to do good, and to 'seek the welfare' of the people around us (as Jeremiah told the Israelites in Babylon. Jeremiah 29:7).
3. **Caring for creation** (through godly use of the resources of creation along with ecological concern and action), fulfilling the very first 'great commission' given to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2.



A key advantage of presenting mission in this way is that the focus of integration is Christ himself: specifically, Jesus Christ as Lord, which is the affirmation of faith that stands at the very heart of the gospel. One reason why many of us prefer the term 'integral' mission to the previous (and still useful) 'holistic' mission is that sometimes that phrase, 'holistic mission' has been used to mean simply 'everything any church or Christian gets involved in – whether evangelism or good works or social action, or whatever'. Mission becomes a bag of marbles, a smorgasbord of options, with no integrating or unifying focus. Biblically, however, all our mission must be centred on, and driven by, the gospel. But 'the gospel' is not simply giving people a simple technique, or a few 'spiritual laws', by which they can be sure to 'go to heaven when they die' – leaving the rest of life untouched. No, 'the gospel' here means, as it does in the New Testament – the good news that is constituted by the whole Bible story of what God has promised (in the Old Testament), and accomplished (in Christ) for the salvation of the world, and what God will ultimately complete in the final judgement and new creation. Provided we keep that biblical narrative as the essential heart of what we mean by the gospel, then

we can see how all our mission activities must be integrated around it – for it is both the content and the authority for anything we do in Christ's name.

In that sense, one can speak of the gospel as central to integral mission, in the same way that the hub is central to the integrated object we call a wheel. Hub and tyre ('where the rubber hits the road') must be completely integrated, and connected to the engine, the source of power. Similarly, the gospel connects 'the power of God for salvation' to the lived reality of every different context and need wherever faith meets unbelief and the kingdom of God confronts the kingdom of this world. To quote The Cape Town Commitment again:

***The integrity of our mission.*** *The source of all our mission is what God has done in Christ for the redemption of the whole world, as revealed in the Bible. Our evangelistic task is to make that good news known to all nations. The context of all our mission is the world in which we live, the world of sin, suffering, injustice, and creational disorder, into which God sends us to love and serve for Christ's sake. All our mission must therefore reflect the integration of evangelism and committed engagement in the world, both being ordered and driven by the whole biblical revelation of the gospel of God.*

*Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.<sup>8</sup>*

Returning, however, in conclusion to our main theme – the image of God and its restoration in Christ – it is interesting to note that the 'Five Marks of Mission' do correspond in several ways to the five dimensions of what it means to be human, as we have explored above.

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8. Lausanne, *The Cape Town Commitment*, I.10.B The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission.



Thus:

1. In evangelism, we call people into a reconciled relationship with God through repentance and faith, in which we are brought from spiritual death to new life in Christ.
2. In teaching, we apply the truth of the Bible's great overarching narrative and all the revelation it contains, in such a way that together we may be transformed through the renewing of our minds. Our intellects are redeemed to think in God's ways.
3. In works of compassion, we often respond to the physical nature and needs of our humanity – addressing issues of hunger, disease, disability, etc.
4. In working for justice, we address the social brokenness of human communities – with all the fractures, injustice and oppression caused by racial and gender inequality, poverty, consumerism, imperialism, greed, pride and violence.
5. In advocating the godly use and care of creation, we recognise that human flourishing cannot be isolated from our created environment, and that God's intention is not that we should be saved out of the earth, but that we should share with gratitude in the redemption of creation itself.

Integral mission then has two aspects of integration. On the one hand it seeks to integrate all aspects of mission around the centrality of the full biblical gospel. All that we do must bear witness in multiple ways to what God alone has done and purposes to do through Christ. And on the other hand it seeks to bring integration to every dimension of what it means to be human, made in the image of God, by recognising the negative effects of sin in all those areas, and by seeing and applying the relevance of the gospel to the whole person in such a way that we are indeed, individually and together, being transformed into the image of God in Christ.

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## *Questions for reflection*

Wright argues that one of the most important consequences of God's mission (to redeem the whole of creation and restore it to himself) is the restoration of the image of God in humanity.

1. How do you find the way he connects the 'five marks' of mission to the 'five dimensions' of humanity helpful in understanding the nature of mission?
2. How do you think this should affect our understanding of the transformation we want to see as a result of our work?
3. Wright uses the image of the rubber of a tyre hitting the road to describe the way the gospel meets the world in which we live. How does it help you to think about the way we share the gospel in our daily lives, and how does it challenge you where you are?
4. The 'five marks' of mission were given for the whole church, do you think all of them should be the responsibility of a Christian NGO such as Tearfund, or do the two have different roles?

# RESTORING THE IMAGE

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## IDOLATRY, INJUSTICE AND THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Andy Crouch

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MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

When historians of Christianity look back from a suitably safe distance – say, a century or two from now – they will surely note one of our era's most distinctive puzzles: the need for the term 'integral mission,' as if there were any other kind. Mission has meant many things over the two millennia of the Christian era, but only in the twentieth century did social action and personal evangelism become so distinct that a movement had to arise late in that century to knit them back together.

For forty years now the worldwide evangelical movement has benefited from the 1974 Lausanne Covenant's expression of 'penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive.'<sup>1</sup> In one significant paragraph, the Covenant aimed to reclaim 'Christian social responsibility' as integral to Christian faith. At the same time, it conspicuously declined to identify social concern with mission per se, framing social responsibility as a fruit of salvation, but not part of proclaiming the message of salvation except insofar as 'denounc[ing] evil and injustice wherever they exist' were part of proclaiming God's judgement. The Covenant made a clear distinction:

*Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.*<sup>2</sup>

In the following decades, the heirs of the Lausanne Covenant interpreted this double duty differently. Eight years after the first Lausanne Congress, a group of its leaders could say that evangelism and 'social activity... are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird.'<sup>3</sup>

But thirty years later, the tension between these two understandings of Christian mission surfaced in an address by American pastor John Piper to the Cape Town Congress in 2010. While acknowledging the importance of being concerned with human suffering in conditions of poverty and injustice, Piper pleaded with the Congress to give due weight to 'eternal suffering' – the fate of those who the church's evangelistic mission might neglect. This language is rather far from the twin wings of a bird or the mirrored action of a pair of scissors. It is hard to weigh 'present suffering' and 'eternal suffering' on the same scale. 'Eternal suffering',

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1. *The Lausanne Covenant* (Lausanne Movement, 1974)  
[lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant](http://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant)

2. *Ibid.*

3. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization World Evangelical Fellowship, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Lausanne Movement, 1982).

being of infinite duration and depth, must be vastly more consequential than the limited sufferings of this life, with obvious implications for where the church's primary energies ought to be directed. And that was clearly Piper's intent.

Piper's provocative address reminds us that for all the progress we have made in reuniting evangelism and social action, the exact relationship of these two mandates has remained surprisingly muddy in Christian thought, even the careful thought of bodies like the Lausanne movement. Most often, perhaps, they are presented in terms of the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbour. But this still leaves the question of why loving God and loving our neighbour are more than just two distantly related things that we are supposed to do. Why did Jesus single out those two commandments when asked to name the greatest commandment – singular? Why do the biblical writers from beginning to end seem to weave themes of justice and evangelism together? To take the Lausanne leaders (slightly flippantly) at their word, if justice and social concern are like the two wings of a bird, what is the bird?

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I believe the biblical theme of the image of God can be far more useful than we have yet realised in understanding the nature of 'integral mission'. Too often, when the *imago Dei* is invoked, its significance is limited to a generic assertion of human dignity. To be sure, that is indeed an important consequence of this biblical theme. But the image of God goes far deeper and farther than that when we understand it as an essential key to the narrative arc of Scripture. For one way of reading the Bible is that it is one whole, grand story about the image of God.

The story begins with the creator's glad plan to fill the world with fruitful representatives who will cultivate and create in his good world, tending it and unlocking its hidden potential through their attention, memory, reason, and skill.

The story takes a tragic turn when the image bearers sever themselves from relationship with their Maker, substituting created things for the creator. That is, they turn to idolatry – the quest for godlikeness through the worship of false gods. And they begin to play false gods, lording it over one another and taking up forms of power that only false gods wield – in a word, injustice – with disastrous effects for the flourishing of both human beings and the cosmos.

But then there are two decisive, dramatic twists in the story. Early in human history, God raises up a people who will once again bear his image, turning from false gods and serving as a light to nations mired in idolatry and injustice. Then, after this people fail in their mission, compromise with the nations' idolatries, become complicit in their injustice, and fall into exile, the true image bearer arrives

in their story. He is, 'The image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15) – a human being who in every respect fulfils the human vocation to image our creator.

Idolatry (false worship and religion) and injustice (false political power) conspire to impale the Image Bearer on the cross. But in the story's triumphant final act, he is raised, vindicated, and glorified. Now the cosmos is indeed ruled by a human being, truly Son of Man, who is also truly Son of God, and he has set in motion the Spirit's glad work of restoring his image in those in whom it had been lost. In the end, we too shall be raised, vindicated, and glorified, taking up the place we had abdicated and lost. The creation will be filled, just as it had always been meant to be, with a multitude of divine images, more than anyone can number, reigning with their elder brother over creation, now liberated from its bondage to decay and benefiting from their glorious liberty.

Tell the story this way, and there need be no gap at all between evangelism and doing justice, just as there is no real gap between idolatry and injustice. Both idolatry and injustice are about the degrading and defacing of the divine image in history. Both evangelism and doing justice are about the restoration of the divine image in history, anticipating history's glorious coda of the restoration of all things. Just as idolatry leads to injustice and injustice is always justified by idolatry, so neither evangelism nor doing justice can exist in any serious way without the other. Both are about restoring the image.

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So evangelism is not an end in itself. It is the means to an end: restoring the image bearers' capacity for relationship and worship, where the true creator God is named, known, and blessed. Evangelism gives us the name of the God who made us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Spirit who empowers us to be reborn in the image of the Son. Without evangelism, Eve's and Adam's descendants after Eden will never know the full story – they will never know the identity of the true Image Bearer. Just as importantly, apart from the redeeming and empowering gift of salvation, they will never be fully able to bear the image themselves. They will remain captive to idols, false gods that can never deliver what they promise, rather than coming to know and imitate the true God who gives abundance and gave himself to fulfil his promises.

And doing justice is likewise the means to an end – shalom, that rich Hebrew word for peace, describing the conditions where every creature can be fully, truly, gloriously itself, most of all where God's own image bearers bear that image in all its fullness, variety, and capacity. Social action, for the Christian, is no more an end in itself than evangelism is. The work of justice is to restore the conditions that

make image-bearing possible. Without justice, without the kind of restoration that reopens the way to dignified, delighted image-bearing, it is much less likely that the good news about the true Image Bearer will be believed even if it is proclaimed. And even if Adam's and Eve's children have heard and believed the story of restored image-bearing, without the work of justice they will not be able to participate in it. They will be prevented from the dominion and tending of the world for which they were made. The world in turn, and their fellow image bearers, will continue to groan under exploitation and diminishment, defying the will of God for his own creation.

The result of both real evangelism and real doing of justice is the restoration of the image of the only true God in the world. The image cannot be restored without naming the name and telling the story of the one true creator God – so all serious efforts for justice must be connected to evangelism. And that image cannot be restored without God's own image bearers taking up their true identity and calling and having the capacity to fulfil that calling – so all evangelism must be connected to efforts to create the conditions where every image bearer can experience full dignity and agency.

Some who emphasise evangelism ask: won't the world always be full of broken, imperfect systems until Jesus returns? So what good is it to work for justice and shalom in this world, when we know any human efforts will fall short? Shouldn't our greatest effort be devoted to giving people the hope of an eternal kingdom that will never pass away, rather than trying to improve conditions in this world that is passing away?

Of course, these faithful evangelists have no problem presenting the gospel to people knowing that only some will repent and turn to Christ in this life. We could equally ask, what good is it to evangelise when we know only some people will come to faith? The obvious answers are that, first, we cannot know ahead of time who may hear and respond; that, second, even if only a few come to salvation they are still of infinite worth; third, that even those who will not respond deserve to hear that they are loved this deeply by God; and fourth, we are not accountable ultimately for the results – only God can bring the fruit we seek – but for our faithfulness.

But all these are also the reasons that we should work for justice, even knowing we will never see perfect shalom this side of the new Jerusalem. We cannot know ahead of time which efforts for justice – restoring the conditions that lead to image-bearing – will bear astonishing fruit. In my own lifetime we have seen the sudden, peaceful end of apartheid in South Africa; the collapse of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union; and closer to my home, the election of an American of African

descent to the highest office in the United States. None of these could reasonably have been foreseen a generation before they happened. Each has been a victory for the restoration of image-bearing. To be sure, there are still countless other places where injustice reigns – and in each of these situations the victories have been partial at best. But not to work for justice because of those hard realities would be as odd as refusing to evangelise because some will not believe.

As for the question of why we should work for justice in a world that is passing away – well, the world is passing away. Our work for justice should no more be based on the idea that humanity will somehow progress on its own merits to utopia, than proclaiming the good news about eternal life should be based on the idea that someone who accepts Jesus into their heart will never die. The Christian hope is not for a gradually improving world any more than it is for a fountain of youth.

And yet Scripture gives us reason to hope that more than just souls will pass into the new creation. Isaiah and Revelation both speak directly about 'the nations' bringing their 'glory' into the new Jerusalem, suggesting that the best of human culture – whether the ships of Tarshish (Isaiah 60:9) or, we might suspect, the music of Bach – will be rescued from destruction, even if, as with our own bodies, it will surely be radically transformed. The work of justice is simply creating the conditions in which human tending of the world can reach the kind of truth, goodness and beauty that would rise to the level of the glory and honour of the nations.

Indeed, the Christian expectation of a new creation is the only source of hope deep enough to overcome the forces of despair and decay. Hope for a life beyond this life, and a world of shalom beyond this world of injustice, is the greatest resource for the work of justice here and now. Christian hope for a world made new is not an alternative to doing justice – it is the most essential resource for it.

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My true concern, though, is not Christians so passionate about evangelism that they question the need for doing justice. The truth is that I meet such Christians quite infrequently these days. I am much more likely, I am afraid, to meet Christians so passionate about justice that they question the need for evangelism.

Meeting the physical needs of the poor wins attention and affirmation from a watching world. Naming the spiritual poverty of a world enthralled to false gods provokes defensiveness and derision from those who do not believe there even is a God. Disaster relief and economic development seem like achievable goals that bring people together – religious claims to know the one true God seem like



divisive mysteries that drive people apart. Our secular neighbours care, many like never before, about relieving human need – and more of them than ever before are indifferent or hostile to the idea that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, and the one who meets the deepest human need.

In short, working for justice is cool. Proclaiming the gospel is not.

As Christians have recovered a calling to justice and received the affirmation of our secular neighbours, I sense many of us have begun to wonder whether evangelism is really necessary after all. Our vision of 'justice' today tends to draw less and less on the rich biblical concept of shalom, interwoven with the story of the creator God and his yearning for restored relationship with his people. More and more it conforms to the necessary but thin language of human rights and international humanitarian efforts. Justice becomes simply a name for improving certain, often fairly superficial, social conditions, without probing very deeply into the roots of those conditions.

In short, we do not truly believe that the gods of the nations are idols. Our vision of justice has become secularised – we have lost the biblical conviction that only God alone is good. In a sense, John Piper captures this thin conception of justice in his reduction of the work of justice to addressing 'suffering'. You do not have to believe in the creator God to want to alleviate suffering. But justice is about much more than relieving suffering – it is about a vision of human flourishing. And the audacious biblical claim is that even good things that seem to contribute to flourishing become idols when they become our ultimate ends. Even the laudable goals of economic development, political freedom, and human rights are only ultimately good when they are put in the context of something more ultimate than themselves. When we try to establish justice apart from worship of the true God, at best we will simply replace one set of false gods (and false god-players) with another. What will never be addressed by these thin, secular conceptions of justice is the heart of the biblical understanding of justice: the restoration of the human capacity to bear the image in all its fullness.

This does not mean that Christians cannot work in secular societies to secure relatively limited forms of justice. Indeed, we can value the religious freedom and diversity that secular societies provide. Image bearing, from its very beginnings in the garden of Genesis 2, included the capacity to turn away from the creator. In some mysterious way, this is part of the dignity that God grants Adam and Eve: the apparent absence of their Maker who only walks in the Garden 'in the cool of the day' and leaves them to their tending, and their temptation, at other times. When we secure for our neighbours the right to worship other gods or to convince themselves that they believe in no god at all (something we, who know too well

the human heart's incurable bent toward god-making and god-playing, will never actually agree that they have managed to do), we are actually securing one of the fundamental freedoms of image bearers.

Indeed, when Christians do humanitarian and development work supported by the wealth and power of our technologically 'advanced' societies, it is sometimes wise to limit our efforts at overt evangelism. The vast differential of power between a Western development organisation and a desperately poor community can make appeals for conversion dangerously close to coercion. There is a time for simply serving human needs as effectively as we can and trusting God to bring others who will proclaim the message of salvation – perhaps indigenous missionaries less cloaked in the trappings of power and wealth that accompany Western workers.

But Christians who truly want to seek justice cannot afford to let 'justice' be reduced to the lowest-common-denominator meanings we may be able to agree on with our neighbours. To do that would be to surrender to gods that are not real gods – to assent to the serpent's promise that apart from relationship with God, we can be like God, knowing good and evil. We can work for common goals for uncommon reasons. Because we believe every one of our neighbours is an image bearer, however broken their relationship with the one whose image they bear, we will find much common ground for working for justice and freedom. The good things our neighbours seek are good – they are just not ultimate goods. We can work alongside them for the good while worshipping the one who alone is good.

Ultimately the reason for both the work of evangelism and the work of justice is not simply the relief of suffering, whether present or eternal. It is the restoration of God's true image in the world, made known in the one true image and icon, Jesus Christ, and refracted and reflected in fruitful, multiplying image bearers set free by his death and resurrection to reclaim their true calling. Our mission is not primarily driven by a calculation of which suffering, present or eternal, we need to relieve most urgently; it is the fruit of glorious promises that call us into a new kingdom where the world is full of truth-bearing images. No image bearer can fully return to their true calling without finding themselves rescued and redeemed by the true Image Bearer, so no serious Christian witness in the world can fail to call people to put their trust in Jesus and the true God whom he makes known. And no image bearer can bear full witness to the glory of the creator without the conditions for flourishing. Because idolatry and injustice are the twin fruits of the curse, the work of evangelism and the work of justice are one.

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## *Questions for reflection*

Crouch argues that truly integral mission must challenge both idolatry and injustice, bearing witness to God's promise of the kingdom in which the image of God is fully restored in humanity.

1. In what ways is idolatry (substituting other gods or ultimate goods for the true God) intertwined with injustice (the frustration of human dignity and image bearing) in your context?
2. In your context, is there a tendency to emphasise one side of integral mission – evangelism or social concern – more than the other? What tends to motivate that emphasis?
3. Are you comfortable with your answer? Can you explain why you are or aren't comfortable with it?
4. The author suggests that our vision of justice can become 'secularised,' settling for thin conceptions of the good that neglect the real flourishing that is the vision of biblical mission. What are some secularised or limited conceptions of justice that have influence in the context where you work? How would you like to challenge them?

# THE RIGHT TO VALUE

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## THE *IMAGO DEI* AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Vinoth Ramachandra

Humans are creatures who owe their being to the activity of the triune God. They are derivative, not original, created by an act of gratuitous love. Running through the entire biblical literature, but beginning with the opening creation story, is the teaching that human beings occupy a special place among all God's creatures because they alone constitute God's image on earth (Genesis 1:26–27). And as creatures made in the image of God, they are oriented towards God, created for participation and growth within the covenantal fellowship between God and his creation. The fullness of that *imago Dei* is revealed in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

The stone or metal image that an ancient king set up was the physical symbol of his sovereignty over a particular territory. It represented him to his subject peoples. If anyone defaced or damaged an image of the king, that person was rebelling against the king's authority. But in the opening biblical creation-narrative, it is men and women, rather than stone or wooden images, who represent God on the planet earth. It follows that the way we treat our fellow human being is a reflection of our attitude to the creator. To despise the former is to insult the latter (cf. Proverbs 14:31; James 3:9).

Babylonian society, like other Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations, was hierarchically structured. At the top of the social pyramid was the king, who was believed to represent the power of the divine world. Just below him came the priests who shared his mediatorial function, but to a lesser degree. Below them were the bureaucracy, the merchants and the military, while the base of the pyramid was formed by the peasants and slaves. Thus the socio-political order was given religious legitimisation by the creation mythologies of these societies. The lower classes of human beings were created as slaves for the gods, to relieve them of manual labour. And, since the king represented the gods on earth, to serve the king was to serve the gods. Consequently, the Genesis 'counter-myth' undermines this widespread royal ideology. It 'democratises' the political order. All men and all women represent God's kingship through the whole range of human life on earth.

Thus the representational character of the *imago Dei* can be (and has been) understood in two complementary ways. Human beings represent God in reflecting God's *relational* nature. Men and women are constituted by relationships of mutuality and equality. Human beings also represent God in responsible service towards God's creation. Job grounds his magnificent paean to human solidarity on the fact of creation by the one Father of the human family:

*If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will*

*I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers? (Job 31:13–15)*

Consider, too, the reminder of divine presence in the first occurrence of 'human rights' language: 'To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land, to deny people their rights before the Most High, to deprive them of justice – would not the Lord see such things?' (Lamentations 3:34–36)

## JUSTICE AND RIGHTS<sup>1</sup>

*Example: The other comes into my presence already bearing certain claims on me and vice versa.*

In other words, a right is a claim that somebody has to be treated in a certain way by others and *not* to be treated in certain other ways. A right is also a claim to some good to which one is legitimately entitled. When we use the language of 'rights' we are not appealing to the generosity of governments, civil institutions or other individuals. Rather, we are making a claim as a matter of *justice*: to receive what is owed to us. We do not beg for our rights, we claim them.

Most societies recognise different kinds of 'rights' (or legitimate entitlements). There are some entitlements which are based on *achievement*: if I were to win the marathon at the Olympic Games, then I have a right to the gold medal. No one else enjoys that right apart from myself. If the judges were to refuse me the medal, simply on account of my skin colour, say, or because of personal dislike, my rights would be violated. There are other rights based on *contract*: if you were to promise me payment for some work I do for you, and then refuse to pay me even though the work has been done to your satisfaction, you have broken your promise. I am morally injured as my right to payment has been violated. There are other rights that society recognises based on *status* (a parent has rights with respect to his or her children which others do not, a magistrate has the right to punish me which others do not, etc); or *ability* (an employer has the right to refuse me employment if I am not suitably qualified for a vacant post); or *legal statute* (a policeman has the right to fine me for a traffic offence).

Underlying every contractual right is also a *natural* right, one that is not socially conferred: for our right not to have our trust betrayed is a natural right, not a right

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1. What follows is deeply indebted to Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice* (Princeton University Press, 2010); also Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths* (InterVarsity Press, 2009).

we have on account of the decisions of human beings. Natural rights undergird the framework of justice that we appeal to whenever we evaluate morally the laws and social practices that confer rights on us. These natural rights are grounded in the worth of entities. If a person has a right to my treating her a certain way, then my failure to do so would result in her *being wronged*. A special class of natural rights is what we call *natural human* rights. These are rights attached to the status of being simply a human being, a member of the species *homo sapiens*. Human rights are inherent to the status of being human.

Rights language is often abused in our contemporary world, as when the abortion of unwanted babies is defended as the exercise of 'reproductive rights', or when people degrade other human beings in pornography or hate-speech and defend themselves by claiming a 'right' to 'freedom of expression'. In late modern societies, a pervasive 'victim mentality' has undermined any sense of moral obligations, and human rights talk has assumed the status of a secular religion: people respond to every misfortune or disappointment with litigation and every grievance they have is couched in the language of 'rights'. For these reasons many Christians have come to view all talk of 'rights' with suspicion.

This language of rights-claims also appears arrogant and aggressive, especially in the light of the gospel's call to give our lives away in the service of others. But this is seriously misleading. If we lay aside some right to a benefit for the sake of others, it is in order to realise the legitimate claims of these others (including God) on us. When I forgive another the injury he has caused me, I am not denying that my rights have been violated but, rather, foregoing retaliation. The theological justification for claiming rights has nothing to do with an assertive individualism that disregards others; but rests on the recognition of an intrinsic human dignity in the name of which we protest the treatment of some individuals and groups as effectively subhuman.

While despots (and even liberal democracies from time to time) invoke 'national sovereignty' to deflect criticism of their brutality, 'human rights' is the language that international non-governmental organisations like Amnesty regularly employ. The latter language is also the only weapon that the poor and the oppressed can use against their own governments. This is why the misguided rejection of rights discourse by some Western Christian leaders is unfortunate. It is not a product of post-Enlightenment individualism. All moral vocabularies can be – and are – abused. But that is all the more reason Christians should be in the forefront of articulating and defending the rights of the poor and oppressed against their own governments.

We need several moral vocabularies (obligation, responsibility, duty, care) in order

to explore fully the human condition. To say that rights-talk is inadequate, and often needs to be supplemented by these other vocabularies, is one thing; but to say that rights-talk is dispensable is quite another. It is better to think of duties and rights as forming two different moral languages, both of which are necessary for human moral action, but which do not neatly overlap. One attends to the agent-dimension of the moral order, the other to the recipient-dimension of that order. When I fail to fulfil my moral obligation to another, I am morally *guilty*. If, however, my rights have been violated, I am morally *injured*. While we do and should feel grateful when people go out of their way to help us, or when we are loved and wanted, gratitude for goods that we are otherwise entitled to harms our self-respect and erodes our dignity.

In every society there is a deeply-ingrained impulse to regard those human beings who are members of one's 'in-group' as having a right to be treated in certain ways that those human beings who are members of other groups lack. However, legal historians (John de Witte, Brian Tierney) and philosophers such as Jeremy Waldron and Nicholas Wolterstorff have reminded us that not only inherent natural rights but inherent natural *human* rights were assumed in the moral vision of the writers of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, as they were by some of the church fathers. They had to await explicit conceptualisation in the writings of the European canon lawyers of the twelfth century, and were further developed by Calvinist dissenters in the late 16th and 17th centuries. The general recognition of such rights remained an exceedingly slow and halting process, however, until the horrors of World War II. If the 20th century was the most horrendous ever experienced in human history, one of its greatest achievements was the recognition and articulation of such human rights in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Unlike the Western republican tradition that puts the citizen (historically male and property-owning) at the centre of the *polis*, the Christian biblical tradition, especially as it has been recovered in our day in Latin American theology, gives ultimacy to *the poor*. This follows naturally from the recognition that life is our most basic right. The poor are all those whose life is vulnerable, threatened, and denied. And this ultimacy of the poor appears in God's declared *partiality* toward them. Thus there is a rich vein of thought in the Biblical writings that champions the rights of the poor. For instance: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.' (Proverbs 31:8–9)

To speak of the poor as having *rights to sustenance* and a *right to a voice* in participating in the affairs of society implies that what we owe them is not simply charity but justice. This has profound personal and political implications. Early Christian theologians challenged the absolutist and exclusivist understandings of



wealth and property that undergirded Roman law. If I have food in my house that I do not need for my survival, but my neighbour is starving, then the food in my house belongs to my neighbour and his family, not to me. I commit theft as long as I refuse to share it with them. The right to life trumps the right to private property.

## WHAT GROUNDS HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights, to make any sense, must be seen as making unqualified claims about the intrinsic worth of all human beings. It must be grounded in an account of human persons which shows what it is about humans that warrants unconditional respect.

Is it possible, then, to identify something about each and every human being that gives him or her an intrinsic and equal worth adequate for grounding human rights? Worth cannot just float free. An entity's worth derives from its having certain properties (capacities, achievements, etc.) or standing in certain relationships.

This is not merely of academic interest. When there is no public understanding of *why* human beings as such carry intrinsic worth, then either every political claim will be dressed up in the emotive language of 'rights' (thus stripping the language of 'human rights' of its unique power) or the public expenditure of scarce resources on the 'unproductive' members of society by insuring to all of them certain goods – their 'natural human rights' – will make no sense and will be resisted.

Here we are haunted by the challenge that Friedrich Nietzsche threw down more than a century ago. Once we abandon all reference to God, can we continue to talk about the 'dignity', 'equality' and 'rights' of individual human beings simply as human beings? Nietzsche saw this connection with his customary clarity, denouncing equality as immoral and harmful (the 'herd morality') and linking it to the *ressentiment* of weak and ineffectual Christians who aspire to, but cannot attain, the status of the master-class:

*The poison of the doctrine of 'equal rights for all' – it was Christianity that spread it most fundamentally. Out of the most secret nooks of bad instincts, Christianity has waged war unto death against all sense of respect and feeling of distance between man and man...<sup>2</sup>*

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2. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Anti-Christ', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p 619.

And elsewhere:

*Life itself recognises no solidarity, no 'equal rights', between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise the latter – or the whole will perish.*<sup>3</sup>

Most secularist thinkers, while honouring Nietzsche's brilliance, have not bitten the bullet the way that Nietzsche did. They have usually sought to ground such rights in the human capacity for rational action or moral autonomy. No doubt the capacity for such agency is a source of great worth. But that cannot adequately ground human rights: because those who exercise such capacities more excellently than others would thus be obviously of more worth than others. Moreover, a good many human beings have not yet realised these capacities and some never will.

There is also something utterly perverse, for instance, in saying that the evil of rape lies in the violation of a woman's 'autonomy'. That is grotesque. Rape is much worse than that, surely? It is an act of degradation, of sheer contempt for another human being. A truly fascinating question arises in the context of debates about privacy. Was the tapping of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell-phone by the US National Security Agency an assault on her 'autonomy'? Surely not – her autonomy was in no way violated by the secret surveillance on her. She was not constrained or restricted in her actions any way. And, yet, most of us sense that she was morally *wronged*. Is it possible to make sense of that sense of being wronged by invoking 'autonomy' alone? Or does it require a robust notion of intrinsic personal *dignity*?

It is here that we return to our earlier discussion of the *imago Dei*. The relational aspect of the *imago Dei*, coupled with the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection, point to the intrinsic worth of every human person. Christian thought has regularly affirmed that it is God's loving embrace of our humanity that ultimately gives every human person great and equal worth. In the presence of another human being I stand in the presence of a mystery that calls forth reverence and awe.

Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the defence of the rights of those who are incapable of autonomy and rational agency (children, Alzheimer's patients, the mentally impaired) requires a robust notion of *bestowed worth* – just as we value a painting by Rembrandt because it comes from the hand of the master, so when we stand before another person, however destitute, disabled, diseased or degraded, we stand before someone whose great worth has been *bestowed* on him or her

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3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (London and New York: Random House, 1967) p 734.

by God.<sup>4</sup> Thus that person faces us bearing legitimate claims on us – to behave in certain ways towards him or her and to refrain from behaving in certain other ways.

In GK Chesterton's vivid image, people are equal in the same way pennies are equal. Some are bright, others are dull; some are worn smooth, others are sharp and fresh. But all are equal in value for each penny bears the image of the sovereign, each person bears the image of the King of kings. It is this framework of conviction that sustains the discourse of human rights and secures justice for men, women, transsexuals, and children all over the world.

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## *Questions for reflection*

Ramachandra shows us the way the Bible shows us the true worth of humanity, made in the image of God, and that rights are not just for those who meet some criteria by which they deserve them – instead they are a claim each human has upon their fellow humans.

1. How does the idea that you have fundamental value and a right to life and justice as a bearer of God's image make you feel?
2. Are there things that make you feel like you don't deserve this status? Name them, and pray that God will show you how much he treasures you.
3. In your context, who are the people who are not granted the rights of a human made in the image of God because they are not seen to deserve them?
4. How does your work aim to restore these people by giving them their proper value as image bearers?

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4. Wolterstorff, *Justice: rights and wrongs*, (2008, Princeton University Press) p360.

# HOW DO WE FLOURISH?

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## THE IMAGE OF GOD AND *HOMO ECONOMICUS*

Brian Fikkert\*

\* I received helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter from Dr Hannah Swithinbank of Tearfund UK and from Professor William C. Davis of Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia, USA. All errors are solely my responsibility.

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

I have a recurring nightmare. It doesn't happen as often as it used to, but when it does I wake up shaking and covered with sweat. My dream takes me back thirty-five years, to when I was working the night shift on an assembly line in a factory that canned vegetables. In my dream, I get caught on a conveyor belt that is transporting me into a machine that will try to cram my entire body into a six-ounce aluminium can. I am the only one in the factory, so nobody hears me screaming for help. The moment at which I am about to be sucked into the machine is when I wake up from my dream, shaking with terror.

I am very thankful for that job, for it enabled me to earn some money to pay for college. The working conditions were excellent, and I was always treated fairly. I had no complaints then, and I have no complaints now. It was an excellent factory job.

Why then do I have this recurring nightmare? Why does my subconscious self scream out in terror decades later? Could it be that something terrible was happening on that assembly line without my even being aware of it?

Reflecting back, I now realise that there was something very dehumanising about that job. The monotony of the assembly line was absolutely mind numbing. In fact, although I only did that job for eight weeks, I can still picture the details of the clock on the factory wall. I would operate my machine for what seemed like days and then look over to the clock, disheartened to see that only a few seconds had passed by. Over time I started to feel lifeless, almost robotic. I felt like I was no longer operating the machine; instead, the machine was operating me.

John Maynard Keynes, arguably the most influential economist of the 20th century, once stated:

*The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.*<sup>1</sup>

I believe Keynes was largely right. Economists have had an enormous impact on daily life, even though most people are not aware of it. Indeed, the ideas of economists contributed to the creation and operation of the factory in which I worked as a teenager. Their ideas helped both to justify and to shape an economy

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1. John Maynard Keynes, *General Theory Of Employment, Interest And Money* (New York: First Harcourt/ Harvest Inc., 1964), p 383 (emphasis added).

that resulted in a profitable production process that enabled me to earn money for college but that also produced recurring nightmares.

So why the nightmares? I believe they are the result of my humanity screaming out against the dehumanisation of that assembly line. As image bearers of the triune God, humans are designed for creativity, expression and community, all of which are stripped away in the automation, silence and isolation of the assembly line. Indeed, our humanness rebels when it is being transformed into something that it is not intended to be. And if the transformation process continues long enough, the humanness eventually dies, and then the screaming finally stops.<sup>2</sup>

It is crucial to note that I didn't even realise this was happening at the time. On the contrary, I was happy to be making some money. I had absolutely no idea that the very process of making that money was transforming me from an image bearer of the triune God into a machine.

This chapter is not primarily about the dehumanising features of the assembly line. Rather, the assembly line and the reaction of my humanness to it is simply one small example of the much more comprehensive dynamic that is the focus of this chapter. The current process of economic growth – which mainstream Western economists have both justified and helped to shape – may be transforming rich and poor alike into *homo economicus*, a robotic distortion of the image bearers that God designed us to be. And we don't even realise it is happening.

Indeed, as with my nightmares, there is evidence that our humanness is screaming out against this dehumanising process. But we are not paying attention to the screams. If we do not start to listen, eventually the humanness will no longer be able to resist, and the screams will stop. And we will have been transformed into something less than a human being.

As Keynes suggests, this dehumanising process can be traced – at least in part – to a particular school of economic thought that has dominated the West and that has had an enormous impact on the everyday lives of ordinary people. To see this, consider the fact that from the time of the industrial revolution to the present, 'Western civilisation' has experienced economic growth that is simply unprecedented in human history, profoundly reshaping every dimension of life. Although there are many causes of this rapid growth, one can make a strong case that much of it is due to the insights provided by Western economists. In particular, the 'classical economics' of Adam Smith and its modern reincarnation in the 'neoclassical' school of economic thought have both deeply influenced and

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2. Romans 1:18–32.

provided the apologetic for the economic system that has unfolded in the West and that is now being exported to the world through the process of globalisation.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, this growth has had many positive benefits. Most importantly, in the past 30 years there has been a massive reduction in the number of people living below the US\$ 1.25 per day poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Researchers are finding that the vast majority of this reduction is due to economic growth in poor countries, particularly China and India, many of which have been adopting various insights provided by neoclassical economists.<sup>5</sup> In this light, the present chapter is not a rant against capitalism or market-based economies in favour of high degrees of government intervention in economic life. Indeed, the track record of heavy government intervention in the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) is far from stellar.

However, this chapter is an attempt to raise some major concerns about the fundamental nature of the approach to economic life and to poverty that flows out of the neoclassical framework. In particular, this chapter argues that – contrary to its claims – neoclassical economics is advancing an ideology, a notion both of what is ultimately good and of the means for achieving that ultimate good.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this ideology is counter to a biblical understanding of the nature of human beings, of poverty, and of human flourishing. As a result, while the massive reduction in material poverty in recent decades is to be celebrated, the implicit ideology that is driving and shaping this reduction is, at its very heart, idolatrous.

And this idolatry is not just an academic matter, for idols wreak havoc in the real world. Indeed, theologians have observed the following pattern in Scripture:

1. Every human being is worshipping one or more gods.
2. Every human being is transformed into the image of the god(s) they are worshipping.
3. Human beings form societies in their own image.<sup>7</sup>

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3. 'Classical economists' such as Adam Smith laid the foundations for Western economies during the 18th–19th centuries and spawned the neoclassical school of thought of the 19th–21st centuries.

4. World Bank, *A Measured Approach to Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity* (World Bank Publications, 2014).

5. R Bluhm, D de Crombrughe and A Szirmai, 'Poor Trends: The Pace of Poverty Reduction after the Millennium Development Agenda', *UNU-Merit Working Paper Series 2014–006* (2014).

6. Michael W Goheen, 'Probing the Historical and Religious Roots of Economic Globalization', in Erin Glanville and Michael Goheen (eds), *The Gospel and Globalization* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub, 2009), pp 69–90.

7. B Goudzwaard, *Aid for the Overdeveloped West* (Wedge Pub, 1975), pp 14–15. See also A Crouch, *Playing God* (IVP Books, 2013).

Hence, identifying the god(s) that human beings are worshipping reveals much about where both those human beings and the societies that they create are heading.

Tragically, in the case of neoclassical economics, the god that is being worshipped – *homo economicus* – is a self-centred, materialistic, individualistic hedonist. Indeed, the transformation of human beings and societies into the image of this idol is well underway in the West, with devastating consequences, as we shall see further below. And through the process of globalisation, the worship of this idol is spreading faster than the god of any other religion. In this light, it is important to consider whether the poverty alleviation coming from such growth is actually just moving poor people from one form of enslavement into another.

At the heart of the methodology of neoclassical economics is a very subtle lie. It is a particularly dangerous lie, for it seeps into the DNA of its adherents without their realisation.

To see this, note that the first chapter of nearly every economics textbook in the neoclassical tradition makes a distinction between positive statements and normative statements.<sup>8</sup> Positive statements are statements of fact, statements that simply describe the way the world really is: the sky is blue; the sun is hot; and the grass is green. Positive statements, the reader is told, are so incontrovertibly true that all human beings – regardless of their religion, gender, race, or culture – can agree upon them as being true.

In contrast, normative statements describe the way that things should be. As such, normative statements necessarily involve value judgements rooted in some ethical standard, some ultimate notion of good and evil: students should study hard; parents should love their children; and the rich should help the poor. Normative statements, the reader is told, are beyond the scope of neoclassical economics. As a 'science,' neoclassical economics leaves the value judgements inherent to normative statements to the realm of theologians and philosophers.

In taking this posture, neoclassical economics is squarely rooted in the Enlightenment (some would call it 'modern') worldview that has so profoundly shaped Western civilisation since the 17th century. Seeking to understand and control the world apart from God, the Enlightenment worldview envisions humans as autonomous material agents who seek to control the cosmos, which is also strictly material, through the use of rational processes.

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8. For example, see Arthur O'Sullivan, Steven Sheffrin and Stephen Perez, *Economics* (Prentice Hall, 2013).



Although the Enlightenment worldview has been nearly universally rejected by both theologians and philosophers, neoclassical economists press on with their methodology, despite the fact that it leads them into regular contradictions. For example, despite their claims to be focused only on making positive statements, neoclassical economists make normative statements all the time! One of the most famous textbooks in international economics, co-authored by Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman, includes the following in the introduction to one of its chapters:

*What should a nation's trade policy be? For example, should the United States use a tariff or an import quota to protect its automobile industry against competition from Japan and South Korea?*<sup>9</sup>

The book then goes on to answer these very normative questions, explaining why in most cases free trade is 'good' and tariffs and import quotas are 'bad'.

Indeed, in every matter – whether it be monopoly, minimum wages, taxation, finance, trade, unemployment, inflation, insurance, pollution, or technology – neoclassical economists make statements about what *should* be done in order to achieve the 'best' outcome possible. And in so doing, neoclassical economists are necessarily making normative statements, implicitly applying an ideology, a notion of what is ultimately good and of the means to achieving that ultimate good. And the fact that neoclassical economics refuses to admit that it is doing so is what makes this discipline and the global system that it is fostering so dangerous.

What is the ultimate good that is implicit in the neoclassical framework? It is possible to reveal the implicit ethical standard by observing the criteria that neoclassical economists use to determine the preferred policy in any given situation: Is free trade preferable to protectionism? Should the government raise the minimum wage? Would rent controls be a good or a bad idea? etc.

The way that neoclassical economists answer these – and all – questions is by determining which policy will result in the most 'efficient' outcome. Policy A is considered to be more 'efficient' than Policy B if Policy A allows for more 'mutually beneficial trades' to take place than Policy B does. And neoclassical economists take it as a given that a more 'efficient' policy is better than a less 'efficient' policy.<sup>10</sup>

Note that it is the parties who could potentially make the trade who determine whether or not the trade is beneficial. If each party believes that the trade is in their

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9. Paul R Krugman et al., *International Economics* (Prentice Hall, 2014), p 192 (emphasis added).

10. Stated differently, a policy is considered to be 'pareto efficient' if it is impossible to make one person better off without making at least one other person worse off.

self-interest, the trade will happen. But if either party does not believe that the trade is in their self-interest, the trade will not happen.

And now we can see the sleight of hand involved in the neoclassical deception. Neoclassical economics claims to be morally neutral, yet it implicitly defines 'efficiency' as being morally preferred! In other words, neoclassical economics takes what is clearly a normative statement – 'policies that increase the number of mutually beneficial trades are better' – and calls it a positive statement!

Unfortunately, this implicit ethical standard is clearly unacceptable from a Christian perspective. To see this, consider the buying and selling of pornography. Both the buyer and the seller of the pornography believe that they are benefitting from the trade, so neoclassical economics necessarily views this trade as 'good', whereas God clearly views it as evil.<sup>11</sup>

Now whenever an ethical standard – a notion of right and wrong – violates the moral law of the triune God, it must be the case that this ethical standard has been decreed by a false god. So exactly who is the false god at the centre of neoclassical ideology?

As we have seen, neoclassical economics makes individuals the ultimate standard. They are the ones who determine if a trade is good or not, and their determination must be followed. The individual human being is the god of neoclassical economics.

What exactly is this god like? The neoclassical conception of a human being is *homo economicus*, a self-interested creature that rationally allocates its income in order to maximise its utility, ie its personal happiness as defined by itself.

In principle, anything could bring utility to *homo economicus*. For example, some people get utility from eating steak, while others, like Mother Teresa, get utility from helping people who have leprosy. But in the most common formulation, *homo economicus*' utility,  $U$ , is depicted as a mathematical function,  $F$ , whose value increases with the amount of goods,  $C$ , and leisure,  $L$ , that *homo economicus* consumes:  $U = F(C, L)$

11. Numerous Christian economists have made similar criticisms of the positive-normative distinction and of pareto efficiency. For example, see Donald A Hay, *Economics Today* (Regent College Publishing, 2004); GN Monsma Jr, 'Normative Economics,' in *Through the Eye of the Needle: Readings on Stewardship and Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986); AB Cramp, *Notes Towards a Christian Critique of Secular Economic Theory* (Toronto, ON: Institute for Christian Studies, 1975).

Note the hedonism at the heart of neoclassical ideology: human flourishing consists of selfishly consuming the goods that one desires and of working as little as possible.

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And what are the means to achieving human flourishing for *homo economicus*? Because the consumption of goods and leisure is limited by income, the neoclassical ideology sees increasing income as the key to greater human flourishing for all people, including the poor.

At a macro level, this need to continually increase income translates into the pursuit of economic growth.<sup>12</sup> Figures 1 and 2 depict this process in the neoclassical growth model developed by Nobel Laureate Robert Solow.<sup>13</sup> As pictured in Figure 1 (see next page), the accumulation of physical capital per person – ie plants and machinery – enables a country to increase its output per person by moving along the curve, which represents the nation's 'production function'. Unfortunately, the curve flattens out due to diminishing returns to capital. For example, adding one more tractor per person no longer increases output very much, since a person can only drive so many tractors! As a result, economic growth slows and eventually stops.

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12. See, for example, William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

13. Robert M Solow, 'A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 70:1 (February 1956) pp 65–94.

FIGURE ONE

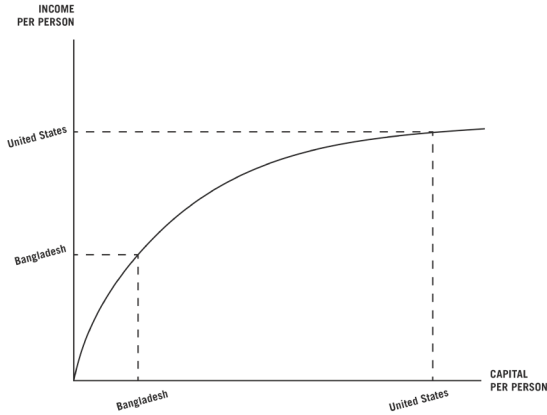
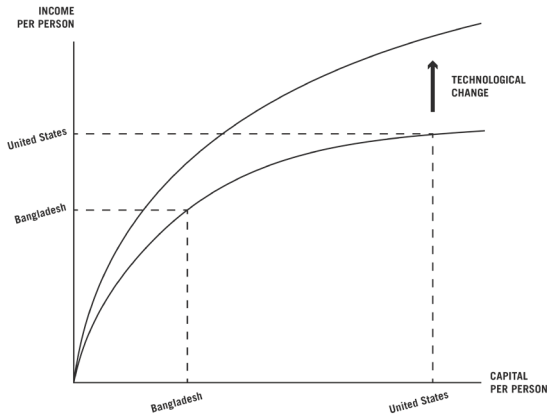


FIGURE TWO



However, physical capital accumulation is not the only way to grow. Indeed, as depicted in Figure 2, technological advancement enables countries to get more output from the same amount of capital per person, thereby shifting the curve upwards and allowing for ever-increasing levels of output as long as technological change never ceases.

Note that the accumulation of capital and technology is the means of salvation in the neoclassical ideology, for it is through capital and technology that greater hedonist pleasure can be achieved. Indeed, if *homo economicus* is the supreme god of neoclassical economics, capital and technology are its lesser deities.

Finally, note that in the neoclassical ideology, all countries are on the same pathway. Bangladesh is simply the United States at an earlier stage of development. Indeed, the main policy prescription from this framework is that poor countries should adopt the same institutions that have enabled the West to accumulate capital and technology. And as they do so, they too will be able to grow, to consume more, and to flourish in the same way that the West has, a result that is becoming increasingly terrifying...

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As mentioned earlier, the worship of false gods always comes at a cost, for human beings and the societies they create are transformed into the image of whatever god(s) they are worshipping. Indeed, the horror of image bearers of the triune God being transformed into *homo economicus* is increasingly evident in Western civilisation.

Consider first the classroom. Under the deceptive guise that neoclassical economics is simply using positive statements, students are subjected to the constant refrain: 'Human beings are self-interested maximisers of their own happiness through greater consumption of goods and leisure. That's just the way it is.' Unfortunately, telling students that pursuing self-interest is normal actually makes pursuing self-interest become normative! Indeed, researchers have found that students exposed to the neoclassical model actually become more selfish over time, increasingly willing to sacrifice their own integrity for greater material gain.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, the lie extends well beyond the classroom, for upon graduation the students become culture makers, shaping society into the image of the god they are worshipping and whose image they themselves have come to bear: *homo economicus*. Indeed, researchers are finding that the conception of human beings as self-interested materialists has impacted the construction of both the formal institutions and informal norms that shape daily life in the West. As a result, the rhythms of life in Western society communicate to people that pursuing their material self-interests is just the way it is. 'It's normal'. And when the mantra is repeated enough times it becomes normative, transforming more people into *homo economicus* without their even being aware of what is happening to them.<sup>15</sup>

Harvard psychologist Jerome Kagan summarises the situation as follows:

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14. Robert H Frank, Thomas Gilovich and Dennis T Regan, 'Does Studying Economics Inhibit Cooperation?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7:2 (May 1993) pp 159–171.

15. Dale T Miller, 'The norm of self-interest', *American Psychologist* 54:12 (December 1, 1999) pp 1053–1060. The effect of such cultural rhythms on human formation has been emphasised by James KA Smith, in *Desiring the Kingdom* (Cultural Liturgies), (Baker Academic, 2009).

'[Americans] treat self-interest as a natural law and because they believe they should not violate a natural law, they try to obey it.'<sup>16</sup> Keynes was largely right.

As people in the West are transformed into the image of *homo economicus*, their humanness screams out against the dehumanising process that is taking place, just as I do in my nightmares.

For example, while the United States has enjoyed unprecedented increases in income and wealth during the post-war era, a growing body of research is finding that this growth is accompanied by a dramatic increase in mental illness amongst America's youth. Indeed, between 1950 and 1999, the rate of suicide of people under the age of 24 increased by 137 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Seeking to uncover the root causes of the rising rates of mental illness, an expert team gathered at Dartmouth Medical School to examine the leading empirical evidence, mostly from the field of neuroscience, and concluded: '...the human child is "hardwired to connect."<sup>18</sup>

We are hardwired for other people and for moral meaning and openness to the transcendent. Meeting these basic needs for connection is essential to health and human flourishing. Because in recent decades we as a society have not been doing a good job of meeting these essential needs, large and growing numbers of our children are failing to flourish.

And what has caused this breakdown of relationships with other people and with the 'transcendent?' Jean Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, has explored the causes and concludes, 'We have become a culture that focuses on material things and less on relationships.'<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the West has material things, but humans are wired for something that money cannot buy, something that the pursuit of money can actually undermine.

16. Jerome Kagan, *Unstable Ideas* (Harvard University Press, 1989), p 283.

17. Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect* (New York, NY: Institute for American Values, 2003), p 68.

18. *Ibid.*, p 6.

19. Jean M Twenge, quoted in Courtney Hutchison, 'Today's Teens More Anxious, Depressed, and Paranoid Than Ever,' ABC News (December 10, 2009). See also Jean M Twenge et al., 'Birth cohort increases in psychopathology among young Americans, 1938–2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI', *Clinical Psychology Review* 30:2 (March 2010) pp 145–154.

The research on mental illness is getting at something: human beings are indeed 'hardwired to connect,' for we are made in the image of the triune God, who is inherently a relational being. From all eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost exist in relationship with one another. Thus, as beings made in God's image, humans are created for relationship as well. Specifically, the Bible describes four key relationships for each human being, relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. Human flourishing consists of experiencing these four relationships as God designed them to be experienced. When this fails to happen, the humanness is violated, so it screams out, railing against being transformed into something other than what it was created to be.

It is important to note how radically different human flourishing is for *homo economicus* and for *homo image bearer*. To illustrate, consider how these two creatures view each of the four, key relationships:

RELATIONSHIP	<i>HOMO ECONOMICUS</i> VIEWS...	<i>HOMO IMAGE BEARER</i> VIEWS...
God	God as irrelevant to happiness	God as the ultimate source of happiness, which is achieved through intimate communion with him
Self	Self as the ultimate god whose happiness is dependent upon greater consumption and leisure	Self as a creature designed to glorify God by faithfully fulfilling a variety of God-ordained callings
Others	Others as opponents with whom one competes for greater consumption	Others as fellow image bearers with whom one cooperates so that all can fulfill their respective callings
Rest of Creation	Creation as something to be exploited for personal gain and work as something to be avoided as much as possible	Creation as something to be stewarded on behalf of the creator and work as a gift from God

It is important to remember that these different visions of human flourishing express themselves at more than just the individual level, for human beings create entire societies in their own image.

For example, *homo economicus'* tendency to view others as opponents can result in ruthless competition for resources at all levels of society. At the local level, companies and workers fight with each other for a greater share of revenues. At the national level, special interest groups lobby over government taxation and expenditures. And at the international level, nations use trade and exchange rate policies to increase their incomes at the expense of other nations.

Self-serving individuals create a self-serving world.

And of course, these different visions of human flourishing require different methods for achieving such flourishing. As mentioned earlier, *homo economicus*' happiness ultimately rests on ever-increasing levels of capital and technology. In contrast, while a biblical perspective sees capital and technology as having the potential to contribute to human flourishing, it also recognises that – at best – they are merely small tools in that overall process. Instead, the Bible teaches that human flourishing ultimately results from being united to the very person of Jesus Christ, who restores His people to full image bearing by enabling them to enjoy intimate fellowship with the triune God and with one another in the new heavens and the new earth. Although complete restoration to human flourishing will not be fully realised until Christ's second coming, to some degree it can be experienced in the present – particularly in the community of the local church, where God dwells with His restored image bearers in the here and now.<sup>20</sup>

In this light, promoting human flourishing, including poverty alleviation, is not solely about pursuing as much growth and consumption as possible. Rather, it is about:

Preaching the word and digging wells.

Administering the sacraments and starting schools.

Offering prayers and giving penicillin.

Fellowshipping with the body and financing micro-enterprises.

And it is about repentance – our repentance:

Repentance from self-centred hedonism.

Repentance from faith in capital and technology.

Repentance, because the goal is not to turn Bangladesh into the United States, but rather to turn both into the New Jerusalem.

Repentance, because our humanness is screaming out against being transformed into *homo economicus*.

Repentance, because eventually the screaming will stop if we don't.

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20. Ephesians 2; See also, GK Beale and M Kim, *God Dwells Among Us* (InterVarsity Press, 2014); B Fikkert, and R Mask, *From Dependence to Dignity* (Zondervan, 2015).



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## Questions for reflection

Fikkert argues that our concepts of flourishing are determined by the world around us, and that many of us are pushed into the shape of the *homo economicus* by the predominance of post-Enlightenment, rational, economic theory in the global north.

1. How do you think the worldview that Fikkert describes has affected you and your ability to flourish as God intended? What are the gods that you struggle with?
2. The worldview of Western civilisation has profoundly shaped both the goals and the methods of relief and development work. What are the ways that this has affected your community and country? How has it affected your practices and aims in participating in poverty alleviation work?
3. Human beings are transformed into the image of whatever god they are worshipping. How does your work point people towards God rather than towards other gods (for example: technology, material goods, your own organisation)?
4. Being united to the person of Jesus Christ is the only way to be fully restored to full human flourishing (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1–10). What are the implications of this for how you design your poverty alleviation work? How could you help enable people to flourish as God's image bearers?

# THE FUTURE TRANSFORMATION

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*IMAGO DEI, THE MISSIO DEI  
AND THE GLORIA DEI*

Krish Kandiah

It was 4.45 on a Friday evening which, if you have had any connection with working with looked-after children, you'll know is a dangerous time to answer the phone. It was social services asking us if we could foster another child. We asked for a few more details and they told us that they didn't know much about him except that he was a 'biter.' My wife and I were a little concerned about this as we have a house full of birth, adopted and foster children and we wondered how we would cope with a 'biter.' But then another perspective kicked-in. No one can be adequately summed up in a single word. No one should be summarised by a description of the worst thing they have ever done. This little boy was more than a biter. This little boy was made in the image of God and that meant we needed to offer him somewhere safe to live. So we invited this troubled three year old into our lives. He turned our world upside down and helped us experience God's grace in brand new ways.

Professor Keith Ward has argued convincingly, 'There is no one proper starting point in theology, since every question leads on to every other.'<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to exploring the *imago Dei* this is definitely true. In this short chapter we will hint at the integration of four major strands of doctrine: Christology, Anthropology, Eschatology and Missiology. Firstly, we will examine the Christological nature of the image of God. Secondly, we will unpack some of the anthropological implications of such a Christological focus. Thirdly we will touch on the eschatological dimensions of a Christological approach to the *imago Dei*. Finally, we will point towards the missiological implications for the nature of aid and development when humanity is made in the image of God.

## CHRISTOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE *IMAGO DEI*

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him 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. (Colossians 1:15–16)*

In this well known passage in the epistle to the Colossians Paul describes Jesus as the image (*eikon* – literally icon) of God. This is not the only time this description is attributed to Jesus. For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul explains how the 'god of this age' is preventing people from seeing 'the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.' Similarly, in Hebrews 1:3 we are told, 'The Son is

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1. K Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 1.

the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.<sup>1</sup>

Porteous writes on the significance of the Christological shift in the understanding of the nature of the image of God in the New Testament:

*Nothing could make clearer the tremendous impact of the revelation of God in Christ than the fact that it has almost completely obliterated the thought of man as being in the image of God and replaced it with the thought of Christ as being the image of God.*<sup>2</sup>

This shift is significant and should inform any Christian understanding of the *imago Dei*. The New Testament passages that describe Christ as the image of God make an intrinsic link between Christ being the image of God and the revelation of God's glory. As Stanley Grenz puts it: 'The *imago Dei* texts in the New Testament elevate Jesus as the one who makes manifest the reality of God.'<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting that neither the Spirit nor the Father are described as being the image of God. The New Testament emphasis on the *imago Dei* revealing the glory of God is something that is uniquely linked with the Son of God. Christ is the image of God both as the eternal son of God and the incarnate word of God. For Richard Middleton the fact that as the incarnate word of God Christ is the image of God has significant implications for our understanding of the body:

*The interpretation of the imago Dei among theologians almost universally excludes the body from the image, thus entrenching a dualistic reading of the human condition. Although few modern interpreters come to the Genesis text with the ascetic predilections of Origen or Augustine, nevertheless this unwarranted limitation of the image continues to perpetuate an implicit devaluation of the concrete life of the body in relation to spirituality.*<sup>4</sup>

A focus on Christ as the image of God will assist theologians in avoiding this pitfall. In light of these texts it is clear that a Christian understanding of the nature of the image of God needs to be shaped by the incarnation of Christ. Anthony Thiselton describes Christ as, 'the paradigm of the truly human'.<sup>5</sup>

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2. NW Porteous, 'Image of God', *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1962), p 684.

3. Stanley J Grenz, 'Jesus as the *imago Dei*: Image-of-god Christology and the non-linear linearity of theology', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol 47 no 4 (2004) 619.

4. JR Middleton, 'The liberating image? Interpreting the *imago Dei* in context,' *Christian Scholar's Review* (1994), p 11.

5. Anthony C Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), p 241. Thanks to Thomas Creedy for pointing this out to me.

A truly Christian anthropology needs to take seriously a Christological understanding of the nature of humanity. If Christ is the *imago Dei* par excellence, we should derive our understanding of what it means to be human from Christ rather than simply trying to isolate a few verses in the book of Genesis. As Ridderbos argues: '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.'<sup>6</sup>

Discussion around what it means for human beings to be made in the image of God often revolves around three common categories for defining the *imago Dei*: the *substantive*, the *functional* and the *relational*. These categories need to be examined to see if they are still able to function when applied Christologically. We must recognise that human beings are made in the image of God but in a way that is in both continuity and discontinuity with Christ who is 'the exact representation of his being'. (Hebrews 1:3)

Firstly, substantive approaches to the image of God emphasise 'sharing some of His substantial characteristics'.<sup>7</sup> This was the approach taken by the early church fathers.<sup>8</sup> This view argues that 'the divine image is something we possess'.<sup>9</sup> The characteristics that are most commonly cited are rationality, morality, creativity and generosity. The theological intention of this emphasis seems to be the search for distinguishing factors between human life and animal life. This is understandable if the creation account is the starting point for thinking about the nature of humanity, but for an individual human being how many of these traits are necessarily present for someone to be able to claim that they are made in the image of God? If someone is not particularly creative or generous are they still in the image of God? What about someone who has learning difficulties – is their rationality somehow impaired? And if so, does this make them less the image of God? And how does this approach work out Christologically? There is of course a good case to be made that Christ does adequately fulfil all of the criteria necessary. Christ is the epitome of rationality, morality, creativity and generosity.

Secondly, functional approaches to the image of God emphasise the particular job or role that human beings play due to their status as image bearers. Genesis 1 and 2 most certainly emphasise these aspects, as the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams states:

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6. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), p 85.

7. Tearfund et al., *Wholly Living* (2010), p 24.

8. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p 203.

9. Stanley J Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), p 169.

*The creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 see the creation of humanity as quite specifically the creation of an agent, a person, who can care for and protect the animal world, reflecting the care of God himself who enjoys the goodness of what he has made.*<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting that Williams emphasises the individual nature of the image bearer. Here again Christ in one sense more than adequately fulfils these criteria. Although uncreated he is certainly an agent who cares for and protects the world and all of its inhabitants. As we shall see, part of the very role of being a custodian of creation is to point creation to its true purpose, and that involves the worship and representation of the creator himself.

Thirdly, the relational approach, which has a number of different expressions. Grenz argues that the reformers took a relational perspective on the image of God where being in the image of God refers to our right standing before God. 'The divine image is essentially a special relation with the creator which Adam lost, but Christ restores.'<sup>11</sup> A different relational approach to the image of God was articulated by Karl Barth who recognised that creating male and female to be the image of God together was to make relationality fundamental to true humanity.<sup>12</sup> Barth argues from the divine use of the plural 'let us' in the creation account that the *imago Dei* has an inherently plural and relational aspect.<sup>13</sup> Grenz comments that for Barth the Genesis text 'explicitly links the plurality of humanity which includes a plurality of sexes to a plurality found in the divine self-reference.'<sup>14</sup>

A Christological approach fits well with this relational perspective on the *imago Dei* where being made in the image of God means existing in relationship to him, to other humans and to the rest of creation. Of course Christ existed in all of these relationships and perfectly displayed the nature of God in those three sets of relationships. As we shall see, the Christological approach to the *imago Dei* passages is exegetically slightly more nuanced than in most presentations of the relational image.

However, notice the directionality of the inquiry in all of these approaches: in

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10. R Williams, 'The Climate Crisis: A Christian Response,' Operation Noah Annual Lecture (Southwark Cathedral, 13 October 2009).

11. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p 171.

12. K Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.2*, trans. G Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960).

13. B Ware, 'Male and female complementarity and the image of God,' *The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (2002), p 74.

14. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p 175.

each we have a prior understanding of the image of God and then apply it to see if Christ is able to fit into it. An alternative way of framing our conception of the image of God is to take Christ as the benchmark of the image of God and then go on to reflect our understanding to humanity. If we prioritise the Christological passages by, for example, integrating the Colossians and Hebrews passages, we get a different nuance with three important emphases:

### 1. Revelation of God's character

The *imago Dei* is intrinsically related to the making known of God's character in the world. Christologically this is supported by the Johannine prologue where Christ is described as the word of God – not just carrying or delivering the word of God, but uniquely incarnating the *logos* of God. As Christ is described in Hebrews 1 as the exact representation of God's likeness, thus his primacy as the *imago Dei* is established. Even unfallen humanity is not as perfectly the image of God as Christ is, and yet there is continuity with the vocation of humanity to reveal the character of God through our life in the world.

### 2. Representation of the rule of God

The *imago Dei* is linked with Christ ruling over the creation in Colossians 1:15-19. This makes further sense of the historical reflection that:

*Ancient Assyrian kings... erected statues of themselves in conquered territories, often as a way of representing their occupation of the land. So close was the link between the image and the king that reviling the former was viewed as an act of treason.*<sup>15</sup>

Hence the Genesis account also links humanity's calling as bearers of the divine image and our role as stewarding creation. Christ is the rightful ruler and yet humanity is called to participate in this reign.

### 3. Relationality

There are some implicit relationships assumed in the language of *imago Dei*. For example, there is a relationship between Christ and the other members of the Trinity. O'Brien states clearly that image emphasises Christ's relation to God. The term points to Christ's revealing of the Father on the one hand and his pre-existence on the other – 'It is both functional and ontological'.<sup>16</sup> But there is also

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15. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *imago dei*' p 621. See also Henri Blocher, *In the beginning* (Intervarsity Press, 1984).

16. Peter Thomas O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), p 44.

an implied relationship between the image of God and those to whom the image is being revealed. The audience to which the image is directed has an implicit relationship with the image, thus humanity and indeed all of creation have some kind of relationship with God. John underlines this when he refers to Christ as the word of God and explains that Christ is God and with God but he also is the one who comes 'to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him'. (John 1:11)

By prioritising the Christological image of God we are then able to discern humanity's purpose, as we are eschatologically transformed into his image and likeness. As Grenz points out:

*The New Testament presents Jesus as the true image of God, who through his mission on God's behalf – especially in the cross and resurrection – reveals the divine reality and thereby completes the vocation of humankind.*<sup>17</sup>

## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A CHRISTOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE *IMAGO DEI*

If Christ is the *imago Dei* par excellence what does this mean for human nature? Humanity in a derivative way is also made in the image of God. Humans were created to reveal the character of God as they represent God's reign over creation as his vice regents, and they do this in relationship with God and each other.

The mission of God the Son as image bearer is due to humanity's failure on all three aspects of this vocation to image God. The closest we get to sin being described in these terms is in Romans 3:23: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' New Testament scholar James Dunn recognises that within Jewish thought *image and glory* are closely related.<sup>18</sup> John Stott argues for a similar understanding of these verses, citing 1 Corinthians 11:7 when he asserts that when Paul refers to falling short of God's glory (*doxa*), '[Paul could mean] his approval or praise which all have forfeited, but probably refers to his image or glory in which we were all made'.<sup>19</sup> To 'fall short of the glory of God' is in one sense a strange construction; grasping for the glory of God would seem equally sinful, as the tower of Babel narrative demonstrates. But falling short seems to emphasise a standard that

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17. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *imago Dei*' p 621.

18. James DG Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Volume 38a (Word Biblical Commentary) (Zondervan, 2015), p 167.

19. John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), p 110.



has been failed. To what extent were human beings supposed to measure up to the glory of God? Scripture does not explicitly make the connection between our inability to image God and Christ coming to image God. But the very fact that the same language from Genesis 1 is applied to humans and then to Christ in Colossians 1 can be seen to be an implicit critique of humanity's failure – just as the appointing of David as king of Judah during the reign of Saul is a critique of Saul's kingship. NT Wright argues that Paul's use of the term 'image of God' in relation to Christ is his, 'way of expressing the doctrine... poetically, that the man Jesus fulfils the purposes which God had marked out both for himself and for humanity.'<sup>20</sup>

## A RESTORATIVE ESCHATOLOGY

The eschatological perspective on the image of God is that salvation involves not only a renewed earth, but also individuals fully restored into Christ's likeness.

Paul utilises the image language (once again it is the word '*eikon*', just as in Colossians 1:15) to describe the 'increasing transformation of the people of Christ into that same image by the power of the indwelling Spirit.'<sup>21</sup> For example Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24, and 2 Corinthians 3:18 below:

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

The theme of the image of God and the glory of God are intertwined in this text. The passage refers of course to the fact that because of the privilege of sharing the good news of the new covenant, Christians do not need to hide their transformation from the watching world. There is an ongoing process of radical change in believers to the extent that we are being transformed and renewed and restored to the image of God. Being the image of God is a status that we never lost (Genesis 9:6), but the experiential and glorified aspects of this are ongoing and won't be completed until our eschatological destiny has been reached. Thus one way in which the final salvation is described is that human beings are restored to perfectly image God, thus the glory of God will be more fully realised through the redemption of human persons.

*Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and*

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20. NT Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), p 7.

21. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, p 44.

*have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:9)*

Paul here applies the fact that as human beings we have a new identity, which fits us like a new set of clothes. This new self is being transformed until it more perfectly reflects the image of its creator. Notice that, 'The present participle... indicates an ongoing process.'<sup>22</sup> This same concept is echoed in Ephesians 4:24.

This means that Christlikeness is the goal of true humanity. The extent to which a life resembles Christ is the extent to which we are truly human. Not forgetting that, as we saw in Genesis 9:6, fallen humanity remains in the image of God. This frames debates about the image of God more sharply. Because the eschatological destiny of human beings is described in terms of the restoration of the image of God, and because all creation is being renewed not just individuated human souls, there is a sense in which Eden is being reconstructed with human beings playing the role they were created for in the beginning. Once again Stanley Grenz puts it well:

*The biblical narrative of the imago Dei that climaxes with the glorified new humanity sharing in the divine image contains a present component as well. The new humanity already shares in the divine image through being 'in Christ'.<sup>23</sup>*

Peter Kuzmic makes a compelling case that that some of the various eschatological positions held by evangelicals actually militate against engagement in social amelioration or political transformation.<sup>24</sup> For example, according to some dispensational approaches to eschatology, things on the earth are going to get progressively worse and worse, to the point at which Christ removes Christians from the earth. Working for social justice is thus seen as purely for evangelistic purposes for some and as a waste of time by others. The biblical anthropology that sits alongside this view can be seen in statements like: 'Three things are eternal: God, the Word of God, and the souls of men.'<sup>25</sup> This combination of pessimism about the world and a dualistic anthropology means that evangelism is often seen as the central and often exclusive mission of the church.

But this approach to eschatology, which emphasises a radical discontinuity between this current age and the age to come, would benefit from integration with New Testament texts that seem to argue for more continuity. For example, 2

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22. Ibid., p 191.

23. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *imago Dei*', p 623.

24. P Kuzmic, 'History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views,' in Bruce J Nichols (ed.), *In Word and Deed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 1985), p 153.

25. P Cate, *Through God's Eyes* (William Carey Library, 2013), p 119.

Corinthians 5:17 emphasises a radical discontinuity between human beings before and after conversion: 'The old has gone, the new has come.' But in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 Paul clearly reminds his readers of their past status and encourages them to reflect on their previous lives so that they remain humble: 'Think of what you were.' Another example of the tension between continuity and discontinuity is the New Testament's continual referral back to the Old Testament scriptures with it being made patently clear that with the coming of Christ we have entered a new phase of human history, such that now the distinctions between Jew and Gentile have gone. So there is a continual tension between the old order and the new creation; between the doing away with the old order, the old heavens and earth, and the renewal of that same old order. In the same way the continuity that is expressed in the continuous present tense of 2 Corinthians 3:18 – 'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' – underlines an ongoing process for human transformation.

This depiction of salvation as the restoration of the image of God in humanity hints at the transformation of character, rather than just a change in status (justification), a change of future (redemption), a change of situation (rescue) or even a change of relationship (adoption). By referring to human sanctification as the renewal of the image of God there is an echo of the creation passages where the purpose of human life is described in relational terms. Human beings were made to image God – thus there is a human-divine relationship. Human beings were to image God by representing him as they explored, ruled and stewarded creation – thus a human to created-order relationship. Human beings were to co-equally image God together – thus interpersonal relationships are implied. In light of this original vocation of humanity the mission of the church, the renewed humanity, cannot be restricted to the salvation of a soul from a soon to be destroyed earth.

We see in Jesus – the sent one, the central character in the *missio Dei*, the image of God par excellence – these same relationships transformed in him and through him. We see Jesus perfectly imaging the character of God to the extent which he can say, 'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father' (John 14:8). Jesus demonstrates a mastery and stewardship over creation as he quiets the storm, or multiplies bread and fish to feed a hungry crowd in the wilderness. Jesus models what interpersonal sacrificial love looks like. As believers being recreated in the image of God, in other words in the likeness of Christ, the perfect image of God, how can our part in the *missio Dei* be anything less than the multidimensional image bearing that Christ exhibited? We seek to bring human beings into relationship with God, we seek to correctly steward and care for creation and we work to transform human relationships that they might exhibit the love of God.

Just as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ and we await the eschatological fulfilment of that, so creation groans longing for its recreation, and human relationships can bring but a taste of the coming city of God to creation.

What are the implications of this approach to the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the work of aid and development? We can only hint at a few in the confines of this short essay. Three aspects that are particularly helpful in reflecting on the nature of aid and development are: eschatological confidence, Christological commitment and holistic corporeality.

## 1. Eschatological confidence

The work of aid and development can be crushingly exhausting. The economic systems that perpetuate inequalities, the ongoing impact of war and the degradation of the environment through consumptive behaviours often seem insurmountable. But the scriptures speak decisively about the unstoppable purposes of God to renew humanity to reflect the image of God. The covenant-keeping God honours his promises to Abraham to bless him and all the nations through him. The God who promised the exodus, the return from exile and the coming of Christ delivered, and so the God who promises the restoration of all things including the image of God in humanity can be relied upon. In the book of Revelation we are given a glimpse of the consummation of redemptive history. Revelation 21:1-8 shows God's people living in relationship with him, a renewed community of believers living together in the new Jerusalem, and a renewed creation. This glimpse of our future empowers us and encourages us to keep pursuing justice, to persevere in our work of showing love in word and deed to all humanity.

## 2. Christological commitment

Christ as the central actor in the *missio Dei* models to the church how her role in God's plans for the universe is to be enacted. As Lesslie Newbigin comments, 'It is the manner in which the Father sent the Son that determines the manner in which the church is sent by Jesus.'<sup>26</sup> In other words, the *missio Dei* must determine the *missiones ecclesiae* (the mission of the church).<sup>27</sup> The mission of Christ centres around the cross – as God the Son obeys God the Father in the power of God the Spirit. Jürgen Moltmann comments: 'At the centre of Christian faith is the history of Christ. At the centre of the history of Christ is his passion and his death on the

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26. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way* (World Council of Churches, 1987), p 23.

27. David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p 10.

cross.<sup>28</sup> We are given insight into the motivation of Christ's endurance on the cross in the book of Hebrews: 'For the joy set before him, [he] endured the cross scorning its shame.' (12:1) The eschatological motivation for the sacrificial mission of Christ offers the church rich resources for the enduring work of spiritual and social kingdom transformation.

### 3. Holistic corporeality

Evangelism is an essential element of the *missio Dei* because it is only a renewed, redeemed and restored humanity that can fulfil our Christological vocation. Humanity was created to be Christ-like and it is only through the transforming work of the Spirit that comes to those who have believed in the gospel of Christ that this can be fully realised. All humanity (bar Jesus of Nazareth) has failed to image God and it is only through the work of Christ and human incorporation into Christ that this can be restored. To attempt to serve the needs of humanity yet only meet practical, physical, social and economic needs and fail to address the central vocation of humanity is reductionist. A truly Christian approach to aid and development must recognise this aspect of human need.

In the same way, caring for the body is an essential element of the *missio Dei* because humanity's identity as those made in the image of God is directly connected to our embodiment. Only human beings, not angels nor spirits, are described as being made in the image of God. Our eschatological description of restored humanity includes an embodied existence as the resurrected people of God. Jesus, the one who perfectly embodies both the *imago Dei* and the *missio Dei*, did not merely preach or evangelise but healed and fed, challenged oppression and resurrected the dead. There seems to be an essentially holistic nature to the mission of God towards humanity made in his image.

## IN CONCLUSION

Christ, the Son of God, was sent into the world by God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit as the perfect image of God. Christ was sent because of humanity's failure to image God. The Son of God came to restore the image of God the Father in sinful humanity in the power of the Spirit. Through his inauguration of the kingdom of God and his example in challenging unjust structures and speaking out the good news, Christ enacted the *missio Dei* as the *imago Dei*. It is through the restoring work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection that the decisive victory

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28. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Fortress Press), p 151.

of the powers of darkness and evil has been won, so that now the restoration of all things is assured. We look forward, just as Christ did, to final and full restoring of the image of God in humanity and the renewal of all things. This vision empowers patient endurance and the offering to humanity and creation of a taste of the coming kingdom through preaching the gospel, pursuing justice, alleviating poverty, engaging in political advocacy and offering hospitality to those in need.

The 'biter' we ended up fostering for a year gave our little family a fresh experience of knowing God. As we cared for him, he helped us to encounter God's love, a wonder at his creation and a taste of the coming kingdom of God.

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## *Questions for reflection*

Kandiah talks about the way that the mission of Jesus Christ, who is the true likeness of God in the world, was to restore the broken relationships caused by the Fall and to bring into being the kingdom of God – which will be fully revealed in the new creation, and in which we will be transformed and restored to the image of God once again.

1. What would it look like for the kingdom of God to be revealed where you are?
2. How do you think you and your work reflect the eschatological confidence, Christological commitment, and holistic corporeality that this essay talks about?
3. How might you grow in these further?
4. How does the example of fostering and hospitality that Kandiah provides help you to think about what reflecting the image of God as we participate in his mission might look like in your life?

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ISBN 978-1-916507-62-3

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31747-0217