

A THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN (IMAGO DEI) AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN

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ABSTRACT

This study is a theological examination of the image of God in man (Imago Dei) and its significance to the contemporary Christian. This is an examination of the essence and significance of the image of God in humankind. What is the uniqueness and special things that God input into humankind. It goes deep into the origin and source of the existence of humankind, that is how man was created by God, who is their creator. Man is a creature of God; they did not create themselves. Man was created in the image of God not image of any other creatures. The conclusion of the creation of man was done through breath of God, which form the basis for the uniqueness of man above all other creatures. Man is designed in the image of God, but man is not God. Man is not equal in anyway to God; hence, he is not God. The image of God in man is the actual regulator of man activities. It is this image of God in man that makes them to be a spiritual being, a rational/creative being, a volitional being, a responsible being, and a relational being. This study is from the theory of Anthropology/humanity in systematic theology. The method used is descriptive design method.

Key Words: God, Image of God, Man.

Introduction

The image of God in humanity is the primary aspect that makes humanity relevant in all respects. All other things are created, including humankind, but humankind was made living through the breath of God. God in his sovereignty makes all things by his words, but he made humankind in his image after his likeness. This makes a man unique and very special from all other creatures. Man is created in the image of God, but he is not God. Man is created and thus a creature, but not a mere creature (Stagg 1911, 25). This implies that humankind is not equal to God. The image of God in man does not make a person become God, either in a mini or macro sense. This implies that the image does not equate humankind to God.

This is against the idea of Comte, the founder of positivism in France. “Who sees humanity as the new God? He further stated that in positivist religion, the object of worship is a Being (Humanity) that has a relative, modifiable, and perfectible nature (Stumph 1995, 340-349). This is a great error that the human who was created has now become God, who created him in his image. This is a purely misconceived notion that humankind, having a beginning and being created, can be equal to God. This work will x-ray the image of God in humankind and its significance to the contemporary Christian. The words “man,” “mankind,” and “humankind” are used interchangeably to mean human beings. A deeper understanding of the image of God in humanity will help individuals be courteous in whatever condition or position they find themselves, despite the limitations inherent in the concept of the image of God.

Although different types of anthropology discuss humanity, such as materialistic and idealistic anthropology, this work will focus on Christian anthropology. Unlike other views, Christian belief is that man is created by God (Gen. 1:1, 27). “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth ...so God created man.” Man did not just appear, but God created. God is the brain behind the existence of man (Anthony 1986, 2-3). “Man is not only a creature; however, he is also a person, and to be a person means to have a kind of independence, not absolute but relative ((Anthony 1986, 3). This implies that man is a creature created by God or caused to exist by God; man did not just exist; it was God’s order that brought man into existence. And man was created to be a person who possesses the characteristics of decision-making, goal-setting, and pursuing the goals that are set. Man was created for God’s glory, and that is the motive of God behind the creation of man and other creations as well. This is not because God needs fellowship or any other thing, but because the creation, including man, gives Him joy, Psalm 19:1. The heavens declare the glory of God.” God always find joy when His creations give glory to Him (Gruden 1994, 440).

Theoretical Framework

This is a theory in Anthropology in systematic theology. The conception of the image of God in human being in the history of Christian doctrines by Louis Berkhof is the Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and others (Berkoff, 2003). The Reformed holds that the image of God in human being includes the moral qualities of righteousness and holiness including the rational nature of human being. Lutherans see the image of God in man as endowed spiritual qualities.

While Roman Catholics view spirituality, freedom and immortality as constituting the image of God in human being, others like Anabaptists, Pelagians, and some Armenians maintain that human being was not yet the image of God but can only be through regeneration (Berkoff, 2003). Some rationalists hold that image of God in man is the “free personality of human, and the rational ethno-religious disposition and destiny to live in communion with God” (Berkoff, 2003).

Methodology

This study will be carried out using descriptive design method. A survey of theological anthropology from medieval period to the contemporary time will be carried out. Dictionaries of theology, relevant textbooks, journals, encyclopaedias, and other relevant materials will be consulted.

Biblical Background

The biblical data touching the image of God in man are found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible affirms that man was created in the image of God. The book of Genesis tells us that God created man in His image, forming man from the dust of the earth and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7. “The fact that God made man in his image and likeness delineates. All other distinguishing characteristics between humans and the animal world fall within its broad spectrum (www.UnitedChurchofGod.org, Man in the Image of God).

Henry is of the opinion that biblical discussions centre on the Hebrew words *selah* and *demut*, and the corresponding Greek terms *eikon* and *homoiosis*. Scripture employs these terms to affirm that humankind was fashioned in the image of God,” and that Jesus Christ, the divine Son, is the essential image of the invisible God (Elwell, 2001, 591-594). These two words provide a deeper understanding of the text’s root meaning in relation to the image of God. This extension of the New Testament presents Christ as the Son of the invisible God. The two words “image” and “like” are used synonymously and interchangeably, but they do not mean two different things; they mean the same thing, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament. In Gen. 1:26, the words are used, but Gen. 5:9, 9:6; I Cor. 11:7 and Col. 3:10 employed one of the two words. This image of God in which man was created is referred to as righteousness. God’s image in man is righteousness. The image also involved spirituality. This implies the spirit of God in man. God is a spirit, and those who will worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. John 4:24; Gen. 2:7.

The image of God in man is an immortal one. Man, as a result of God’s image, became an immortal being 1 Tim. 6:16. Because God is immortal, man was privileged to possess this quality through the image of God. The image of God in man makes man to be crowned over all other creation. This was firmly established in Psalm 8:5,6. “You have made them a little lower than the angel and crowned them with glory and honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.” According to Scripture, the essence of man consists in the fact that he is the image of God. This distinguishes man from all other creatures and stands supreme as the head and crown of the entire creation. The Scripture says that “man was created in

the image and likeness of God. Gen. 1:26;27. Berkoff is of the opinion that Man is not only the crown of creation but also the object of God's special care (Berkoff, 2003). Man is the supreme or overseer of all other creatures that God has made. Nothing among all the creations was rated higher than made. Man to God is purely an object of care. God made man for man to be taken care of by God.

Early Church View of the Image of God in Man

Many of the early church fathers were influenced in some areas by philosophy, which informed their understanding of the *imago Dei*. Justin Martyr wrote: "When God created man, he endowed him with the sense of understanding, of choosing the truths and of doing right (Lewis and Demarest 1989, 673). This implies that through the image of God in man, man has all it takes to live right with God. Irenaeus, is the first Father to discuss the *imago* systematically, "sai mind there is a distinction between "image" and "likeness" (Gen. 1:26). He defined the former as the endowments of a rational mind and a free will retained after the fall, and later as the gratuitous life of the spirit lost at Eden but restored by Grace." This means that at the fall a spirit's life was lost and regained at the death and resurrection of the last Adam (Jesus Christ). He further states that the composition of the unsaved and saved person is dichotomous, with the unsaved consisting of body and soul, while the saved consists of body, soul, and spirit, which is trichotomous (Lewis and Demarest 1989, 673).

Clement of Alexandria also distinguished between "imago" and "likeness"; he defined the former as the power of reason and free will, and the latter as moral excellence, which may grow or diminish (Lewis and Demarest 1989, 673). This implies that the image of God in man endows man with the power to reason on any decision to be made, allowing man to have free will in decision-making and guiding him to live a morally balanced life. Gregory of Nyssa also places the *imago* chiefly in the intellect. The formation of man is to serve as an instrument of reasoning. Soul derived its perfection in that which is intellectual and rational. This image of God in humanity refers to intelligence and rational knowledge (Lewis and Demarest 1989, 673). Which means that this image distinguished man from all other creations?

Concept of Imago Dei

The image of God in humanity is the foremost thing that makes humanity relevant in all its aspects. All other things are created, including humankind, but humankind was made a living soul through the breath of God. God, in His sovereignty, makes all things by his words, but he made humankind in his image after his likeness. This makes a man unique and very special from all other creatures. "Man is designed in the image of God, but he is not God. Man is created and thus a creature, but not a mere creature (Stagg 1911, 25). This implies that humankind is not equal to God. God's image in man does not equate man to become God. God created man in His image. (Genesis 1:26, 27). This does not mean that man was created in the image of God in terms of his physical shape. This would be unattainable because God is a spirit.

Nevertheless, God made man in His image. He reproduced Himself. He did not produce gods, but He reproduced a spiritual aspect of Himself in man (Epp 1970, 16). In other words, He

created man so that man would answer only to Him. Man is to have fellowship and enjoyment with God and be responsible only to God (Epp 1970, 17). This implies that the image does not equate humankind to God. This is against the idea of Comte, the founder of positivism in France. “Who sees humanity as the new God? He further stated that in positivist religion, the object of worship is a Being (Humanity) that has a relative, modifiable, and perfectible nature (Epp 1970, 17). This is a significant error: the created human has become God, who made him in his image. This is a purely misconceived notion that humankind, which has a beginning and was created, can be equal to God.

“Man is not only a creature; however, he is also a person, and to be a person means to have a kind of independence, not absolute but relative (Epp 1970, 350). This implies that man is a creature created by God or caused to exist; man did not just exist. It was God’s order that brought man into existence. Furthermore, a man is created to be a person who possesses the characteristics of decision-making, goal-setting, and pursues the goals set. Man was created for God’s glory, and that is the motive of God behind the creation of man and other creations as well. This is not because God needs fellowship or anything, but because of the creation, including giving Him joy, Psalm 19:1. The heavens declare the glory of God.” God always find joy when we give glory to Him (Gruden 1994, 440).

This sense of man’s unique position within the world of created things, nourished by law and history, receives conscious formulation and summary in the two accounts of creation and the nature hymn of Psalm 8.

The factor common to all these documents is their vision of man as the noblest work of God’s creation and thus as the one to whom the creator has promised the position of ruler in this world (Eichrodt 1967, 120). Psalm 8 and Genesis 2 are the most closely akin in their particular stress on the difference in power between Humans and other creatures. Of the two texts, Psalms 8 exhibits it in its more naïve form, attributing man’s position simply to the sovereign will of the omnipotent God and thus putting it beyond further discussion. Just as God is king in the heavenly realm, so a man carrying out his commission is the king of the earthly realm, crowned with glory and honour, and by his statue only a little lower than the inhabitants of heaven (Eichrodt 1967, 121-122).

Furthermore, the Yahwist’s creation story explains how a man becomes a living being. Life is a divine gift, bestowed directly by God through the insufflations of the *samayim*, the breath of life. Man receives his life by a particular act of God and is thus treated as an independent spiritual and accorded a closer association with God than an animal (Eichrodt 1967, 121). On the other hand, man consists of earthly matter, which makes him dust and ashes, yet he can also claim to possess a spiritual potentiality that alone makes him a conscious ego (Eichrodt 1967, 125). Man is not only a creature; he is also a person.

Moreover, being a person means having a kind of independence, not absolute but relative. Being a person means being able to make decisions (Hoekema, 1986, 5). Erickson said every human being is God’s creature made in God’s image. God endowed each of them with the powers of personality that make it possible for us to worship and serve him (Erickson 2013, 474). There are many views and theories on human existence, but this work will concentrate entirely on

Christian views. One of the fundamental presuppositions is the Christian view of humanity, which posits that belief in God as the creator and sustainer leads to the understanding that the human person does not exist independently, but rather as a creature of God (Erickson 2013, 475). “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ... And so, God created man” (Gen. 1:1, 27). This implies that human existence is centred on God.

Man’s first blunder confused his being in the image of God with being God. Adam and his wife Eve were not content to be like God; they sought to be God. They saw God as a limit and as a threat. They saw God destroying their fulfilment by restricting their existence, holding them back from the fruit they needed (Stagg 1911, 30). The revelation in Genesis 3 tells us that man was content with the uniqueness of his assigned position, in the image of God, with dominion over all creation. Man, desires more. He tried to set God aside and replace him with himself (Stagg 1911, 31). Pittenger said a man has always been a problem to himself.

Who is he? What is he for? Does he count for anything in the scheme of things? Is his significance limited to what he can get in the conventional three score and ten years of his life in this world? (Pittenger 1964, 13). Hence, the suffering that humans experience may likely originate from within themselves. Pittenger arrives at man’s conclusion, and man is a creatively dependent being made by God. Man is a creature with a purpose to be fulfilled. He is made for fellowship with God. Man is created for community with others. He shares life as a member of the human race, all of whom are the children of God. Man is neither soul alone nor body alone, but body-soul unity; he is made of the dust of the earth and yet has been “breathed” into life by the spirit of God. Man is in defection from the purpose for which he was created; he is a sinner, estranged from God with whom he is made (Pittenger 1964, 19).

The image of God in humanity is essential to his understanding of what makes him human. The implication of the image of God should inspire them and set the parameters for their view of humanity (Erickson 2013, 457). Pannenberg says that, as instinct guides the behaviour of animals, so the image of God guides human beings; instinct and the image of God alike have as their function to give direction to the life of the creature, rather than living it at the mercy of the murderous chance of random impressions (O’Connell 1985, 45). He further said that the image of God, which is impressed “on the mind” of human beings, functions appropriately as a teleological concept and standard for their behaviour (O’Connell 1985, 46). This implies that the image of God is a regulator of human behaviour. Here are the eight features in this definition, which are not aimed to be meticulous but are the least part of the primary features which reveal God’s image in humankind:

(1). A Personal creature – the personality of God, which is exceptional in the three Persons of the Trinity, is reflected in human persons as well. Human beings are themselves with individual personhood. Each person has a personal centre of identity, often associated with the soul or mind (O’Connell 1985, 9). Personhood, which is the basis of consciousness, personal memory, self-consciousness, self-directedness, self-transcendence, purpose, and intentionality, is one of the most apparent manifestations of the image of God in humankind. Their capacity to develop an

intention and make decisions as free agents, which initiate changes in the created world, is one of the most apparent manifestations of the image of God in humankind (O'Connell 1985, 9).

(2). A Spiritual Being – God who is a Spirit (John 4:24), and He is the creator of the spirit within each human being, so that they can worship Him in spirit and truth. Humans have an innate need for God, a void that only God can fill. A relational Being – in the classic's locus for the creation of the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), it is notable that both God and humans are described as being in a connection. Humankind is a social being. Man is not just capable of relating; they need relationships (Lemke, 9 – 10). Humanity finds fulfilment only when they are appropriately related to God and other humans, a duty that Jesus Christ described as the first and second greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36-40; cf. Deut. 6:5).

(3). A rational/Creative Being – God is omniscient and wise (Rom. 16:27; 1Tim. 1:17; Jude 25). Humankind, of course, can never approach the completeness of divine knowledge. Moreover, God created humans with minds and the capacity for reason. When they exercise rationality and creativity, they reflect God's nature. Humankind is, after all, homo sapiens – thinking beings. Relationality is probably mentioned most consistently through Christian history as the one trait that exemplifies the image of God in persons, perhaps mainly because of the high place that reason held in the Greek philosophical worldview of the time. However, although this is one of the characteristics of God's nature that is reflected in human nature, it is not the only significant feature of either God or humans (Lemke, 9–10).

(4). A Volitional/Free Being – God is free and sovereign, and He creates humans with free will. Freedom is God's most valuable but precarious offering to humanity. God created humankind in His own image (rather than as common animals). He offered humankind the opportunity of acting in disobedience to Him. I establish a perspective of action theory, which I describe as soft libertarianism. A Moral nature – God is holy, and He created humankind to be holy (Matt. 5:48; Rev. 4:8). God created a conscience within all humanity (Rom. 2:14-15). Conscience can be mistreated, but it is a fraction of the innate hardware of every personality of man. Morality comes before volition because, without a moral will, one cannot have moral accountability. Good conduct is not commendable if they are not unreservedly selected, and evil deeds are not justly punishable if they are not chosen unreservedly (Lemke, 11).

(5). A Responsible Being – God has changed humans with dominion over the world. He created (Gen. 26-28; Ps. 8:5-6). This may be an effect of God's image, other than the essence of man's existence, but being God's agent or steward requires a foundational essence competent to oversee all categories of creation. God has proffered persons the capacity to stand for Him and also to rule over all the earth. An emotional creature – God is love, and He created humans with the ability to love (I John 4:7-20). Although some theologians affirm a doctrine of responsibility, the majority of Christian theologians interpret scriptural language, which portrays God as caring and loving towards individuals but angry towards sin (Lemke, 12–14).

(6). A Relational Creature – in the classic locus for the creation of the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), it is notable that both God and humankind are explained as being in a relationship. God is relational, and this is an inherent component of man's existence. Humankind is a social being, and

humans cannot survive without relationships (Lemke, 11). Man, only finds fulfilment in a proper relationship with God and other humans, a task that Jesus described as the first and second commandments (Matt. 22:36-40; cf. Deut. 6:5).

(7). A Moral Being – God is holy, and He created humankind to be holy (Matt. 5:48; Rev. 4:8). God created a conscience within all humanity (Rom. 2:14-15). Conscience can be scared or ignored, but it is part of the innate hardware of every human. Morality presupposes volition because one could not have moral responsibility without a moral strength of character. Good conduct is not praised as commendable if they are not freely chosen, while evil conduct is not justifiably punishable if it is not freely chosen (Lemke, 15).

(8). An Emotional Being – God is love, and He created humankind with the ability to love (I John 4:7-20). While some theologians affirm a doctrine of impassibility, most Christian theologians understand the scriptural language that describes God as caring and loving towards persons, yet angry towards sin. Although the Greek philosophical worldview has been a factor that led numerous early Christian theologians to downplay or refute the role of emotion, the Bible effectively portrays emotion when used accurately as a positive reflection of the image of God (Lemke, 16).

The Significant of Imago Dei to Contemporary Christian: A Theological Exploration

Martin Luther said the image of God is a foundational concept for understanding humans' significance and purpose. This will help them understand how they are made in God's image, enabling us to see the basis for the dignity and purpose of their lives and works. Understanding this concept is an eye-opener, allowing them to recognise their purpose and value on earth. According to Gen. 1:26-28, man's worth is connected to their creator. If God is of great and estimable worth, then human beings, made in his image, must be of great value, too. Because of the cost and the value of the creator, humankind is of great inestimable value. Because they are made in his image and likeness. The image of God in humanity appreciates their position in God strongly. "Seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:6.

Believers are not ordinary people. According to C.S. Lewis in his book titled *The Weight of Glory*. There are no ordinary people. One has never met a mere mortal. Every interaction, whether saved or unsaved, even with the irrelevant people to one, is not ordinary, because they are the image of God. They should not focus on their sin for long without appreciating the grace of God and our dignity. Humans should not forget their sinfulness, and at the same time, they should not capitalise on it, but for the grace of God made available to them. According to Apostle Paul in I Cor. 15:9-10; I Tim. 1:16 (Lewis and Demarest 1989, 673). "Human person is small and great at the same time, creature and "Co-Creator," sinner and "Co-redeemer," they are moulded from the earth and called to them in the dominion of God (Athappilly 1943). This is a mystery that is revealed in detail through the history of Jesus. Who provided answers to the question about the human person? They are significant because the image of God in man establishes man's involvement in all the major works of God. This revelation is given through the incarnate God.

Gregory Naziancen says, "Acknowledge that you have been made divine." Humankind is significant because they have been made in the image of God. The image of God in humanity

established their divinity. This is because their God is divine, and He created them in His own image and likeness; hence, the divinity of humanity is established from the very beginning. “Man is man according to the Christian interpretation of life because he was made in the image of his maker, whose image he continues to bear in a sadly disfigured form (Mackay, Heritage and Destiny 1943, 45). The image of God in humanity establishes him as a man. Man is the image and likeness of God that man carried. The image of God in humanity is one of pure love. That is the purpose of God in allowing humans to bear His image and to love as He loves. To establish that a man carries or bears the image of God, there must be full evidence of Godly love in him.

Ochler opines that Man as a free being is set over nature, and designed to hold communion with God and be His representative on earth.” The image of God in man affords man to commune with God, and it makes man God’s representative on earth. Man is to represent God in all ramifications and, thereby returning glory to God, man is to rule over all other creatures and maintain communion with God. The image of God in man is not only that humans are God’s representative, but that they are representative of God. Being like God, humankind reflects nature; that is, when one looks at a human being, something of the nature of God is revealed, which can be seen nowhere else (Mackay, 1943, p. 45). The image of God in humanity makes humans God’s representation on earth, as every aspect of God is fully manifested in human life.

Conclusion

The image and likeness of God in humankind is beyond plasticity or cosmetic manifestation. It carries the weight of dignity, integrity, values and significance of humanhood as well as God-human relationship. Dignity in the sense of self-worth and respect that he carries while integrity demonstrate high moral principles and trustworthiness of his existence. Values and significance of humanhood showcase the qualities that guide various decision making in human being. Hence, in order to actualize the image of God in man, redemption of human soul is inevitable. Which is the basis of Christ work for humanity.

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