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DEFENSE OF THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION  
OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

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by  
David Samuel Casas  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEFENSE OF THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION  
OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

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I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Ann, and to our children, Ellie and Jonathan.  
Your tireless support, prayers, and constant encouragement have been the undergirding of  
this endeavor. I thank the Lord for each one of you every day.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	ancient Near East
ANF	Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANET	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd ed. with supplement
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> .
GHCLOT	Wilhelm Gesenius, <i>Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament</i>
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johan Jakob Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	Clendenen, Mathews and Dockery, eds., The New American Commentary
NIDOTTE	Willem VanGemeren, <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NPNF	Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i>
TDOT	G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TLOT	Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, <i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>

## PREFACE

My journey through the *imago Dei* began on a spring afternoon sitting in the seminary office of Dr. Russell Fuller, where a thirty-minute admissions meeting turned into a four-hour conversation that ranged from our mutual Georgia homes to politics, old Hollywood, and, of course, doctoral work. It was here that Dr. Fuller suggested the topic, which immediately sparked not only my interest, but also a life-long pursuit. I am so grateful to those hours that spring day because they also started a close friendship with someone I consider a mentor.

As I pursued my investigations into this challenging topic, I was led to the theological anthropology of Dr. Gregg Allison. I not only found myself merging my doctoral studies in Old Testament and Hebrew with theology, but also gained another mentor and friend. Although we did not see, nor continue to see, eye-to-eye on the *imago Dei*, Dr. Allison helped form my anthropology and my ecclesiology. I am deeply grateful for the strong friendship the Lord has allowed us to have that has gone beyond academic conversation, and into the realms of future church-planting, good food to feed our forever-developing foodie lifestyle, and of course, the Cubs.

No Old Testament formation is complete without a thorough investigation into the historical, geographical, literary, and religious life of Israel, and it was Dr. T. J. Betts that led me in those footsteps. His mild-mannered approach to the literature of the Old Testament provided a sense of balance and conviction that strengthened my faith in the sufficiency of Scripture. I am forever grateful that the Lord allowed these great men into my life, and that the Holy Spirit used them for my formation.

Although the long library hours and classroom time is foundational for a project this large, it could not have been done without the countless persons that have

contributed in one way or another to its completion. I want to thank Dr. James Flanagan for believing in me enough to hire me and to talk me into completing a PhD. His unwavering support of my work and his continual guidance and encouragement have been indispensable. Through it all, he has been a mentor, a guide, and a friend. Joining Dr. Flanagan are my colleagues from Luther Rice. I am thankful to Dr. Scott Henderson for exploring human nature and the soul with me by introducing me to John Cooper and Eric LaRock, which greatly informed the neuroscientific and philosophical arguments in favor of the spiritual interpretation of the *imago Dei*. Dr. Mark Owens, who introduced me to Francis Watson and countless other authors, and continually checked on my progress, helped me sharpen my thinking regarding the image of God, and I am forever grateful. Last, but certainly not least, are Dr. David Mapes and Dr. William Wilson. I want to thank Dr. Mapes for being my first professor of theology, and for laying the foundations of my theological training. Dr. Wilson and I have shared many conversations on our weekly commutes to work, and his friendship and encouragement have been invaluable.

As I reflect, I am overwhelmed by so many that God has placed in my life and influenced this project. I want to thank Dr. Terry Mortensen for introducing me to the research of John Oswalt and for allowing me to contribute a chapter to *Searching for Adam*, which served to organize my thoughts regarding this project. I thank my former pastor, Chris Anderson, for his encouragement in the early stages of my writing and for the use of his quiet office on occasions I needed it most! I am also thankful to my dear friend, Steve Ham, for the many, many conversations exploring together the *imago Dei* over sips of coffee and bites of Vegemite. But most importantly, I thank him for his friendship and for being an example to me in his commitment to the Gospel and biblical inerrancy.

I am thankful to Dr. Aaron Menikoff, for being not only my pastor, but also my friend and discipler. He has been an encouragement through the last leg of this

journey. I am grateful for the whole Menikoff family for the quick friendship they have forged with my family in welcoming us to Mount Vernon Baptist Church. To our new church family at MVBC, thank you for the prayers and encouragement.

Finally, there are those that no matter the effort put into research and writing, I know that without them this dissertation would have never begun or have been completed. The Sutherlands: Chuck, Janice, David, and Rhonda; thank you for the encouragement and prayers throughout this entire process. Particularly Janice, who made me promise that she be the first one to read this dissertation. I hope that it is an encouragement to you! Chip and Amy Rogers: for allowing my family and I to utilize your place on the beach for rest and relaxation while I completed the writing. Mom, tío and tía; thank you for your constant prayers. The Casas clan: Ann, Ellie, and Jonathan, I love you so much! My life would be truly incomplete without you. My dear Ann, my love, thank you for your perseverance, encouragement, prayers, and your love. And to my Lord Jesus Christ — Lord you know that in the end these words mean so little compared to your infinite glory, vast wisdom, and deep love. Thank you for saving me and for allowing me a small glimpse into your eternal truth.

David Casas

Lawrenceville, Georgia

May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Secularists and atheists view man<sup>1</sup> as simply a material being like all other animals. In many ways, this is the predominant view of popular culture. According to this view, man may have evolutionary advantages over the animals in his reason, in his communication, and in some physical abilities. But man is not a spiritual or sacred being, with a purpose and destiny higher than that of the animals. In the end, man lives and dies like the beast. Thus concentration camps, gulags, killing fields, and abortion clinics are all monuments to secularism and atheism. Such degraded views of man—particularly in denying that man is made in the image of God—inevitably institutionalizes human misery.

God’s word stands in contrast to this view. Man is described as the pinnacle of God’s handiwork. On the sixth day of creation, as his final work, God created man as a physical and spiritual being. His physical aspect<sup>2</sup> was formed from the ground (Gen 2:7)<sup>3</sup> and his spiritual aspect<sup>4</sup> came from God (Eccl 12:7). The animals, created on day five, resemble man in that they were also formed from the ground (Gen 2:19) and have the breath of life (Gen 1:30; 6:17; 7:15, 22; Eccl 3:19). But although the animals resemble

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this dissertation, the generic term “man” will be utilized to refer to male and female humankind.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout this dissertation, man’s “physical aspect” is defined as the physical body with its organs.

<sup>3</sup>Unless noted, all Scripture references are from The English Standard Version.

<sup>4</sup>Throughout this dissertation, “spiritual aspect” is defined as man’s soul/spirit.

man in certain aspects, man surpasses them because God breathed directly into man and because he made man in his own image. Thus God crowned man with glory and majesty to rule over the works of his hand (Ps 8:5-6).

But what exactly is the image of God? The answers and applications of such a question are essential to the Christian because they dictate human happiness or wretchedness—and often life and death. The image of God consists of the spiritual part of man that reflects the character of God and is the only firm basis for advocating the dignity of man, the sanctity of life, and the gracious redemption of sinners.

The image of God is further explained in Genesis 1:26 by the complementary prepositional phrase, “according to our likeness.” *Likeness* means “resemblance” or “similitude.”<sup>5</sup> Often used in comparisons (something is like something else), *likeness* usually describes appearances (something resembles something else in appearance). Ezekiel, for example, compares the likeness (appearance) of the faces of heavenly beings to the face of man (Ezek 1:10). The preposition in the phrase “*according to his likeness*” means *the like of, like, or as*, so God created man in his image *as the like of* his likeness. Simply put, God’s image reflects similarities between God and man.

But how is man similar to God? Certainly, the resemblance excludes the physical body because God is a spirit (John 4:24) and invisible (Col 1:15; 1Tim 1:17; 6:16). Moreover, it excludes creaturely limitations because God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all his attributes (Ps 90:2; Mal 3:6; Jer 23:24). Man resembles God in having a free, rational, personal spirit, including a conscience with God’s law written

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<sup>5</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2000), 198a.

upon his heart (Rom 2:14-16); therefore, man can rule over nature in a way similar to how God reigns.<sup>6</sup> The Targums explain man's rational, personal spirit in Genesis 2:7, "and it (the breath of life) became in man as a spirit that speaks." Human beings, in contrast with the animals, can reason, converse, and fellowship with each other. But most important, because man resembles God spiritually, he can fellowship with God.

In the greater part of church history little controversy surrounded the nature of the image of God.<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, the soul or the spiritual part of the human being served as the focal point of God's image. Recently, however, many have departed from this understanding. Some see man created *as* the image of God: resembling Him in the physical body. Bruce Waltke draws on the conclusions of Clines and Hart suggesting that image refers to human beings as a psychosomatic unity that "functions to express, not to depict" God.<sup>8</sup> In essence, man is made *as God's image* as opposed to *in God's image*. Furthermore, drawing on parallels of "image" and "likeness" on steles of ancient Near Eastern kings, he advocates for the image of God as man's vice regency on earth to

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<sup>6</sup>Note also that it does not devalue the human body, because together with the spirit that bears the image of God, man is a living being. And as a physical being, he rules over physical nature. Although I reject the recent views that the body is part of the image of God, the traditional understanding of the image of God does not devalue the body. Indeed, because man's spirit bears God's image, man's body becomes a type of temple housing God's image, just as the Holy Spirit residing with our spirit makes the body of a Christian the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Accordingly, the Scriptures often speak of our bodies as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13), as putting to death the deeds of the body as dominated by sin (Rom 8:13), and as presenting our bodies living and holy sacrifices (Rom 12:1). The image of God elevates the body above all earthly creation.

<sup>7</sup>With little variation, the church fathers, as well as Talmudic rabbi, would agree with Novatian, who wrote, "[Man was] made in the image of God, to whom He [God] imparted mind, and reason, and foresight, that he might imitate God; and although the first elements of his body were earthly, yet the substance was inspired by a heavenly and divine breathing." Novatian, "A Treatise of Novatian Concerning the Trinity," in *ANF*, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Wallis (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886), 612.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 65-66.

rule creation in place of God.<sup>9</sup> Anthony Hoekema, Eugene Merrill, John Walton and Bill Arnold, likewise, advocate for the image of God as man's vice regency on the earth to rule creation in place of God. All conclude that man is not made *in* the image of God, but made *as* the image of God; therefore, as Arnold succinctly wrote, "humans are created to function as the divine image through the exercise of 'dominion' and 'rule.'"<sup>10</sup>

This modern view, however, presents problems. If God is a spirit, how is man like him physically? If man's physical nature or his function on earth constitutes the image of God, at death man would cease being an image-bearer, or at best, partially bear the image. Man's value and dignity extend beyond his physical nature to something inward: his spiritual qualities.<sup>11</sup> In New Testament terms, it is the renewing of God's image through the Gospel that points to image bearing as something spiritual; as something that is found in man's inner being, not his role. Paul exhorted that while the physical aspect of the believer is returning to dust, the spiritual aspect is renewed every day (2 Cor 4:16).

### **Thesis**

Although modern scholarship, particularly Old Testament scholarship, have argued for man's function through his physical body as the meaning of or forming an integral part of the image of God, the view that the image of God is found in the spiritual aspect of the human being is more faithful to the biblical text.

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<sup>9</sup>Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 65-66.

<sup>10</sup>Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 45.

<sup>11</sup>When I use the terms "spiritual qualities" or "spiritual things," I am referring to non-physical attributes that pertain to the soul/spirit, such as love, gentleness, holiness, righteousness, knowledge, etc. The Apostle Paul refers to them as spiritual things (1 Cor 9:11), fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and spiritual mindedness (Rom 8:6).

## **Methodology**

This dissertation will establish the thesis by providing a historical-grammatical reading of the relevant texts and a proper theological understanding of the image and likeness of God.

## **Procedure**

The rest of this chapter will provide the history of interpretation by describing the important personalities and their methods. Chapter 2 discusses the data that supports the thesis by analyzing selected issues in current scholarship that leads to a physical and functional view of the image of God and the disagreements to their conclusions. Chapter 3 provides a historical-grammatical reading of selected texts that demonstrate the reasonableness of a spiritual interpretation<sup>12</sup> of image of God and why it should still be defended. Chapter 4 examines the counter claims to the thesis and presents a defense to the findings of this study. Chapter 5 briefly summarizes the most important findings and provides a conclusion.

## **The History of Interpretation**

As Walter Vogels accurately surmises, the voluminous attention that has been given to the concept and meaning of the image of God seems disproportionate considering that it is not a central theme of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, many scholars have attempted to document the varying historical viewpoints on the subject.<sup>14</sup> To present an

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<sup>12</sup>I am utilizing the nomenclature of modern Old Testament scholarship. Throughout the history of interpretation, the differing views on the image of God are placed into three major categories: (1) the substantive theories, which include both the spiritual interpretation (the view that the image is found in soul/spirit and in the qualities or attributes thereof), and the physical interpretation (the view that the image is best represented by the physical body); (3) the functional interpretation: the view that the image is best represented in the Divine mandate to rule the earth; and (4) the relational interpretation: the view that the image is best represented in man's relationship with God and in his relationship with other humans, particularly of the opposite gender.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Vogels, "The Human Person in the Image of God (Gn 1,26)," *Science et Esprit* 46, no. 2 (1994): 189.

<sup>14</sup>For an excellent historical overview of the various positions, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 33-65; James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2000), 1:394-402;

accurate picture of the history of interpretation will require some measure of selectivity due to space restrictions; moreover, it will inevitably exclude certain scholarly points made throughout the centuries, particularly feminist and evolutionary theories. The perspectives that will be discussed include the rabbis, followed by the church fathers, the medieval scholars, the reformers, and conclude with a broad representation of key modern scholars.

### **Rabbinic Teaching and the Image of God**

Rabbinic interpretation of the image of God, and the entirety of Scripture for that matter, is methodical and meticulous and one could be assured that subjects are treated with care. Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Ramban as his disciples know him, approached Torah with awe and trepidation, “I shall begin to write . . . with terror, with fear, with trembling, with sweat, and dread . . . as is my little wisdom and brief knowledge against the hidden matters of the Torah, that lie hidden in her house, concealed in her room.”<sup>15</sup> The rabbis serve as examples of how carefully Scripture must be approached; an exhortation to which the modern scholar would do well to adhere. Ben Sira warned,

Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, and into the things that are hidden from thee enquire thou not. In what is permitted to thee instruct thyself; thou hast no business with secret things.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the sacredness of Scripture, the rabbinic spiritual interpretation of the image

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R. Larry Overstreet, “Man in the Image of God: A Reappraisal,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 43-58. A. Jónsson Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, trans. Lorraine Svendsen, *Coniectanea Biblica* 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), provides an excellent exposition on twentieth century research on the image of God. Berkof especially focuses on the church fathers, Luther vs. Calvin, and the Socinians and Arminians vs. Schleiermacher. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 202-3. John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 601-17, provides a succinct summary of the history of interpretation.

<sup>15</sup>Charles B. Chavel, trans., *Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on The Torah: (Bereshis) Genesis* (New York: Shilo, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>16</sup>Talund and Hagigah, *Hagigah: A Translation of the Treatise Chagigah from the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Annesley William Streane (London: Cambridge University, 1891), Chagigah 13a.

of God relied on a historical-grammatical approach to the text, and in the majority of instances extra-biblical sources or philosophy was avoided.<sup>17</sup>

The rabbis understood the deliberate creation of man as the beginning of God's spiritual work in a material universe. Rabbi Zlotowitz, elaborating on rabbinic thought on this matter, observed man's role as a spiritual endeavor,

Thus, God satisfied the motive of creation: He would be able to confer good upon man . . . . Man could attain it only by elevating the spiritual in himself and by uniting it with the spiritual in creation . . . . By uniting his intellect with that of God through the study of Torah and by perfecting his deeds through the performance of the commandments, man earns the degree of perfection that it is possible for him to attain, and the degree of reward that God seeks to give.<sup>18</sup>

Rabbi Abarbanel claimed that the divine deliberation in man's creation was evidence that God did not associate humanity with the earth, but instead served as "the deepest involvement of Divine Providence and wisdom."<sup>19</sup> The Rabbis noted that concerning the beasts, God commanded, "Let the earth bring forth," but in the case of man, God said, "Let us make man," in order to clearly distinguish man's spirituality. Ramban called הַפְּעֻלָּה a special utterance in which the earth produced "the body [of man] from its elements as it did with cattle and beasts . . . and He, blessed be He, to give the spirit from His mouth."<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Kimhi (Radak) related Adam's name to אָדָם in order to highlight his constitution, now endowed with a spiritual element. He wrote,

When God created man from the upper and lower elements He called him Adam, as

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<sup>17</sup>Jacob Jervell's comprehensive study on rabbinic approaches to the *imago Dei* found that interpretation fell into two camps. The first is what he called the "ethical-anthropological interpretation" which refers to man as an ethical creature. Man is more like God when he knows and obeys the Torah. The second, he called the "historical-speculative interpretation," which focused on Adam alone as created in God's image. Jervell's research may have yielded such contrasts; nevertheless, the Sages were almost unanimous in that the image of God refers to man as a spiritual creature, and who relates directly with God, rather than simply being an ethical creature alone. Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei. Gen 1, 26 F. Im Spätjudentum, in Der Gnosis und in Den Paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 84-112.

<sup>18</sup>Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (New York: Mesorah, 1977), 8.

<sup>19</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 67.

<sup>20</sup>Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides)*, 52.

if to say, Although his spirit is from the heavens, he is nevertheless *adam*, for his body was formed from the *adamah*.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) suggested that the name Adam was derived from *דמה* as in Isaiah 14:14, “I will make myself like the Most High.” He noted, “Because man is in the likeness of God.”<sup>22</sup> In the rabbinic mind, God’s intimate involvement in man’s creation was to emphasize the endowment of his unique spiritual qualities found in his soul.

The rabbinic spiritual emphasis on man’s creation is directly linked to the fact that man was created in God’s image. Rabbi Abarbanel associated *צַלְמֵם* with the word *צַל* in order to illustrate how man is related to his Creator. He wrote that man must follow God’s every way, “as a shadow which faithfully follows the movements of its illuminated form.”<sup>23</sup> Interpreting Abarbanel’s conclusions regarding Genesis 1:27, Zlotowitz understood man’s creation in God’s image as a strictly spiritual action:

‘Created’ regarding man refers not to his physical formation but to man’s creation — from nothingness — as a being endowed, in God’s ‘image,’ with reason and intellect; the first such creature in the Universe. And similarly, wherever else the verb appears it is to be so interpreted.<sup>24</sup>

Speaking in more plain terms, Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman (the Vilna Gaon) explained that “image” refers to spiritual image and content, and thus “Man was also granted a degree of divine holiness so that he might properly serve God.”<sup>25</sup> In another place, he explained that “in his image” refers to “an image commensurate with his lofty soul.”<sup>26</sup> In his commentary on the adjoining prepositional phrase “after our likeness”

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<sup>21</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 69.

<sup>22</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 69.

<sup>23</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 70.

<sup>24</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 32.

<sup>25</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 70.

<sup>26</sup>Rabbi Malbim elaborated on Vilna Gaon’s rendering and wrote that the verb “created” is used because it refers to the creation *ex nihilo* of man’s living soul, something unprecedented in creation. Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 72.

(Gen 1:26), R. Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi) associated כְּדַמּוּתוֹ with the ability “to understand and to gain wisdom.”<sup>27</sup> He noted that man was made “with a stamp like a coin,” and yet he observed that all men are physically different, unlike a coin.<sup>28</sup> Rashi was making an obvious inference to a spiritual interpretation of the image of God. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv added that reason alone is what makes man an image-bearer, “Man’s God-like uniqueness lies in his willingness always to utilize his intellect as the basis of his decisions.”<sup>29</sup> Ramban concluded that both צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת speak to man’s similarity to both his physical and spiritual origins, but the reason for the spiritual similarity is due to the נִפְשׁוֹ being immortal.<sup>30</sup> Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam) elaborated further and included human volition:

Man alone among the living creatures is endowed — like his Creator — with moral freedom and will. He is capable of knowing and loving God and of holding spiritual communion with Him; and man alone can guide his actions in accordance with reason. He is therefore said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty.<sup>31</sup>

There is no question that the Rabbis understood the image of God as the spiritual qualities of humanity, men and women alike.<sup>32</sup> Zlotowitz summarized the rabbinic position best by affirming that *created in the image of God* describes man’s spiritual resemblance to God.<sup>33</sup> Whether the mind and the soul were identified as man’s chief

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<sup>27</sup>Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg et al., eds., *Sapirstein Edition Rashi: The Torah with Rashi’s Commentary Translated, Annotated and Elucidated* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1999), 1:16.

<sup>28</sup>Herczeg et al., *Sapirstein Edition Rashi*, 1:17.

<sup>29</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 70.

<sup>30</sup>Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides)*, 53.

<sup>31</sup>Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 70.

<sup>32</sup>Rabbi Samson Hirsch noted that although all living creatures were created in both sexes, this is noted specifically only in the case of human beings to stress that both sexes were created directly by God in equal likeness to Him. Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 73.

<sup>33</sup>Zlotowitz writes, “Taken in sum total, then, the two parallel terms ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ describe man in his spiritual resemblance to his Creator: his endowment with the intellectual perception that gives him preeminence over the animals, that guides him consciously in the exercise of his free-choice, his moral sense of right and wrong, and finally that gives man his fundamental distinction of approximating some spiritual resemblance to his Creator.” Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis*, 71.

divine similarity, or man's volition pinpointed as the locus of the likeness, God's image was spiritually interpreted in the rabbinic mind.

### **The Church Fathers and the Image of God**

The church fathers overwhelmingly connected the image of God to spiritual things as opposed to physical things, with very few exceptions.<sup>34</sup> Berkhof suggested, "The early church fathers were quite agreed that the image of God in man consisted primarily in man's rational and moral characteristics, and in his capacity for holiness."<sup>35</sup> Irenæus elaborated further and believed that the image and likeness were lost at the fall, and were restored at salvation,<sup>36</sup> which would serve as a foundational premise for all the

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<sup>34</sup>Frederick McLeod disagrees with attributing a spiritual interpretation of the *imago Dei* to the Antiochene church fathers. He argues that for the Antiochene School the whole composite of soul and body is what constitutes a person resulting in man as the image of God, not in a bodily or spiritual sense, but only in relationship to his ability to rule. He therefore argued that the Antiochene School embraced the functional model of the image of God: the view that the *imago Dei* is best represented by the divine mandate to rule over the earth. Frederick G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University, 1999), 82-235. John Chrysostom (ca. 354-407) indeed seemed to be one of the original proponents of a functional view of the image of God. In the late fourth century, his congregation was under siege by Emperor Theodosius' retributions on a tax riot that destroyed many of the city's imperial statues. J. D. Douglas, "John Chrysostom," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Earle E. Cairns and James E. Ruark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 225. Chrysostom equated the authority of the emperor to the statue itself, and thus applied the same principle to the image of God. In his *Homilies on the Statues*, he explained, "For He said, 'Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness.' What is the sense of this, 'after our image, and after our likeness?' The image of government is that which is meant; and as there is no one in heaven superior to God, so let there be none upon earth superior to man. This then is one, and the first respect, in which He did him honour; by making him after His own image; and secondly, by providing us with this principality, not as a payment for services, but making it entirely the gift of His own love toward man; and thirdly, in that He conferred it upon us as a thing of nature." John Chrysostom, "The Homilies on the Statues," in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. W. R. W. Stephens (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1889), 7.3. However, in his exposition of Col 1:15, Chrysostom reasoned that if God is invisible, therefore his image must be invisible as well, "Paul declaring this point, and saying, that He [Christ] 'is the Image of the invisible God,' (Col 1:15). Now if He be the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an 'image.'" John Chrysostom, "Homilies on John," in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. G. T. Stupart (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1889), xv.1. In another place, he specifically connected the image of God to man's spiritual aspects, "Not for this did God create thee in His Image, but that thou mightest please Him, that thou mightest obtain the things to come, that thou mightest join the choir of Angels." John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians," in *NPNF*, ed. Hubert Schaff, Philip Kestell, and John Medley, trans. Talbot B. Chambers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1889), ix. Some, like McLeod, read Chrysostom and those of Antioch as being functional, while others, like myself, see traces of various positions. Therefore, it is difficult to classify the Antiochene church fathers.

<sup>35</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 202.

<sup>36</sup>Overstreet, "Man in the Image of God," 44.

church fathers that followed him.

First generation theologians possessed the advantage of direct teaching by the Twelve Apostles, and interpreted God's image as the possession of divine understanding or the demonstration of divinely inspired action—good works. Clement (ca. 96) in his letter to the Corinthian church related man's creaturely superiority to his ability to understand, which he attributed to the image of God. In his only mention of Genesis 1:26, he wrote, "Above all, with His holy and undefiled hands He formed man, the most excellent [of His creatures], and truly great through the understanding given him—the express likeness of His own image."<sup>37</sup> Ignatius (ca. 35-110) in his Philippian letter associated the image of God to the demonstration of Christian charity: "Love one another in the Lord, as being the images of God."<sup>38</sup> A statement by John of Damascus preserved from fragments of the writings of Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) stated, "As the good of the body is health, so the good of the soul is knowledge, which is indeed a kind of health of soul, by which a likeness to God is attained."<sup>39</sup> Every one remained in harmony with Pauline anthropology, which Gregg Allison succinctly summarized:

The first Christians were deeply influenced by their Jewish roots, especially the Hebrew Bible's teaching about God's creation of human beings in his image (Gen. 1:26-31). Paul picked up this idea in addressing God's work in sanctification of "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:9-10; cf. Eph. 4:22-24). Indeed, the apostle described the entire process of Christian growth as being progressively conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). This insistence on renewal of the divine image can only mean that the image, prior to salvation and this sanctification process, is tragically marred and dreadfully corrupted by sin. Thus, the early Christians affirmed both human dignity, because people are created in the image of God, and human depravity, because the image of God in people is warped and perverted by sin.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Clement of Rome, "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 1:13.

<sup>38</sup>Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philippians," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 1:119.

<sup>39</sup>Justin Martyr, "Other Fragments from the Lost Writings of Justin Martyr," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Alexander Roberts (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 1:302.

<sup>40</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand

Human dignity and human depravity provided the framework for a complex anthropology in the early church. Nevertheless both served foundational for connecting the image of God to spiritual things, specifically the loss of the image through sin and its restoration through salvation.

Irenæus (ca. 130-202) would be the first voice to contribute significantly to biblical anthropology in his polemic against gnostic heretics, and elaborate on how the image of God was lost at the fall and restored through salvation. In his defense of Christ's humanity, he explained that it was the incarnate Christ that would restore the image that Adam lost:

For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

It seems that Irenæus understood God's image as connected to spiritual things, particularly its restoration through the work of salvation. And yet there are statements he made which could be interpreted as ascribing the image to the physical. In the same treatise he wrote,

Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.<sup>42</sup>

In his attempt to explain how the image was lost by sin, Irenæus ascribed image to what remains of the original creation, the earthly part, and argued that without a restoration of the likeness through God's Spirit, man remains imperfect.<sup>43</sup> He rationalized that by

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Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 322.

<sup>41</sup>Irenæus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 1:446.

<sup>42</sup>Irenæus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," 531.

<sup>43</sup>Irenæus explained, "But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in

“receiving the Word of God as graft,”<sup>44</sup> a person would participate in works of righteousness—those things that pertain to a spiritual man—and “arrive at the pristine nature of man—that which was created after the image and likeness of God.”<sup>45</sup>

Although he included the human body in some of his explanations, it seems as though Irenæus understood image and likeness to refer to Christ’s image that restores man to a point that he may relate to an invisible God:

For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown* for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.<sup>46</sup>

The reestablishment of the likeness, as Irenæus understood it, occurred through a proper knowledge of God. He concluded, “For the knowledge of God renews man. And when he says, ‘after the image of the Creator,’ he sets forth the recapitulation of the same man, who was at the beginning made after the likeness of God.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, it seems that in relating the restoration of God’s image in man to the work of salvation, Irenæus understood the image of God as pertaining to the spiritual.

Tatian (ca. 120-180) approached the subject differently and narrowed the image of God to human immortality:

For the heavenly Logos, a spirit emanating from the Father and a Logos from the Logos-power, in imitation of the Father who begat Him made man an image of immortality, so that, as incorruption is with God, in like manner, man, sharing in a part of God, might have the immortal principle also.<sup>48</sup>

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his formation (in plasmate), but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect,” Irenæus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,” 532.

<sup>44</sup>Irenæus refers here to Jas 1:21, the “implanted word.”

<sup>45</sup>Irenæus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,” 536.

<sup>46</sup>Irenæus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,” 544.

<sup>47</sup>Irenæus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,” 538.

<sup>48</sup>Tatian, “Address of Tatian to the Greeks,” in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 2:67.

On that statement, Tatian rejected the idea of the image as rationality, pointing to animals, “irrational creatures,” as demonstrating some characteristics of understanding and knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Instead, image and likeness distinguish man far beyond what an animal can seemingly also do, and makes him god-like; “and I mean by man, not one who performs actions similar to those of animals, but one who has advanced far beyond mere humanity—to God Himself.”<sup>50</sup> Tatian, therefore, distinguished between the human soul and the spirit given by God; the latter being “an image and likeness of God,”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, if man has the indwelling spirit of God, then he is an image-bearer, contrariwise, he is no more than an animal with the exception of the ability to speak:

But the principal point to be spoken of now is, what is intended by the image and likeness of God. That which cannot be compared is no other than abstract being; but that which is compared is no other than that which is like. The perfect God is without flesh; but man is flesh. The bond of the flesh is the soul; that which encloses the soul is the flesh. Such is the nature of man’s constitution; and, if it be like a temple, God is pleased to dwell in it by the spirit, His representative; but, if it be not such a habitation, man excels the wild beasts in articulate language only,—in other respects his manner of life is like theirs, as one who is not a likeness of God.<sup>52</sup>

Like his contemporaries, Tatian understood that the image of an invisible God could not translate to a visible human except through his spiritual aspect — the soul. The redeemed soul is the immortal part of the redeemed human being, and by its very attributes, the most like God’s nature in the sense that He is an immortal spirit. If there is no comparison, there is no likeness, therefore, image bearing had to be spiritual.

Athenagoras (ca. 133-190) would attempt to merge the thinking of his contemporaries by combining man’s rational abilities to his immortality. The image of God, evinced by man’s understanding and rational judgment, was ultimately the guarantee of eternal existence:

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<sup>49</sup>Tatian, “Address,” 71.

<sup>50</sup>Tatian, “Address,” 71.

<sup>51</sup>Tatian, “Address,” 70.

<sup>52</sup>Tatian, “Address,” 71.

To those who bear upon them the image of the Creator Himself, and are endowed with understanding, and blessed with a rational judgment, the Creator has assigned perpetual duration, in order that, recognising their own Maker, and His power and skill, and obeying law and justice, they may pass their whole existence free from suffering, in the possession of those qualities with which they have bravely borne their preceding life, although they lived in corruptible and earthly bodies.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, it is the image of God in man's rational soul that differentiates him from the animals and serves as proof of perpetuity — as a promise, in this life, of eternal existence. Those spiritual qualities are what man will bring with him into the eternal state.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), the first voice of the next generation of church fathers seemed to emphasize the fruit of the Spirit as evidence for God's image in man. He argued on more than one occasion for the restoration of the image of God through knowing and growing in the knowledge of God through Christ Jesus. He reasoned that God's image could not be a physical representation, because God is immortal:

For conformity with the image and likeness is not meant of the body (for it were wrong for what is mortal to be made like what is immortal), but in mind and reason, on which fitly the Lord impresses the seal of likeness, both in respect of doing good and of exercising rule.<sup>54</sup>

In the *Prayer to the Paedagogus*, he expressed that the Lord grant to those that obey his Word, "That we may perfect the likeness of the image, and with all our power know Him who is the good God."<sup>55</sup> He described the "true Gnostic"<sup>56</sup> as one who lives a holy and

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<sup>53</sup>Athenagoras, "On the Resurrection of the Dead," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. B.P. Prattan (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 2:155.

<sup>54</sup>Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 2:370.

<sup>55</sup>Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," in *Fathers of the Second Century*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *ANF* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 2:295.

<sup>56</sup>Some modern scholars believe Clement's view of the *imago Dei* was tainted by Gnosticism. However, Hunter believes that Clement's utility of "true Gnostic" simply means "the ideal Christian," and does not necessarily point to Gnosticism's influence on his views. David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009), 112. In fact, according to Hunter, Clement blames Plato and Pythagoras for "holding excessively negative views of the body." Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity*, 106. Clement argues that the basic error of all heretics was their "hatred of what God has created." Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," 388. He also states that the true Christian learned "to love the creation of the God and Creator of all

sober life, and pursues good works; he is one “who is after the image and likeness of God, who imitates God as far as possible, deficient in none of the things which contribute to the likeness as far as compatible.”<sup>57</sup> Clement will lead the next generation of church fathers to continue to see image bearing as connected to spiritual things instead of physical things.

As a major theologian of the era, Tertullian (ca. 160-215) significantly contributed to the development of biblical anthropology as a whole.<sup>58</sup> He would also connect the image of God to the spiritual, but would depart from those before him by advocating that the image is best understood through human volition.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore it was proper that (he who is) the image and likeness of God should be formed with a free will and a mastery of himself; so that this very thing—namely, freedom of will and self-command—might be reckoned as the image and likeness of God in him.<sup>60</sup>

Tertullian did not simply isolate the image of God in man’s freewill as an aspect of his nature, but held to the view that God constituted man as a free person: the very essence of the spiritual aspect of man is “freedom and power of his will.”<sup>61</sup> Volition is what makes man spiritual and that is the expression of God’s image. “He expressed his likeness to the

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things.” Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata,” 393. In fact, he called those that denied the bodily birth and existence of Jesus Christ as “wicked fellows” who blaspheme “against the will of God.” Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata,” 400-401. It does not seem that Clement disparaged the body or held to any Gnostic or Docetic view of the body. His understanding of God’s image as pertaining to the soul seems to be his sincere understanding of the text.

<sup>57</sup>Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata,” 369.

<sup>58</sup>According to Allison, Tertullian championed the view that man was composed of only two elements (physical and spiritual) and is credited with originating the “dichotomist view” of human nature—that humans may be distinguished into the two elements of body and soul. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 324.

<sup>59</sup>Allison emphasizes that the historical and philosophical context such as fatalism and absolute determinism affected Tertullian’s views on this and other doctrines. He explained that the church “placed a strong emphasis on human free will and self-determination.” It is not surprising, therefore, that Tertullian would equate the *imago Dei* to human volition. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 454.

<sup>60</sup>Tertullian, “The Five Books against Marcion,” in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 3:301-2.

<sup>61</sup>Tertullian, “Five Books,” 301.

form of God; but he showed his stamp in that essence which he derived from God himself (that is, the spiritual aspect, which answered to the form of God), and in the freedom and power of his will.”<sup>62</sup> The view of God’s image in human volition will be abandoned, particularly because animals will also demonstrate some form of will, nevertheless, Tertullian continued a spiritual interpretation of the image of God.

Like those before them, the later fathers, particularly from Cappadocia, argued for an image that “encompasses our faculties of perception and knowledge” and therefore it is “wholly oriented towards its objects of knowledge and discernment.”<sup>63</sup> The objects referred to are the qualities of the Invisible God, which Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329-379) asserted are possessed by the human soul. Thus, the image of God in man represents the “qualities of the transcending Archetype” that are present in him.<sup>64</sup> Basil advanced the thinking on image bearing by ascribing to it New Testament definitions, “To whom does He say, ‘in our image,’ to whom if it is not to Him who is ‘the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.’”<sup>65</sup> In the light of Hebrews, Basil observed that the text clearly points to the Creator-God’s “co-operator”<sup>66</sup> in Genesis 1:27, “In the image of God [the Son] he [*Elohim*] created him [man].” Therefore, if Christ is the image of the invisible God, “not the bodily figure,”<sup>67</sup> but of the qualities attributed to the essence of God, then the image of God is spiritual when stamped upon man.

Many in the Patristic period contributed to the understanding of the image of

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<sup>62</sup>Tertullian, “Five Books,” 301.

<sup>63</sup>Maximos Aghiorgoussis, “Image as ‘Sign’ (Semeion) of God: Knowledge of God through the Image according to Saint Basil,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21, no. 1 (1976): 24.

<sup>64</sup>Basil says concerning the soul, “The mind is a wonderful thing, and therein we possess that which is after the image of the Creator,” Basil of Caesarea, “Letters,” in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Jackson Blomfield (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1895), 2.8:273.

<sup>65</sup>Basil of Caesarea, “The Hexaameron,” in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Jackson Blomfield (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1895), 2.8:106.

<sup>66</sup>Basil of Caesarea, “The Hexaameron,” 2.8:107.

<sup>67</sup>Basil of Caesarea, “Letters,” 2.8:276.

God as connected to spiritual things. But it was Augustine (354-430) that significantly advanced the understanding of image bearing as spiritual by insisting that the immortal image of God can only be found in the immortal aspect of man, which is his soul and in particular, his rational soul.<sup>68</sup> In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine rejects any connection between God's image and the human body because God lacks a physical body:

For, as not only most true reason but also the authority of the apostle himself declares, man was not made in the image of God according to the shape of his body, but according to his rational mind. For the thought is a debased and empty one, which holds God to be circumscribed and limited by the lineaments of bodily members.<sup>69</sup>

He reaches further than his predecessors, however, and identifies the locus of God's image in the "noblest part of the human mind."<sup>70</sup> The noblest part is the rational mind, which he pinpoints as the place where renewing, due to salvation, begins:

If, then, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and he is the new man who is renewed to the knowledge of God after the image of Him that created him; no one can doubt, that man was made after the image of Him that created him, not according to the body, nor indiscriminately according to any part of the mind, but according to the rational mind, wherein the knowledge of God can exist.<sup>71</sup>

Augustine points to the rational mind as the definition of the image of God in man: indeed, its very locus. He stated in *The Confessions* that the rational mind according to the image of God is what sets man as ruler over creation.<sup>72</sup> Like Tatian before him,

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<sup>68</sup>Augustine of Hippo, "The City of God," in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 1:241. Augustine would also advance the idea of the image in man as being reflective of the Trinity; an idea abandoned by later scholars, Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 1:197.

<sup>69</sup>Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," 1:159.

<sup>70</sup>Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," 1:189.

<sup>71</sup>Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," 1:159.

<sup>72</sup>Augustine explained, "We behold the face of the earth furnished with terrestrial creatures, and man, created after Thy image and likeness, in that very image and likeness of Thee (that is, the power of reason and understanding) on account of which he was set over all irrational creatures," Augustine of Hippo, "The Confessions of St. Augustin," in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886), 1:206.

Augustine reasoned that the only immortal aspect of man that can relate to God's immortality is the soul: "We must find in the soul of man, i.e., the rational or intellectual soul, that image of the Creator which is immortally implanted in its immortality."<sup>73</sup>

Augustine did not douse his reasoning with complexities, but very clearly sided on the spiritual interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," 1:185-86.

<sup>74</sup>Scholars that do not ascribe to the image of God being delimited to the soul of man often object to Augustine by citing Philo's Platonism: the anthropological dualism that teaches that the soul and body are separate and parallel entities that never intersect. Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 50. They argue that the church fathers, particularly Augustine, were influenced by Greek philosophy. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition*, 14. They also argue that in the end their theology simply "promoted Philo's allegorical methodology" as a way to interpret Scripture. David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 239-64. In his work, Gerald McCool observes that Augustine's theology of the *imago Dei*, in which it seemed as though Platonism was blended with Plotinus' Neoplatonism and biblical revelation, had already taken form in his Cassiciacum dialogues. He reports that Augustine claimed "no personal credit" for his image theology and in fact openly admits that he had often heard them "expounded in the discourses of St. Ambrose." New questions therefore arise regarding Ambrose's view of the image of God. Evidence shows that Ambrose knew the Scriptures, but had no knowledge of things evident in Augustine's writings. McCool points out, "Ambrose knew the Scriptures thoroughly; he was well acquainted with the works of Origen, but he was hostile to philosophy and knew little or nothing about Plotinus." This description of Ambrose is compounded by the fact that his conclusions regarding the image of God are very similar to Saint Basil's. McCool observes, "For He [Christ] is in the Father and the Father is in Him according to the metaphysics of the image and its exemplar, and thus whoever truly sees the image must see the exemplar also. The human soul according to the *Hexaemeron* is an image of the perfect Image who is the Word of God." Therefore, Ambrose also held the view of the image of God delimited to the soul. Furthermore, Augustine consulted Simplician, who had been Ambrose's spiritual father and teacher, throughout his spiritual journey. On many occasions he asked Simplician to comment and even correct his writings. Ambrose wrote about his mentor and how he travelled the world proving how philosophy had strayed from the truth. We do not know if Simplician influenced Augustine's image doctrine or communicated to him a doctrine already made known to Ambrose, but what the historical evidence does present is plausible interactions between three church fathers that would call into question ascribing motivations to advance Platonic thought. It is speculative at best, but plausible to argue that Augustine's image doctrine may not have been Christianized Greek philosophy, but an honest attempt to faithfully teach doctrine that was handed down to him by teachers that had some measure of contempt for philosophy. Gerald A. McCool, "The Ambrosian Origin of St. Augustine's Theology of the Image of God in Man," *Theological Studies* 20, no. 1 (1959): 63-68. Returning to Augustine's writings, in a response to Plato's and Porphyry's opinion that the human body is the punishment for a rebellious soul, Augustine summarized it as "quite false." Indeed, the body and soul are "conjoined and closely intertwined" and only death can violently act upon that union to cause its separation. To Augustine, the body is not evil, nor is it the enemy; instead death is the enemy as it acts upon the mortal body. Augustine observes, "For no sooner do we begin to live in this dying body, than we begin to move ceaselessly towards death. For in the whole course of this life (if life we must call it) its mutability tends towards death. Certainly there is no one who is not nearer it this year than last year, and to-morrow than to-day, and to-day than yesterday, and a short while hence than now, and now than a short while ago. For whatever time we live is deducted from our whole term of life, and that which remains is daily becoming less and less; so that our whole life is nothing but a race towards death, in which no one is allowed to stand still for a little space, or to go somewhat more slowly, but all are driven forwards with an impartial movement, and with equal rapidity." In some sense, neither does the soul escape death should it remain unregenerate. Augustine defined soul death as separation from God, or the second death, "For although the human soul is truly affirmed to be immortal, yet it also has a certain death of its own. For it is therefore called immortal, because, in a sense, it does not cease to live and to feel; while the body is called mortal, because it can be forsaken of all life, and cannot by itself live at all. The death, then, of the soul takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it. Therefore the death of both—that is, of the whole man—occurs when the soul,

Augustine also believed the image of God was distorted by sin, but not “wholly blotted out” by it.<sup>75</sup> It seems that his beginning point was the natural good in humanity because of the Creator’s goodness.<sup>76</sup> That goodness was preserved in the rational mind in the form of God’s image after the fall, and thus provided a point where man could partake of God’s salvation:

But we have come now to that argument in which we have undertaken to consider the noblest part of the human mind, by which it knows or can know God, in order that we may find in it the image of God. For although the human mind is not of the same nature with God, yet the image of that nature than which none is better, is to be sought and found in us, in that than which our nature also has nothing better. But the mind must first be considered as it is in itself, before it becomes partaker of God; and His image must be found in it. For, as we have said, although worn out and defaced by losing the participation of God, yet the image of God still remains. For it is His image in this very point, that it is capable of Him, and can be partaker

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forsaken by God, forsakes the body. For, in this case, neither is God the life of the soul, nor the soul the life of the body. And this death of the whole man is followed by that which, on the authority of the divine oracles, we call the second death.” If the enemy is death, therefore the causative agent is sin. Augustine explained Wisdom 9:15, “The word corruptible [to body] is added to show that the soul is burdened, not by any body whatsoever, but by the body such as it has become in consequence of sin.” Philosophically, Augustine points out a contradiction in Platonist thinking. If the body were the punishment of a rebellious soul, no Platonist would be afraid of death. He asks of Cicero and Plato, “If, therefore, it is a punishment to the soul to be connected with any body whatever, why does God address them as if they were afraid of death, that is, of the separation of soul and body?” Therefore, the body does not serve as punishment for the soul, nor does it burden the soul, yet it is mortal because sin abounds in the body (Rom 7:23). How did Augustine understand man’s constitution as it relates to the *imago Dei*? Man’s material aspect, his body, was formed by the dust of the earth and breathed the breath of life in which man became a living soul. In the plain reading of Paul, Augustine concluded, “This man, then, who was created of the dust of the earth, or of the moistened dust or clay,—this “dust of the earth“ (that I may use the express words of Scripture) was made, as the apostle teaches, an animated body when he received a soul.” Answering the materialist philosophers of his day, he conceded that neither the soul nor the body alone would constitute the whole man, but when joined it is called man. However, he argued, that neither lose the identity of man when they are singly apart. When a person dies, it is said that the man is now in heaven or hell, speaking only of the soul; and though his body is buried, it is said that the man is buried in a place, speaking of his body only. Augustine argued that Scripture follows the same usage of the terms, “Even while a man is alive, and body and soul are united, it calls each of them singly by the name man, speaking of the soul as the ‘inward man,’ and of the body as the ‘outward man.’” Paul’s words in 2 Cor 4:6, as Augustine observed, speaks as if it were two persons, but it indeed refers to a single man. Wherefore, the constitution has implications for the *imago Dei* in the sense that the body is made of dust and to dust it will return. Augustine argued that it is necessary to understand that when Scripture refers to man being created in the image of God and yet created from dust, that Scripture is plainly conveying that man is indeed a dichotomy. He opined, “The former [created in the image of God] is spoken of the rational soul, which God by His breathing, or, to speak more appropriately, by His inspiration, conveyed to man, that is, to his body; but the latter [formed from the dust of the earth] refers to his body, which God formed of the dust, and to which a soul was given, that it might become a living body, that is, that man might become a living soul.” Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God,” 243-52.

<sup>75</sup>Augustine of Hippo, “A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter,” in *NPNF*, ed. Phillip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 1:103-4.

<sup>76</sup>Augustine of Hippo, “On Marriage and Concupiscence,” in *NPNF*, ed. Phillip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 1:298.

of Him; which so great good is only made possible by its being His image. Well, then, the mind remembers, understands, loves itself; if we discern this, we discern a trinity, not yet indeed God, but now at last an image of God.<sup>77</sup>

Augustine therefore believed that the original image would be restored fully through salvation, “For it is the Spirit of grace that does it, in order to restore in us the image of God, in which we were naturally created.”<sup>78</sup> Augustine shifted the focus back to the human soul as the aspect of man that can reason and relate to his Creator. Although the lost human being was deprived of God’s glory, through the image of God—the noblest part of his spiritual aspect—he could regain the lost relationship. His conclusions, except for connecting the image to the Trinity within us, would remain unchallenged until the modern age.

### **Medieval and Reformation Scholars and the Image of God**

Regarded as one of the great philosophical theologians of the church, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) advanced Augustine’s conclusions that the image of God was found in the rational soul and not in any of man’s physical attributes. In the landmark work, *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued,

Man is said to be after the image of God, not as regards his body, but as regards that whereby he excels other animals. Hence, when it is said, "Let us make man to our image and likeness", it is added, "And let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea" (Gen. 1:26). Now man excels all animals by his reason and intelligence; hence it is according to his intelligence and reason, which are incorporeal, that man is said to be according to the image of God.<sup>79</sup>

Aquinas also believed that the image of God was impressed in man’s spiritual aspect, like a coin, thereby providing man and God a point of contact, even if the image is foreign to man’s nature.<sup>80</sup> This point of contact is what permits man to know God; “the

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<sup>77</sup>Augustine of Hippo, “On the Trinity,” 189.

<sup>78</sup>Augustine of Hippo, “A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter,” 103.

<sup>79</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Clairmont, CA: Cayote Canyon, 1265), I.3.1, Kindle.

<sup>80</sup>Relying on Augustine, Aquinas noted, “God made a spiritual image to Himself in man.” He further explains this process, “since the perfect likeness to God cannot be except in an identical nature, the

image of God is found in the soul according as the soul turns to God, or possesses a nature that enables it to turn to God.”<sup>81</sup> For sinners, the image is damaged and for believers the image is restored to its original condition through grace.<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, in sum, noted that likeness to God is best known when man spiritually imitates God. “Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature.”<sup>83</sup> As the singular most prominent voice during the medieval age, Aquinas’s view of the image of God would not only establish Augustine’s influence on church dogma, but also would affirm the spiritual interpretation throughout the period.

The Reform theologians did not do much to either advance or refute the traditional Christian position of God’s image in man’s spiritual aspect. Martin Luther (1483-1546) maintained that although human nature before the fall “remained perfect and uncorrupted by sin,” the image of God was far different; man was created for a life that was far more excellent than the physical.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, he narrowly rejected Augustinian speculations (those pertaining to the image as reflecting the Trinity) and was very reserved in advancing any explanation of God’s image on account that sin had blinded man to its definition. He urged caution, because any natural qualities interpreted as the image, even those possessed by the soul, are corrupted by sin:

I fear however that since this "image of God" has been lost by sin, we can never fully attain to the knowledge of what it was. Memory, mind and will we do most

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Image of God exists in His first-born Son; as the image of the king is in his son, who is of the same nature as himself: whereas it exists in man as in an alien nature, as the image of the king is in a silver coin.” Aquinas, *Summa*, I.93.1.

<sup>81</sup>Aquinas, *Summa*, I.93.8.

<sup>82</sup>Once again relying on Augustine, Aquinas describes the image in the sinner as “obsolete . . . as it were clouded as almost to amount to nothing . . . or obscured and disfigured,” and for the just, he describes it as “clear and beautiful.” Aquinas, *Summa*, I.93.8.

<sup>83</sup>Aquinas, *Summa*, I.93.4.

<sup>84</sup>Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. Henry Coles (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 1:108.

certainly possess, but wholly corrupted, most miserably weakened; nay, that I may speak with greater plainness, utterly leprous and unclean. If these natural endowments therefore constitute the image of God it will inevitably follow that Satan also was created in the image of God; for he possesses all these natural qualities, and to an extent and strength far beyond our own.<sup>85</sup>

Although he believed the image was “marred and obscured” by the fall, Luther argued that Adam possessed it as a spiritual quality, “Adam possessed it in its moral substance or nature; that he not only knew God and believed him to be good, but that he lived also a life truly divine.”<sup>86</sup> Like Calvin after him, Luther believed that God’s image would be restored by the gospel, and once again would restore a spiritual, not physical, quality to man:

Now the very intent of the gospel is to restore this image of God. Man's intellect and will have indeed remained, but wholly corrupted. The divine object of the gospel is that we might be restored to that original and indeed better and higher image; an image, in which we are born again unto eternal life, or rather unto the hope of eternal life by faith, in order that we might live in God and with God and might be "one" with him . . . . That is, he shall be a spiritual man, in which state he shall return to the image of God; for he shall be like unto God in life, righteousness, holiness, wisdom, etc.<sup>87</sup>

In his later life, Luther had a hand in writing the Augsburg Confession, which would be presented to Emperor Charles V in 1530.<sup>88</sup> In it, the Lutherans affirmed the locus of the image of God in the soul of man:

And Scripture testifies to this, when it says, Gen. 1:27, that man was fashioned in the image and likeness of God. What else is this than that there were embodied in man such wisdom and righteousness as apprehended God, and in which God was reflected, i.e., to man there were given the gifts of the knowledge of God, the fear of God, confidence in God, and the like? For thus Irenaeus and Ambrose interpret the likeness to God, the latter of whom not only says many things to this effect, but especially declares: That soul is not, therefore, in the image of God, in which God is

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<sup>85</sup>Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, 115.

<sup>86</sup>Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, 116.

<sup>87</sup>Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, 118-20.

<sup>88</sup>According to Bente, “March 11 the proclamation reached Elector John at Torgau. On the 14th Chancellor Brueek advised the Elector to have ‘the opinion on which our party has hitherto stood and to which they have adhered,’ in the controverted points, ‘properly drawn up in writing, with a thorough confirmation thereof from the divine Scriptures.’ On the same day the Elector commissioned Luther, Jonas, Bugenhagen, and Melancthon to prepare a document treating especially of ‘those articles on account of which said division, both in faith and in other outward church customs and ceremonies, continues.’” Frederick Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 46.

not at all times. And Paul shows in the Epistles to the Ephesians 5:9, and Colossians 3:10, that the image of God is the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth. Nor does Longobard fear to say that original righteousness is the very likeness to God which God implanted in man. We recount the opinions of the ancients, which in no way interfere with Augustine's interpretation of the image.<sup>89</sup>

Luther kept himself from plainly explaining the substance and locus of the image of God, but held to a spiritual interpretation of its definition as the most faithful to the text.

John Calvin (1509-1564) insisted that the image of God was in the soul, “For though the divine glory is displayed in man’s outward appearance, it cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is in the soul.”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, even the “glory” that is manifested in man’s physical body is in the form of spiritual qualities: “Only let it be understood that the image of God which is beheld or made conspicuous by these external marks, is spiritual.”<sup>91</sup> Calvin specifically addressed distinguishing the terms זֶלֶם and דְּמוּת and rightly concluded that the terms do not stand for two different things, but that man is an image that is like God:

Hence there is an obvious absurdity in those who indulge in philosophical speculation as to these names, placing the Zelem, that is the image, in the substance of the soul, and the Demuth, that is the likeness, in its qualities, and so forth. God having determined to create man in his own image, to remove the obscurity which was in this terms adds, by way of explanation, in his likeness, as if he had said, that he would make man, in whom he would, as it were, image himself by means of the marks of resemblance impressed upon him.<sup>92</sup>

In his debate with Andreas Osiander, a contemporary Lutheran theologian, who argued

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<sup>89</sup>“Defense of the Augsburg Confession: Book of Concord,” accessed August 29, 2015, [http://bookofconcord.org/defense\\_2\\_originalsin.php](http://bookofconcord.org/defense_2_originalsin.php).

<sup>90</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (West Roxbury, MA: B & R Samizdat, 2015), 1.15.3, Kindle.

<sup>91</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3; Calvin elaborated on this point elsewhere: “Thus the chief seat of the divine image was in his [Adam] mind and heart; yet there was no part of him in which some scintillations of it did not shine out. In the mind perfect intelligence flourished and reigned, uprightness attended as its companion, and all the senses were prepared and molded for due obedience to reason; and in the body there was a suitable correspondence with this internal order.” John Calvin, *Genesis*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 26.

<sup>92</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3 Rejecting Augustine’s speculations “to fabricate a trinity in man,” Calvin elaborated that a definition of the image of God “ought to rest on a firmer basis than such subtleties. As for myself, before I define the image of God, I would deny that it differs from his likeness. For when Moses afterwards repeats the same things (verse 27) he passes over the likeness and contents himself with only mentioning the image. We also know that it was customary for the Hebrews to repeat the same thing in different words.” Calvin, *Genesis*, 26.

for God's image as encompassing the whole Adam, Calvin again rejected any connection between the physical body and image bearing. Although acknowledging that man's body and soul are a whole, Calvin surmised, "there is no absurdity in holding that he is called the image of God in respect of the soul."<sup>93</sup> This understanding of the text also led him to reject the functional interpretation of the image, which is based in part on the image encompassing the physical:

Nor is there probability in the opinion of those who place likeness to God in the dominion bestowed upon man, as if he only resembled God in this, that he is appointed lord and master of all things. The likeness must be within, in himself. It must be something which is not external to him but is properly the internal good of the soul.<sup>94</sup>

Calvin was very clear on the image as part of the spiritual aspect,<sup>95</sup> and thus the spiritual interpretation would serve foundational to reformed theology.

Consistent with Luther, and seemingly relying on Augustine, Calvin concluded that the image was corrupted by sin. He defines the original image as Adam's ability to be "united with God" in the "true and highest perfection of dignity," which would be impossible for Adam if he "were not like to him."<sup>96</sup> The image of God was not completely lost at the fall, but it was severely damaged to the point of utter deformity. "Wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful

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<sup>93</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

<sup>94</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>95</sup>Anthony Hoekema contends that Calvin was "willing to grant" some "sparks of glow" to the body and thus acquiesce some ground on the inclusion of the body in the image of God. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 42. In alluding to the body's glow, however, Calvin was not asserting the possible inclusion of the body, instead he was avoiding being misunderstood and grouped with Gnostic thought that considered the body evil. He confessed, "I deny not, indeed the external shape, in so far as it distinguishes and separates us from the lower animals, bring us nearer to God." Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3. He vehemently insisted that to ascribe the image of God to the human body is to ascribe something completely foreign to it: "Extending the image of God indiscriminately as well to the body as to the soul, confounds heaven with earth." Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

<sup>96</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.6.

deformity.”<sup>97</sup> But how did Calvin define such deformity? He argued that man lost the spiritual qualities of knowledge, righteousness and holiness according to Paul’s teachings in Colossians 3:19 and Ephesians 4:24, “after Paul, I make the image of God to consist in righteousness and true holiness.”<sup>98</sup> Those spiritual qualities mentioned must be renewed when we come to salvation in Christ; “We now see how Christ is the most perfect image of God, into which we are so renewed as to bear the image of God in knowledge, purity, righteousness, and true holiness.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, Calvin concludes that the more man resembles God spiritually, the more he is the image of God:

Therefore, as the image of God constitutes the entire excellence of human nature, as it shone in Adam before his fall, but was afterwards vitiated and almost destroyed, nothing remaining but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity, so it is now partly seen in the elect, in so far as they are regenerated by the Spirit. Its full lustre, however, will be displayed in heaven. But in order to know the particular properties in which it consists, it will be proper to treat of the faculties of the soul.<sup>100</sup>

There is no ambiguity to the Reformer’s position; instead it resulted as reaffirmation that God’s image and likeness is connected to man’s spiritual aspect.

### **Modern Scholars and the Image of God**

One of the most important questions in the history of interpretation of the image of God since the Reformation is to what extent has God’s image in man been corrupted by sin.<sup>101</sup> Although the spiritual interpretation of the image dominated Old Testament scholarship for centuries, the lack of proper treatment and convincing answers to the above question in the post-Reformation period left the proverbial door open to a question that for some represented a crucial point of departure in understanding image

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<sup>97</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>98</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.9.

<sup>99</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>100</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>101</sup>Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God*, 12.

bearing. The theories and conditions that emerged in the late nineteenth century would set the stage for new approaches to Genesis 1:26-27, and a departure from the spiritual interpretation.

By the 1880s, the image of God, and Old Testament interpretation as a whole, had faced a paradigmatic shift as a result of three major developments. First, Darwin's theories on evolution and other modern scientific theories claimed no fundamental differences between humanity and higher mammals,<sup>102</sup> which forced modern biblical scholarship to revive efforts in identifying those things in man that would differentiate it from the animal world. Secondly, extra-biblical comparative documents discovered in Mesopotamia, particularly *Enuma Elish*,<sup>103</sup> cast doubts as to the Bible's isolation and the origin of the biblical accounts of creation.<sup>104</sup> Finally, the influential contributions of modern critical scholars, such as Julius Wellhausen, to Israel's religious history and Old Testament scholarship as a whole, through the distinction of Old Testament sources, replaced salvation history with a history of religions approach.<sup>105</sup> During the new century, many new ideas regarding the image of God would be introduced, complicating the landscape and making consensus on the topic almost impossible.

Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) made the first major departure from the historic consensus of God's image as a spiritual interpretation.<sup>106</sup> Gunkel, in some manner,

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<sup>102</sup>Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, rev. ed (Detroit: Gale Research, 1974), 35.

<sup>103</sup>Dating from at least the early first millennium BCE, the *Enuma Elish* tablets were written on seven tablets in Akkadian cuneiform. The saga is an ancient cosmology and theogony story about the god Marduk that parallels the Genesis creation account in several places. John Anthony Dunne, "Enuma Elish," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

<sup>104</sup>K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 91-92.

<sup>105</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 65.

<sup>106</sup>According to Claus Westermann, "Gunkel's study marked a decisive turning point in the exegesis of Gen. 1 beyond which there can be no return." Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 30.

accepted the Wellhausen documentary hypothesis,<sup>107</sup> but rejected the idea that Genesis 1 was a free composition by the author, a position held by Wellhausen. Instead the account was a product of careful arrangement of oral history that pre-dates Moses.<sup>108</sup> In fact, he determined that the simpler narrative of the first chapters of Genesis were myth derived from the simpler pagan roots of oral tradition. He insists that the simpler the narrative, the more pure, “The more independent a story is, the more sure we may be that it is preserved in its original form.”<sup>109</sup> This forms the basis of Gunkel’s religio-historical approach, not to mention his rejection of the historicity of Adam and Eve.

On the image of God, Gunkel blames the spiritual interpretation on Christian dogmatism and argues instead for a physical resemblance. First of all, he based his conclusions by drawing parallels between biblical and Babylonian accounts, arguing for Babylonian origins to Genesis. Nevertheless, he believed that the adopted myths were transformed by Israel, thus rejecting direct dependence.<sup>110</sup> It cannot be ignored, however, that Gunkel’s reliance on extra-biblical material was of prime importance, “the theologian will do well to treat the Marduk myth with respect. One does no honour to his parents by thinking poorly of his ancestors.”<sup>111</sup> Secondly, Gunkel concluded that אֱלֹהִים was a Babylonian loan word, and using Genesis 5:1-3 and 9:6, the word had the natural meaning of deity that resembled a human body, although spiritual similarity could not be

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<sup>107</sup>Relying on Wellhausen, Gunkel ascribed the image of God texts to the P source. Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. Heinrich Zimmern (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 25. Gunnlaugur elaborated the point and vehemently argued, “Gunkel accepts the Wellhausenian documentary hypothesis without reservation, and assigns the *imago Dei* passages to the P source. In fact Gunkel’s Genesis commentary presupposes the distinction of sources to such a high degree that it is entirely built up according to the sources.” Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God*, 52.

<sup>108</sup>Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 25.

<sup>109</sup>Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis, the Biblical Saga and History*, trans. William Herbert Carruth (New York: Schocken, 1964), 45.

<sup>110</sup>Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 25.

<sup>111</sup>Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 46.

discounted.<sup>112</sup> He argued that the physical is the simplest reading and would have fit the context of earlier, more primitive meanings:

It is the common fate of older narratives preserved in younger form that certain features, which once had a clear meaning in their earlier context, have been so transmitted in their newer setting as to have lost their meaningful context. Such ancient features, fragments of an earlier whole, are thus left without context in their newer setting and so appear hardly intelligible in the thought-world of the narrator. Such features betray to the investigator the existence of an earlier narrative, and they even suggest something of its particular traits.<sup>113</sup>

Wherefore, Gunkel regarded God's image as an external attribute and relied on Genesis 5:3 as the key text for a physical explanation.<sup>114</sup> Gunkel's influence would not be immediate; however, his reliance on ANE texts and his argument for the physical resemblance would form the foundation for the departure of the spiritual interpretation by recent scholars.

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth (1886-1968) refused to accept neither a physical or spiritual interpretation of the image of God, and would argue for a relational representation instead. Although his finger may have been on the text, he rejected the historicity of Genesis.<sup>115</sup> Relying on the philosophical ideas of his day,<sup>116</sup> Barth argued that the only thing that we know apart from God creating man in his image is that he created him male and female.<sup>117</sup> Therefore there exists an I-Thou relationship between God and man, as there is between the male and female:

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<sup>112</sup>Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 29.

<sup>113</sup>Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 26.

<sup>114</sup>This will be the position of Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971), Paul Humbert (1885-1972), Theodore Vriezen (1899-1981), and in some aspects Ludwig Köhler's "upright posture of man" position. Gunzlaugur, *The Image of God*, 92-125.

<sup>115</sup>Barth rejected the historicity of Adam and Eve and of the fall. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F Torrance, vol. 3 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 200.

<sup>116</sup>Perhaps Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, 1958, influenced Barth's I-Thou philosophy. Cairns claims that Barth's conclusions on the image of God and many other subjects would have "taken a different shape had not Martin Buber written *I and Thou*." David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1953), 187.

<sup>117</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:186.

It is not palpable that we have to do with a clear and simple correspondence, an *analogia relationis*, between this mark of the divine being, namely that it includes an I and a Thou, and the being of man, male and female. The relationship between the summoning I in God's being and the summoned divine Thou is reflected both in the relationship of God to the man whom He has created, and also in the relationship between the I and the Thou, between male and female, in human existence itself. There can be no question of anything more than an analogy.<sup>118</sup>

The analogy therefore is what makes man human, according to Barth. The point of contact, or the existence of the point of confrontation, as he describes it, is what defines a human being, indeed human existence itself. "Thus the *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation . . . . To remove it is tantamount to removing the divine from God as well as the human from man."<sup>119</sup> Therefore, Barth argues that the I-Thou confrontation is what defines the image of God, and not some physical or spiritual aspect:

It is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man's peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists as man himself consists as the creature of God. He would not be man if he were not the image of God. He is the image of God in the fact that he is man.<sup>120</sup>

Barth's contribution to the discussion places image bearing outside the realm of any particular human quality, and thus will become the premise for more modern Old Testament scholars to move away from substantive theories and advance the functional interpretation.

Ivan Engnell (1906-1964) was a Swedish theologian who attempted to ascribe his theories of sacral kingship to themes in Israel's religion.<sup>121</sup> He noted that Adam was a divine being in the midst of God's creation, was enthroned in the Garden, surrounded by precious stones, and served as a regent.<sup>122</sup> Engnell's royal categories would form a

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<sup>118</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:196.

<sup>119</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:185.

<sup>120</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:184.

<sup>121</sup>Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 175.

<sup>122</sup>Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, 175.

blueprint for the functional advocates, particularly those that will derive the meaning of image from comparative studies in ancient Near Eastern documents.

Walter Gross (1941- ) presented the first thorough argument for the functional interpretation of God's image. According to Gross, the only meaning for the image of God is a "functional expression" because man was created to rule over the animals.<sup>123</sup> He translated וַיִּרְדּוּ "so that they may rule" and interpreted it to mean that man was created for this very reason.<sup>124</sup> Although Gross was not the only scholar advocating a functional interpretation, his research would add another step to consolidating this position in modern times.

Together with the archeological discovery of Tell Fekheriyeh,<sup>125</sup> and the presumed more concrete meaning of צֶלֶם,<sup>126</sup> the functional interpretation quickly became the modern consensus. Gunnlaugur summarized this modern approach:

It is remarkable, that the functional interpretation, which had until the 1960s only a minute support among OT scholars, has become the absolutely dominant interpretation in this intervening time . . . . The functional interpretation is a logical result of the dominant understanding that it is conceptually inappropriate to view man in the OT as divided into physical and spiritual components and then apply this dichotomy to one's interpretation of the image of God in man. Once this dichotomy is no longer acceptable the field of choices for the explanation is significantly narrowed and a holistic view becomes the most attractive. An emphasis on the importance of the contextual principle of course favours the functional interpretation, since the immediate context does, in fact, deal with man's mandate to rule over creation.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Walter Gross, "Die Gottebenbildlichkeit Des Menschen Im Kontext Der Priesterschrift," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161, no. 4 (January 1981): 259.

<sup>124</sup>Gross, "Die Gottebenbildlichkeit Des Menschen Im Kontext Der Priesterschrift," 259.

<sup>125</sup>The Tell Fakhariyeh inscription was a bilingual inscription found on a large statue of King Hadduyithi of Gozan, an ancient city in modern-day Syria in 1979, written in tenth or ninth century BCE Akkadian and Aramaic, which contained terms equivalent to the Hebrew for "image" and "likeness." It was not until 1982 that the inscription was published. Many scholars have relied on this discovery for added meanings to the two terms in Gen 1:26. Gentry provides a good summary of the inscription's impact and how the cognates of the terms are applied to the study of the image of God. Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 193. Gunnlaugur provides a good summary of the discovery's impact on OT studies. Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God*, 206-7.

<sup>126</sup>Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 166-67.

<sup>127</sup>Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God*, 221-22.

Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971), in particular, unequivocally relied on Mesopotamian meanings to Genesis 1:26, and interpreted the image of God as his physical viceroy on earth:

That man would be furnished with the divine likeness for this purpose is logical enough, for even earthly rulers, when they cannot be present in person, usually set up their images as signs of majesty. Thus man in his sphere of rule as God's vice regent is summoned to represent the dominion and majesty of God.<sup>128</sup>

Claus Westermann (1909-2000) seems to reject the functional interpretation for a more Barthian-like explanation;<sup>129</sup> nevertheless, he affirmed that God's image had no connection to man's substance and more to do with an action. "There can be no question that the text is describing an action, and not the nature of human beings."<sup>130</sup> Following von Rad, Anthony Hoekema maintains that man was created in the image of God in order to represent Him, much like an ambassador.<sup>131</sup> He further believed that such representation included the physical body, because man represents God in his entire person. When considering the various relationships in which man functions, "we are confirmed in the conclusion that the image of God in man does not concern only a part of him (the 'soul' or the 'spiritual' aspect) but the entire person."<sup>132</sup> Remarkably, he will not deny the inclusion of man's being in the image, but he relegates it to a secondary

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<sup>128</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 392.

<sup>129</sup>Relying on Barth, Westermann couched the image of God as the process of human existence: "The creation of human beings in the image of God is not saying that something has been added to the created person, but is explaining what the person is." Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 156-58. Indeed, Westermann argued that God's image is human existence: "The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God."

<sup>130</sup>Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 155.

<sup>131</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 67. Hoekema popularized the eclectic approach to the image of God, which in essence combines the concepts of man's nature, which he called structure, and man's functionality. This approach also has a Christological component that sees Jesus as the ultimate image-bearer and through His saving work restores the image of God so that man can do good works. His position will be developed in a later chapter. Claus Westermann insisted that H. Holzinger, J. Hempel, and H. Gross popularized the functional view and that G. Söhngen and E. Schlink popularized the Christological view. Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 155.

<sup>132</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 68.

importance:

The image of God in man must therefore be seen as involving both the structure of man (his gifts, capacities, and endowments) and the functioning of man (his actions, his relationships to God and to others, and the way he uses his gifts). To stress either of these at the expense of the other is to be one-sided. We must see both, but we need to see the structure of man as secondary and his functioning as primary.<sup>133</sup>

Bruce Waltke boldly states that עֲלָמָא “always” refers to a physical body.<sup>134</sup> Thus, also relying on ANE literature, he likewise settles on the functional interpretation. “The definition of ‘image of God’ including notions of being physical and ruling as God’s vice-regents coheres with God’s intention for humanity to master/rule all creatures in the earth’s three cosmic spheres of heaven, land, and sea (Gen 1:26, 28).”<sup>135</sup> Even Eugene Merrill will rely on Mesopotamian depictions of kings erecting images of themselves in order to conclude that God’s image is “no longer one of ontological identification but functional representation.”<sup>136</sup> In his provocative work, John Walton also heavily relies on ANE literature to interpret Genesis 1:26, and while he will not include Adam and Eve in the image of God account,<sup>137</sup> he will advocate for a functional interpretation that is laced with Barthian influence as well:

The image of God as an Old Testament concept can be understood in four categories. It pertains to the role and function that God has given humanity (found, for example, in “subdue” and “rule,” Gen 1:28), to the identity that he has bequeathed on us (i.e., it is, by definition, who we are as human beings), and to the way that we serve as his substitute by representing his presence in the world. When Assyrian kings made images of themselves to be placed in conquered cities or at important borders, they were communicating that they were, in effect, continually present in that place. Finally, it is indicative of the relationship that God intends to have with us.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 73.

<sup>134</sup>Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 215.

<sup>135</sup>Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 219.

<sup>136</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 170.

<sup>137</sup>John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 63, Kindle.

<sup>138</sup>Walton, *The Lost World*, 40.

Although there were voices in the twentieth century defending the spiritual interpretation,<sup>139</sup> the influence of Gunkel and Barth coupled with greater reliance on ANE discoveries eventually marginalized the spiritual for the functional interpretation among more modern Old Testament scholars.

### **Conclusion**

From the rabbis to the greater part of church history, the spiritual interpretation of the image of God was the dominant view. The modern shift toward the functional interpretation provides the backdrop to this study. In only the past one hundred years, the consensus around a spiritual interpretation of God's image has been almost entirely supplanted. In the next chapter, a closer analysis of the arguments for the physical and functional interpretations is presented.

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<sup>139</sup>Both Otto Procksch, *Die Genesis* (Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1913), and Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) defended the spiritual interpretation, but as the post-World War II scholarly landscape shifted from German to English, they soon became the final voices of the spiritual interpretation within Old Testament scholarship.

CHAPTER 2  
MODERN VIEWS ON THE PHYSICAL AND  
FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATIONS  
OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

Theories that attempt to define the image of God and identify its nature have traditionally fallen into three major categories. Kenneth Gardoski provides a helpful summary: (1) the substantive theories, which identify some human quality as the nature of God's image; (2) the functional theories, which hold to God's image as having something to do with the special function man is to perform; and (3) the relational theories, which define the image as an interpersonal relationship between man and God, and between man and man (or woman).<sup>1</sup> For the past half-century, the physical (which forms part of substantive theory) and the functional view of the image of God have dominated Old Testament scholarship. This chapter outlines the arguments in favor of these views and a critique of each position. Gerard von Rad's theology and D. J. A. Cline's article "The Image of God in Man" will provide the primary basis for the analysis and critique of the positions; other supporters of the views will be included as appropriate.

**The Physical Interpretation as the Meaning of the  
Image of God**

The human body as the locus of God's image appeared as a formal interpretation in the twentieth century. The compelling parallels of Scripture to Mesopotamian texts provided the primary impetus toward its development. Although

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth M. Gardoski, "The Imago Dei Revisited," *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* 5, no. 37 (2007): 7-8.

garnering minimal adherents when first advanced, the contributions of Hermann Gunkel, Theodore Vriezen and Paul Humbert, as mentioned in the previous chapter, made the physical interpretation more reasonable and a viable alternative to the traditional view. Gerhard von Rad built upon the foundations of his predecessors and has provided the most recent defense of the physical interpretation.

### **The Physical Interpretation Appeals to Mesopotamian Cultic Legends**

The physical interpretation appeals to Mesopotamian cultic legends found in a series of archeological discoveries dating back to the late 1800s. Von Rad begins here, and couches the creation account in Genesis 1 as mythological reconstruction on the part of Jewish redactors. He plainly writes,

It is necessary to realize that here is no freely ventured theologoumenon but the reconstruction of a myth. In fact many fragments of Mesopotamian literature show to what remote mythological depths the biblical statement finally points us, whether in terms of a divine being which in the creation of man first makes a sketch or picture on a tablet or in terms of the description of this new creature directly as the counterpart or likeness of the deity.<sup>2</sup>

Von Rad states that the biblical statements should not be interpreted as “mythologoumenon”, however he warns against avoiding similarities between the divine likeness and ancient Near Eastern thinking.<sup>3</sup> It seems that it is not a resemblance alone to ANE sagas to which he appeals. Von Rad argues that the divine action in making man in the image of his god is something “we learn from a number of ancient Oriental myths.”<sup>4</sup> He further advocates for commonality that provides interpretation to Genesis 1:26-27, “Our text may not simply be detached from its broader connection with such evidently

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<sup>2</sup>Gerhard von Rad, “Εἰκόων: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 390.

<sup>3</sup>Von Rad, “Εἰκόων: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 391.

<sup>4</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 58.

common Oriental ideas.”<sup>5</sup> In particular, he points to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which *Enkidu*, Gilgamesh’s long lost friend, is said to have been created as the likeness of the god Anu.<sup>6</sup> Gunkel and Humbert, not Vriezen, hold similar connections.

Skinner, who preceded von Rad, elaborates on the broader connections of the biblical text and ANE myths. Appealing to Gunkel, he explains that the change from prose to poetry in Genesis 1:26-28 is attributed to the ancient writer’s reliance on mythical sources that “reveals a strain of poetic feeling which suggests that the passage is moulded on an ancient creation hymn.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, Skinner is most plain in holding the view of the magisterial position of the ancient myths over the biblical text. He opines, “The origin of the conception [image of God] is probably to be found in the Babylonian mythology.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, various sources of Babylonian cosmogony provide the proper framework for defining God’s image.

One such myth is the *Epic of Atra-hasis*, a second millennium BCE composition that presents, among other stories, the creation of humanity in historical sequence. For some, this particular myth naturally evokes comparisons with Genesis.<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest is the reference to man as a sign (or image) of the spirit that emanates from the flesh and blood of *We-ila*, one of the gods of the pantheon, who would be sacrificed in order to create man:

From his flesh and blood let Nintu mix clay,  
that god and man

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<sup>5</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Hugo Gressmann et al., *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1926), 151.

<sup>7</sup>John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 30.

<sup>8</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 31.

<sup>9</sup>See John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1989), 41-42.

may be thoroughly mixed in the clay...  
Let it proclaim living man as its sign,  
so that this be not forgotten let there be a spirit.<sup>10</sup>

There is some resemblance to the biblical narrative in that man is created from earth, there is a mixture of the earthly and the divine, and man serves as a sign or image of divine creative work.

Horst finds additional connections with Adad-shum-usur's letter to Esarhaddon in which he addresses him as the "shadow of the king" and specifically relates it to an image of god:

The prince is the shadow of God  
And men are the shadow of the prince.<sup>11</sup>

This inscription is in line with the common Mesopotamian concept of the king as mediator between the pantheon and mankind.

Skinner makes particular reference to the *Descent of Ishtar* and the *Enuma Elish* as direct sources to understanding image language. In *Descent*, the gods engage in forming images before designing or creating particular characters. He noted, "Before proceeding to the creation of Ea-bani, Aruru forms a mental image (*zikru*) of the God Anu; and similarly, in the Descent of Ištar, Ea forms a *zikru* in his wise heart before creating Asūšunamir."<sup>12</sup> In both cases, deliberation and image forming was evoked before the gods engaged in creating the beings. In *Enuma Elish*, the pantheon appears through a series of begetting within the primordial Apsu. The chief god Anu will beget his heir in his own image, "Anu begot in his image Nudimmud."<sup>13</sup> The language of the

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<sup>10</sup>W. G. Lambert, A. R. Millard, and Miguel Civil, *Atra-Ḥasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 45-46. See also Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989), 1-38.

<sup>11</sup>Friedrich Horst, "Face to Face: The Biblical Doctrine of the Image of God," *Interpretation* 4, no. 3 (July 1950): 265.

<sup>12</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 32.

<sup>13</sup>Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, eds., *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 32.

epic led Skinner to emphasize the preeminence of *Enuma Elish* not solely in its understanding of the image of God, but of the entire creation narrative, “In view of these parallels, it seems impossible to doubt that the cosmogony of Gn. 1 rests on a conception of the process of creation fundamentally identical with that of the *Enuma eliš* tablets.”<sup>14</sup> Von Rad did not wholly share this assumption; rather he ascribed to the biblical text a much higher purpose, and “as befits its nature, it has no mythological character.”<sup>15</sup> He defined the Priestly writers’<sup>16</sup> reliance on mythical sources as limited and common cosmological thoughts as theologically filtered. He wrote, “Considering P’s superior spiritual maturity, we may be certain that terms which did not correspond to his ideas of faith could be effortlessly avoided or recoined.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, he will not dismiss the connections, “even the elements in this concept which Israel took over are remarkable for their strongly mythological form.”<sup>18</sup> It is in this understanding of the role of ANE myth texts that the physical interpretation of God’s image is based.

### **The Physical Interpretation Argues for a Physical Definition to the Word מִצֵּבָה**

The reliance on Mesopotamian cultic legends for contextual and linguistic meanings to the biblical Hebrew have led proponents of the physical interpretation to ascribe a physical meaning to מִצֵּבָה. Indeed, מִצֵּבָה refers to physical objects, such as molds, idols and paintings in various passages (Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5; 2 Kgs 11:18; Ezek 23:14). Von Rad, both in *Genesis* and *Old Testament Theology* explains, “*Selem*

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<sup>14</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 47.

<sup>15</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 65.

<sup>16</sup>The statement is not an endorsement of Higher Criticism, to which von Rad and others ascribe. It is simply an attempt to fairly present his views.

<sup>17</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 65.

<sup>18</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1:151.

(‘image’) means predominantly an actual plastic work, a duplicate, sometimes an idol.”<sup>19</sup> Seeing no real particular significance with the accompanying דְמוּת — except to say that it provided an underlining idea of correspondence and similarity — nor the change in prepositions from כּ to כ, he ascribes the entire significance of the verse to the meaning and use of צֶלֶם. He opines, “The essential word for the idea of God’s image is obviously *selem* (‘image’), which appears without *dʾmūt* (‘likeness’) in the solemn v.27; likewise in ch. 9.6.”<sup>20</sup> However, returning to the ANE sources, von Rad affirms that the meaning of צֶלֶם must be derived from Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts that exclusively point to a physical resemblance.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, upon examining the use of צֶלֶם in other Semitic cognates, Köhler, another advocate of the physical view, observed that its use was that of an upright statue and thus the image of God needed to be seen as primarily in man’s upright posture, which distinguished him from animals.<sup>22</sup>

Of further importance is the manner in which the psalmist expresses man’s creation: crowning him with glory and honor (Ps 8:5). According to von Rad, the Psalm “points decisively to the physical.”<sup>23</sup> The use of the terms הִדְרָה and כְבוֹד describe man in terms of his outward appearance or at least foremost “to the splendour of his bodily form.”<sup>24</sup> He understood the second part of Psalm 8:5 as parallelism that develops the first part of the psalm.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the psalm parallels the expressions concerning man’s

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<sup>19</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 57. He defined צֶלֶם as image, statue or a work of plastic art in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:144.

<sup>20</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>21</sup>Von Rad appeals to Oriental myths of which “we learn . . . that a god makes a man (or a god) in his likeness.” Appealing to W. H. Schmidt, von Rad also points to Egyptian myths as particularly significant because, “the Pharaoh was regarded as ‘the image of God living on earth,’” von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>22</sup>Ludwig Köhler, “Die Grundstelle Der Imago-Dei-Lehre, Genesis 1:26,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 4, no. 1 (January 1948): 20.

<sup>23</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>24</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:145.

<sup>25</sup>Von Rad, “Eikón: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 391.

body as found in Babylonian<sup>26</sup> and Egyptian texts. The Egyptian text, *The Instruction Addressed to King Merikare*, in particular, ascribes corporeality to the fashioning god and thus transfers the glory to man's body:

They are his images,  
Who came from his body,  
He shines in the sky for their sake<sup>27</sup>

Although כְּבוֹד has a deeper meaning pointing to something "impressive" within man, it is nevertheless manifested in the human body.<sup>28</sup>

Such understanding led von Rad to appeal to two passages residing in the P document, Genesis 5:1ff and Genesis 9:6ff, as conclusive scriptural evidence that the image of God must be solely understood in a physical sense. This point reiterates Gunkel's conclusions. Indeed, both passages "prevent us from interpreting the theologoumenon of the divine likeness in a one-sidedly spiritual sense."<sup>29</sup> Although man's spiritual aspect is not to be dismissed in the definition,<sup>30</sup> to ascribe it thus would be strange to Old Testament theology. Skinner elaborated,

The idea of a corporeal resemblance seems free from objection on the level of OT theology; and it is certainly strongly suggested by a comparison of 5:3 and 5:1... It might be truer to say that it denotes primarily the bodily form, but includes those spiritual attributes of which the former is the natural and self-evident symbol.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Von Rad argues that the honor and glory in Ps 8:5 refers to the outward appearance much the same as old Assyrian fragments which state, "In the host of the thron he (Ea) made their form glorious." Von Rad, "Εἰκόων: The Divine Likeness in the OT," 391.

<sup>27</sup>Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 1:106.

<sup>28</sup>Appealing to M. Buber, von Rad explains that כְּבוֹד is the force or dignity of the human being which shines out and must therefore assume a visible form. Von Rad, "Εἰκόων: The Divine Likeness in the OT," 391.

<sup>29</sup>Von Rad, "Εἰκόων: The Divine Likeness in the OT," 391. Furthermore, von Rad argues that although Gen 9:6 refers to an attack on man's body as a violation of God's honor, both passages informs us that "transmission of the divine likeness is thought of in terms of the physical sequence of generations and therefore obviously in a physical sense."

<sup>30</sup>Von Rad regarded the debate whether God's image refers to the spiritual or physical as not very helpful, and in the end held to the "whole man" as created in the image and likeness of God. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>31</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 32.

Therefore if man as a whole, but primarily in a physical way, is made like God and resembles God, then God has a physical body or at least a physical form.

Does God have a physical body in whose image man was created? Von Rad argues that the philological underpinnings of  $\text{מְצַלְמֵהוּ}$  did not exclude God's corporeality.<sup>32</sup> He tempered his remarks and warned of understanding Yahweh's form as anthropomorphic, he nevertheless points to the importance of Ezekiel 1:26 as the "locus classicus" of the image doctrine in Genesis, in which God's glory is clearly displayed in "human contours."<sup>33</sup> Skinner argues that *corporis forma* to God does not run contrary to Old Testament theology. Indeed, both Numbers 12:8 and Psalm 17:15, expressly state that God has a "form" that can be seen. He opines,

The idea of corporeal resemblance seems free from objection on the level of OT theology . . . the OT writers constantly attribute to Him [God] bodily parts; and that they ever advanced to the conception of God as formless spirit would be difficult to prove.<sup>34</sup>

Alon Goshen-Gottstein, a rabbinical scholar, and advocate of the physical interpretation of God's image, concurs with many of the conclusions of von Rad and Skinner in the understanding of Old Testament theology. Indeed,  $\text{מְצַלְמֵהוּ}$  would entail that in some way God has a physical form; to which he asserts that in all rabbinic literature there is not "a single statement that categorically denies that God has body or form . . . . God's body is seen as identical, or similar, to the human body."<sup>35</sup> Amid a genuine desire not to speculate regarding what precisely is God's form or corporeality, von Rad stands apart from Goshen-Gottstein's conclusions. Nevertheless, at its foundation, the physical interpretation relies on God's physical form as the  $\text{מְצַלְמֵהוּ}$  from which man is made.

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<sup>32</sup>Von Rad conclusively stated, "Without question, in the broader background of this Priestly statement about God's image in man there is the notion of Yahweh's human form." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58-59.

<sup>33</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:146. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59.

<sup>34</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 32.

<sup>35</sup>Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (April 1994): 172.

## The Physical Interpretation Understands the Image as Originating in Creaturely Beings

Advocates of the physical interpretation are careful to establish an immeasurable distance between אֱלֹהִים and mankind in character and substance as the basic orientation of the image text. Von Rad argues, “The distinctive meaning of the divine likeness in the OT can be understood only when we see it in strict connection with a faith which is basically oriented by the sense of the greatest possible distance from God.”<sup>36</sup> In Scripture, man is described as dust and ashes (Gen 2:7; 3:19; 18:27; Job 10:9; Ps 90:3; 103:14; Eccl 3:20) and God’s ways and thoughts, indeed his very nature, are seen far beyond man’s ways (Num 23:29; Isa 55:9; Rom 11:33-34). Von Rad reads this truth as central to rendering the incomparable relationship of God and man. He observes, “The central point in OT anthropology is that man is dust and ashes before God and that he cannot stand before His holiness.”<sup>37</sup> Based on this premise, it befitted von Rad to define the plural command, “Let us make man,” as indicative of God’s attempt to conceal his direct involvement in man’s creation.<sup>38</sup>

How, therefore, is the plural pronoun and אֱלֹהִים to be interpreted? Does it refer to God or does it include the heavenly beings surrounding his throne? It is common in the Old Testament for Yahweh to be surrounded by a council of heavenly beings (1 Kings 22:19ff; Job 1:6ff; Isa 6:1ff). Skinner observes that although the resemblance is slight, the text is pointing to accepted ANE concepts of divine deliberations. He writes, “The deliberative 1<sup>st</sup> pers. Pl. in Gn. 1.26 is probably a reminiscence of a dialogue like that between Marduk and Ea in the *Enuma eliš* narrative.”<sup>39</sup> Appealing to Köhler, von Rad suggests that the plural pronoun “prevents the image being referred directly to God

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<sup>36</sup>Von Rad, “Eikón: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 390.

<sup>37</sup>Von Rad, “Eikón: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 390.

<sup>38</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>39</sup>Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 46.

alone.”<sup>40</sup> He further explains that Psalm 8 is the only commentary on Genesis 1:26 and complements the idea that God commanded the pantheon of heavenly beings to serve, along with himself, as the mold for the formation of man. He explains,

Man is said to be made a little lower than “Elohim.” This means that God’s image does not refer directly to Yahweh but to the “angels.” So also in v. 26. The extraordinary plural (“Let us”) prevents one from referring God’s image too directly to God the Lord. God includes himself among the heavenly beings and thereby conceals himself in this multiplicity. That, in our opinion, is the only possible explanation for this striking stylistic form.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the heavenly court or pantheon provides the substance of the image, and in that image man was created. Perhaps this idea originated with Philo, who could see no nexus between God and evil, and consequently handed over man’s creation to others.<sup>42</sup> Von Rad will similarly conclude, “man is created by God in the form of and similar to Elohim.”<sup>43</sup>

The notion that man is created in the image of אֱלֹהִים, as von Rad implies, the image must be a physical image of God. He does not emphasize any differentiation in the two-fold statement בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ or in the changing prepositions. He argues, “He [the author] has adopted an ancient formula, and in the terms צֶלֶם [*sic*] and דְּמוּת he is cautiously approaching the mystery that man is an earthly image of God, that he is created in the likeness of Elohim.”<sup>44</sup> This approach has two major implications. First, the image cannot be limited to any particular part of man, but must include the whole person. Von Rad does not regard the debate between the physical and the spiritual as

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<sup>40</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:145.

<sup>41</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>42</sup>Philo, *On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses*, trans. David T. Runia (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 22.

<sup>43</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59. Skinner appealed to the “most widely accepted explanation” of God taking counsel with divine beings in order to explain the plural pronoun. He argued that the “ultimate explanation” had to be sought in pre-Israelite traditions such as represented in the Babylonian myths, “where a polytheistic view of man’s origin found expression.” Obviously, von Rad went further by defining Elohim as the court itself. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 31-32.

<sup>44</sup>Von Rad, “Eikón: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 391.

helpful, and yet sees the physical as the most complementary to the text. He states, “We should have to decide in favour of a predominantly physical likeness . . . in the sense of a reference to the Elohim nature proper to man.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, man by nature is a physical representation of the heavenly realm. Second, and due to the plural pronoun, God himself must have a form, if he included himself in the heavenly pantheon. Von Rad explains, “Without question, in the broader background of the Priestly statement about God’s image in man there is the notion of Yahweh’s human form.”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, he clarifies this notion by pointing out that Israel did not conceive of God’s human form in anthropologic ideas we hold today, rather it would be in the reverse, as considering man a complement to God’s divinity. He explains, “It cannot be said that Israel regarded God anthropomorphically, but the reverse, that she considered man as theomorphic.”<sup>47</sup> The two implications mentioned therefore provide the framework for understanding man as an earthly image of אֱלֹהִים.

In conclusion, the plural pronoun in the image language and the ancient Near Eastern context best refer to man as created in a divinely earthly image of created heavenly beings. Von Rad concludes,

If P insists on the fact that the pattern on which man was fashioned is to be sought outside the sphere of the created, and that man is also like this pattern, particularly in respect of his relationship to Jahweh, nevertheless at the same time an infinite difference and distance is tacitly recognized.<sup>48</sup>

The tension between man’s earthly-physical existence and his divine image and resemblance is therefore resolved if such image originates in divine creaturely beings.

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<sup>45</sup>Von Rad, “Eikón: The Divine Likeness in the OT,” 391.

<sup>46</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59.

<sup>47</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:146.

<sup>48</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:146.

## Conclusion

The proponents of a physical interpretation of the image of God see a close relationship between Genesis 1:26-27 and cultic Mesopotamian and Egyptian legends, which mention man's creation as a deliberate act of the pantheon and in the physical image of the creator god. They understand *צֶלֶם* to solely mean a physical representation, linguistically and in relation to ANE myth. But due to the complications of fully speculating on God's corporeality, such physical resemblance is attributed to the heavenly beings surrounding God's throne as the *אֱלֹהִים* of whose image man is created.

### Response to the Physical Interpretation of the Image of God

Although the physical interpretation of God's image introduced by Gunkel and outlined by von Rad became an accepted alternative to the traditional view, it is not without problems. The major objections raised against the physical interpretation include, primarily, a skewed dependence on ancient Near Eastern sources, followed by a narrow interpretation of *צֶלֶם* with a wrong approach to God's corporeality, and finally a misinterpretation of *אֱלֹהִים* in Genesis 1:26.

### The Dependence on Ancient Near Eastern Sources

The over reliance on ancient Near Eastern sources and methods on the part of modern Old Testament scholars, particularly those that hold to a physical interpretation of God's image, produces a flawed point of departure for understanding the *imago Dei*. I will be relying on John D. Currid's provocative work,<sup>49</sup> in which he thoroughly outlines major faults with ANE over-dependence, as well as problems that arise with ANE

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<sup>49</sup>John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). Although I quote Currid extensively here, both he and John Oswalt have been voices against the modern majority tendency to emphasize the similarities and parallels between ancient Near Eastern literature and the Bible, as well as to oppose the departure from the position that holds to an original, singular, and unique worldview on the part of the Hebrew writers. John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

parallels to the Old Testament. Currid correctly outlines the problem in two broad categories: the unhelpful symptom of relegating biblical narrative to myth in modern scholarship and the accepted theories of source criticism. He surmises,

The reality is that modern scholarship commonly views biblical history as invention and propaganda. In other words, it was written by post-exilic authors who had limited access to true historical resources. And, obviously, a majority believe that the antediluvian accounts of Genesis 1-11 are mere myth and legend, just like similar stories throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>50</sup>

The problem of source criticism that Currid alludes to first is beyond the scope of this work to fully outline its deficiencies.<sup>51</sup> In the latter problem, Currid recognizes those aspects of Semitic writings that are similar due to the cultural vicinity; nevertheless he

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<sup>50</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 22-23.

<sup>51</sup>A reliance on source criticism (a.k.a. Documentary Hypothesis) has negatively affected the interpretation of the image of God. Richard Hess observed that some scholars have insisted that source criticism is the fundamental starting point for the study of the Bible and according to those scholars, those who do not accept this model are not competent to work as Bible scholars. Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 833-34, Kindle. I am aware of the criticisms that will arise from my efforts to deemphasize the documentary theories that have so framed Old Testament scholarship for the past century. However, I am also aware that I am not alone as an evangelical scholar, whereas others have opposed the theory, see, e.g., Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament; with a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1969), Edward Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989). Providing a helpful excursus on source criticism and its development, Hess makes a point regarding multiple sources, which I wish to emphasize: "Thus the presence of multiple documents existing over many generations and being written as a single text at a date far removed from the earliest composition is neither proven nor necessary." Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 856-59. Although I focus on the supposed similarities of ANE sources to the biblical record as advanced by von Rad and proponents of the physical interpretation of the image of God, suffice it to say that I believe a fundamental flaw exists on their part when they rely on source criticism, particularly assumptions made regarding the Priestly writer's theology. Of greater distress is von Rad's opinion that alleged post-exilic writers sanitized the mythical elements of Gen 1. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58-64. As Gerald Bray succinctly surmised, "It is hard to believe that a monotheistic writer of the exilic period would have left the plural for God unaltered and unexplained; hard too, to believe that his main purpose was to demythologize pagan beliefs." Gerald L. Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (November 1991): 202. Eugene Merrill provided the best assessment of this methodological approach in his review of Gunkel, stating that his theory is fundamentally flawed due to the fallacies of documentary theory: "The emerging consensus in modern times as to the fallacy of such document distinctions vitiates the exegetical and theological conclusions of Gunkel to the extent that he allowed the hypothesis to provide the framework of his discussion." Eugene H. Merrill, "Review of Herman Gunkel's Genesis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 618 (April 1998): 241-42. This would also be true of any of his successors that hold to his conclusions. I do not deny that I too approach the study of Gen 1 with certain presuppositions. One, in particular, is that Old Testament and New Testament witnesses ascribe authorship of Genesis to Moses—a single author. Of consequence is Jesus Christ, which evangelicals would be hard-pressed to assume that he would ascribe authorship to Moses knowing that other authors had compiled the book. Although the arguments advanced by Archer, Bray, Harrison, Hess, Merrill, Young, and myself would not satisfy source critics, the unity of Genesis cannot be denied and for the most part the arguments of source critics remain speculative.

“emphatically and graphically” demonstrates the “distinctions between the worldview of the Hebrews and the beliefs and practices of the rest of the ancient Near East.”<sup>52</sup> He argues that while emphasizing the parallels, scholars ignore the “foundational differences.”<sup>53</sup> And when it comes to the Genesis text, Currid strongly stresses the differences in the biblical and ANE cosmogonies as a premise to avoid pushing any similarity too far. Proponents of the physical interpretation have skewed the biblical cosmogony, as a whole, and of Genesis 1:26-27 in particular, by unreservedly ascribing to these theories. The objections to their appeal to cultic legends are outlined as follows.

First, it is well documented that similarities abound among ANE cosmogonies, including the Genesis account,<sup>54</sup> and because of the multiple accounts, dependence on one source or another becomes questionable. Currid, quoting Wilfred Lambert, states that parallels to Genesis have been found among the Canaanites, Egyptians, Hurrians, Hittites, and early Greeks in addition to Mesopotamia, and therefore, “the question of dependence, if any, has to be approached with an open mind.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, if parallels do exist to the biblical creation account, they are more likely Egyptian, rather than Mesopotamian,<sup>56</sup> which is a significant point given the over-reliance on Mesopotamian texts on the part of proponents of the physical interpretation. Nevertheless, the influence of such texts, whether Egyptian, Mesopotamian or otherwise on the Genesis account cannot be proved.

Second, of greater magnitude and import, is that the God of the Bible is alone

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<sup>52</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 25.

<sup>53</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 23.

<sup>54</sup>See Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012), 39-56. Enns provides a summary of comparisons between various Ancient Near Eastern myths and Gen 1-2. He does not emphasize the significance of the differences between the accounts.

<sup>55</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 36.

<sup>56</sup>See Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, 53-73.

the creator of the universe. As Currid observes, of all the ancient Near Eastern societies, Israel alone is monotheistic.<sup>57</sup> In fact the biblical account has no interest in theogony (the birth of the gods), unlike ANE sources. Ancient sources ascribed powers of nature to their deities and as a result the gods were restricted to natural elements. Additionally, other creator-gods created the pantheon of gods. This is seen in all cosmogonies, except the Hebrew one. The Canaanite *Baal Cycle* text associates various goddesses, the maids of El and Asherah, with the natural elements of light, rain and floods:

The home of Pidray, maid of light,  
The shelter of Tallay, maid of rain,  
The home of Arsay, maid of the floods,  
The home of the beautiful brides.<sup>58</sup>

The *Enuma Elish* text describes the creation of the pantheon as the first creative act:

When on high the heaven had not been named,  
Firm ground below had not been called by name,  
There was nothing but primordial Apsu, their begetter,  
And Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,  
Their waters commingling as a single body;  
No reed hut had been matted, nor marsh land had appeared,  
When no gods whatever had been brought into being,  
Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined —  
Then it was that the gods were formed within them.<sup>59</sup>

In the *Memphite Theology* text, even Egyptian cosmogony describes the creation of the gods:

The gods who came into being in Ptah...  
There took shape in the heart, there took shape on the tongue the form of Atum.  
For the very great one is Ptah, who gave [life] to all the gods and their kas through  
this heart and through this tongue<sup>60</sup>

As Currid argues, the God of the Genesis account is “radically monotheistic,” and

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<sup>57</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 40.

<sup>58</sup>Arnold and Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*, 54.

<sup>59</sup>Arnold and Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*, 32.

<sup>60</sup>Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:54.

contrary to all ancient Near Eastern sources, “the God of the Hebrews is presented as transcendent, that is, set apart from the cosmos.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, while the pantheon struggles with one another, magic is presented as the ultimate power in the universe, and creation is a consequence of a power struggle among the gods, Genesis presents God as “all-powerful, incomparable, and sovereign.”<sup>62</sup> He is God alone and fashions the universe “*ex nihilo* by means of verbal fiat.”<sup>63</sup> The contrasts are so sharp, that a simple reading of the creation account would have left no doubt in the Hebrew reader’s mind of its uniqueness.

Third, the mythical nature of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies stands in sharp contrast to the historical nature of the Genesis account. The writing style of ANE sources is that of legendary stories, or what Currid calls “mythic narrative.” They are, as he observes, “without determinable basis in fact or history.”<sup>64</sup> Notice the mythical poetic style of Egyptian cosmogony that does not describe the processes of creation, rather describes the evidence of created things:

How many are your deeds,  
Though hidden from sight,  
O Sole God beside whom there is none!  
You made the earth as you wished, you alone,  
All peoples, herds, and flocks;  
All upon earth that walk on legs,  
All on high that fly on wings,  
The lands of Khor and Kush,  
The land of Egypt.  
You set every man in his place,  
You supply their needs;  
Everyone has his food,  
His lifetime is counted.  
Their tongues differ in speech,

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<sup>61</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 40.

<sup>62</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 41.

<sup>63</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 43.

<sup>64</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 43.

Their characters likewise;  
Their skins are distinct,  
For you distinguished the peoples.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, the majority of the primordial tales are principally in the realm of the gods, and not on the physical earth. Genesis, on the other hand, is historical narrative, and as Sailhamer observes, the aim of the biblical writer “is to record what actually happened in human history.”<sup>66</sup> Currid agrees that Genesis 1-2 “bears all the markings of Hebrew historical narrative.”<sup>67</sup> There is an elevated style that contains all the aspects of the narrative type, whether it is chronology, well-developed characters, and literal historical sequence. For the Hebrew reader, Genesis 1-11 was as sequential and historical as the patriarchal narratives.

Finally, and bearing most on the topic at hand, the Bible alone declares that God created man according to his image, barring obscure interpretations of certain Mesopotamian texts. According to Genesis 1:26-27, God confers upon man his image and as a result bestows upon him dignity, glory, dominion, and blessing. By contrast, Mesopotamian gods created humanity “simply to do the labor assigned by the deities.”<sup>68</sup> In the *Enuma Elish* text, the god Ea is said to have lain upon mankind the great toil of the gods:

After Ea, the wise, had created humankind,  
Had imposed upon it the service of the gods<sup>69</sup>

Currid points out that in Egyptian cosmogony there is no separate, let alone detailed,

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<sup>65</sup>Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:98.

<sup>66</sup>John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 16. Relying on Frei, he added that it was not enough to say that biblical narratives are only “history-like” and to relegate them to the level of “realistic narrative.” Instead, “one can say with reasonable certainty that the authors of the biblical narratives give every indication of intending their works to be taken as history rather than fiction.”

<sup>67</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 43.

<sup>68</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 42.

<sup>69</sup>Arnold and Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*, 43.

account of human creation, because the origin of humanity “was not as important as it was in the Hebrew account.”<sup>70</sup> In fact the same motif of humanity created to absorb the toil of the gods is evident in Egyptian texts:

Well tended is humankind — god’s cattle,  
He made sky and earth for their sake<sup>71</sup>

Once again, the details conveyed in Genesis 1:26-27 would have left the reader in awe of its originality.

In sum, although similarities may be observed among all ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, the biblical account stands uniquely apart. It is the distinctions rather than the similarities that provide the stark reminder. Currid provides the key point: “the differences are monumental and are so striking that they cannot be explained by a simple Hebrew cleansing of myth.”<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, Genesis 1 is unique and stands in stark contrast to the darkness of mythical legends and polytheism.

### **The interpretation of צֶלֶם and God’s corporeality**

Although proponents of the physical interpretation argue that צֶלֶם means a physical, three-dimensional idol of heathen gods as the preeminent meaning of the word (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Amos 5:26; Ezek 7:20), they fail to recognize the other uses and nuances of the word as equally enlightening to the understanding of God’s image. The term צֶלֶם also refers to a two-dimensional painted picture of men (Ezek 23:14).<sup>73</sup> Of particular interest is the plural construct form in Ezekiel 16:17, צִלְמֵי זָכָר, images of males. In this case, צֶלֶם is not inherently the physical image of a man, but specifically an image made into the form of a male. Equally important is the use of צֶלֶם

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<sup>70</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 42.

<sup>71</sup>Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:106.

<sup>72</sup>Currid, *Against the Gods*, 44.

<sup>73</sup>BDB, 853.

to refer to something shady, a shadow or a phantom, or as Swanson puts it, “semblance, fantasy, formally, a shadowy thing, i.e., something that has none or little real substance but a mere form.”<sup>74</sup> The BDB adds to the reading of Psalm 39:7 “a mere semblance man walks about.”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, when referring to its use in Genesis 1:26-27, 5:3 and 9:6, צֶלֶם is called a likeness because of its “shadowing forth.”<sup>76</sup> The aforementioned passages refer to צֶלֶם as something nonconcrete or as some attribute, which provides a larger canvas on the meaning of the word in the Genesis passages.

There are multiple words for idol in the Hebrew Scriptures, which the most common, גִּלְגֹּל, may be shapeless blocks or logs and in some instances doll images.<sup>77</sup> In other words, גִּלְגֹּל refers to the shape of the idol. Other terms, such as אֶלִיל (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Isa 2:8, 18, 20) is associated with the idea of worthlessness by the prophets<sup>78</sup> and הֶבֶל (Isa 57:13; Jer 10:15; 16:19) is figurative language, even derogatory, that speaks of idols that are “evanescent, unsubstantial, worthless, or vanity.”<sup>79</sup> Both terms speak to the attributes of the idol. In the case of צֶלֶם, it is referring to the representation of the deity,<sup>80</sup> particularly by the construction of the two phrases in Genesis 1:26. This is what Bullinger called a “Hendiadys” (two words employed, but only one idea intended), thus in Genesis 1:26, man was created in the likeness of our image.<sup>81</sup> According to Gerald

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<sup>74</sup>James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1997).

<sup>75</sup>BDB, 854.

<sup>76</sup>Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2003), 710.

<sup>77</sup>BDB, 165.

<sup>78</sup>BDB, 47.

<sup>79</sup>BDB, 210.

<sup>80</sup>R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 767. BDB, 854.

<sup>81</sup>Ethelbert William Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (New York: J. B. Young, 1898), 657-59.

Bray, the meaning of *תְּצַלְמֶנּוּ* supersedes any interpretation that narrowly focuses on the human body. He concludes,

It must now be concluded that *tselem* does not by itself imply that the human body bears some resemblance to God (still less that God has a body like man's), and therefore that the nature of the body's involvement in the concept of the image must be decided on other grounds.<sup>82</sup>

The semantic range for *תְּצַלְמֶנּוּ*, therefore, denies the claims of Gunkel, Humbert and von Rad that it can only refer to man's physical body.

The use of *תְּצַלְמֶנּוּ* in Genesis 5:1-3 and Genesis 9:6 does not inform its use in Genesis 1:26 as a physical resemblance. Von Rad, however, claims that Genesis 5 speaks to Adam's physical offspring and Genesis 9 is addressing the physical murder of a human being, and both passages provide the interpretation of Genesis 1:26 as a physical image. D. J. A. Clines rightly argues that the variations between all three passages might have been deliberate so that the meaning of God's image would not be confused. He observes,

Genesis 5:1 and 5:3 does not speak of the transmission of the divine image (for it belongs to man as such, and so cannot be transmitted . . .), but of Seth's likeness to Adam; hence the aspect of the image doctrine that is of interest to the writer at this point is that Adam was made 'in the likeness' (which is the same thing as 'according to the likeness') of God . . . Seth is not Adam's image, but only like Adam's shape . . . Thus Gen 1:26 is not to be interpreted by 5:1, 3, but vice versa.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, the issue cannot be settled by the syntactical use of the terms alone, but of the theological question regarding God's incorporeality.

Although von Rad defined *עֲלֵהֵימָּ* to mean the heavenly court in order to avoid speculations regarding God's corporeality, he did not completely reject the idea of God's physical form, as mentioned above; and this position creates a theological problem. John 4:24 affirms that God is a spirit, which is an idea that is suggested in Isaiah 31:3. In fact,

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<sup>82</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 196.

<sup>83</sup>David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 78n117. Clines will focus on the differences in prepositions as the significant aspect of the verse, of which I disagree. Instead, I will focus on the inverted use of the terms as the more significant.

when God appeared to the Israelites in the desert, he had no form (Deut 4:12). Isaiah will ask the pointed question: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?” (Isa 40:18). Ezekiel suggests that God was seated on a throne in human appearance (Ezek 1:26). Von Rad said that God’s glory was displayed in human contours,<sup>84</sup> and this serves as the “prelude” to Genesis 1:26.<sup>85</sup> And yet, Ezekiel’s careful language is overlooked. The prophet does not say that God has a human form or describes anything concrete for that matter; instead, there was *דְּמוּת כְּסֵא* and upon “the likeness of the throne” (he repeats it again), *דְּמוּת כְּמֵרְאֵה אָדָם* *a likeness, as the appearance of a man*. It was not a human form, instead a figure (or a likeness) in the appearance of a man. In fact, in 1:27 his waist is described “in the appearance” of “gleaming metal” or “fire” yet there is never a suggestion that God is made of metal or of fire. Furthermore, in 1:28, Ezekiel sees what he describes as *דְּמוּת כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה* *the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord* in order to leave no doubt that it was the appearance of a likeness. The careful construction leaves no doubt that Ezekiel was not to be understood as describing God in human form, let alone bodily form.

What about the anthropomorphisms throughout the Old Testament? None presented God as a concrete, physical being. Indeed, nothing in Scripture suggests that God’s human forms were anything more than temporary manifestations. Clines further suggests that this may be the reason for shrouding God in the figure of the angel of the Lord. He states, “A hesitation to identify the human form with Yahweh himself is suggested by the use of the figure of the ‘angel of the Lord’, who, it frequently transpires, is none other than Yahweh.”<sup>86</sup> This may hold true among the majority of conservative evangelical scholars,<sup>87</sup> but the question remains as to rabbinic consensus.

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<sup>84</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:146.

<sup>85</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59.

<sup>86</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 72.

<sup>87</sup>Bray boldly argues “everyone agrees that the Genesis accounts refer to man being made in

Goshen-Gottstein in support of a physical interpretation of God's image, argued that rabbinic literature never denied God's body. Contrariwise, his assumptions face opposition from the rabbis. To assist in Rabbi Simeon b. Pazzi's comprehension of an incorporeal God, Rabbi Shimi drew an analogy from the human soul:

Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole world, so the soul fills the body. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, sees, but is not seen, so the soul sees but is not itself seen. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, feeds the whole world, so the soul feeds the whole body. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, so the soul is pure. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, abides in the innermost precincts, so the soul abides in the innermost precincts.<sup>88</sup>

In another place, the rabbis taught that any form God took, including a burning bush, was to demonstrate his incorporeal presence.<sup>89</sup> The doctrine of God's unity and omnipresence was closely bound to the teaching that he had no bodily form. C. G. Montefiore explains,

When the uneducated man in the Rabbinic period heard about God's arm or eyes or throne, these terms were, doubtless, less of a metaphor, or of an accommodation, or of a survival, to him than to the trained Rabbis, but they were *not wholly* real. For he heard also that God was 'everywhere', that He was spirit and not flesh, and that (in spite of the 'arm' and the 'eyes' and the 'throne') he must not think of or figure God to himself in the likeness of man or beast or of anything material. However confused and vague his conceptions of God may have been, he was nevertheless, ready to die for the doctrine of that Divine Unity which included His immateriality.<sup>90</sup>

Saying that the rabbis taught God's corporeality goes against the fundamental principles of rabbinic thought, and those foundations centered on God's unity and immateriality, which were firmly established by Scripture. According to the Midrash Tehillim, even angels who guard God's throne exclaim, "Blessed be the glory of the LORD from its

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the image of an invisible God." This is a strong generalization that obviously excludes those that would hold to a physical interpretation. Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 196.

<sup>88</sup>Rabbi Isidore Epstein, ed., *Soncino Babylonian Talmud Berakoth*, trans. Maurice Simon (Teaneck, NJ: Talmudic Books, 2012), 10a.

<sup>89</sup>There is an anecdote about a Gentile who asked a rabbi, "What purpose did your God have in speaking with Moses from the midst of a bush?" The rabbi answered, "To teach that there is no place void of the Divine Presence, not even so lowly a thing as a bush" (Exod. R. 2:5). Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (Lexington, KY: BN Publishing, 2008), 9.

<sup>90</sup>C. G. Montefiore and H. M. J. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Meridian, 1960), lii.

place!” (Ezek 3:12). The vague statement “from its [His] place” attests to their ignorance of God’s exact location. Thus when asked where is God located, Rabbi Gamaliel replied: “I don’t know.”<sup>91</sup> Kadushin contends, “It is wrong to say that the Rabbis affirmed the corporeality of God as a principle. Such a principle would hardly be compatible with what we recognized to be the normal religious experience of the Rabbis.”<sup>92</sup> Urbach concurs, “From the Bible the Sages acquired their supramythological and supranatural conception of the Deity.” He further explains, “He is spirit and not flesh. All possibility of representing God by means of any creature upon the earth or the hosts of heaven is completely negated.”<sup>93</sup> God having human form, or any form to his essence for that matter, was foreign to rabbinic thought.

The question then arises as to how rabbis account for biblical anthropomorphisms ascribed to a bodiless God. One rabbi remarked, “We borrow terms from His creatures to apply to Him in order to assist the understanding.”<sup>94</sup> Schechter accounts anthropomorphic ascriptions to endowing God with qualities and attributes, which make him “accessible to man.”<sup>95</sup> That said, Ramban interprets God speaking as God willing; Rabbi Abraham Ezra interprets God seeing as God thinking.<sup>96</sup> In Talmudic fashion, and often quoted, the *Berakoth* states, “The Torah used an ordinary form of expression”<sup>97</sup> when describing God as looking. Anthropomorphisms as understood by

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<sup>91</sup>“Midrash Psalms,” 217a, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/tmm/tmm17.htm>.

<sup>92</sup>Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Blaisdell, 1965), 280.

<sup>93</sup>Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 37.

<sup>94</sup>Quoting Rabbi Ishmael’s “Mekhilta,” Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 7.

<sup>95</sup>S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 36ff.

<sup>96</sup>Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides)*, 27, 29.

<sup>97</sup>Epstein, *Berakoth*, 31b.

the western mind are foreign to rabbinic thought: the Sages just did not see it as ascribing corporeality.<sup>98</sup> Cohen insists that it is “impossible to maintain” that the rabbis believed in God’s corporeality even if numerous “strong anthropomorphic ascriptions” appear in their writings.<sup>99</sup> He suggests, as do others, that the thought behind them is the doctrine of the imitation of God.<sup>100</sup> Wherefore, if one begins with the philological evidence, doubts are cast as to the exclusive physical definition of אֱלֹהִים. Moreover, if one begins with the incorporeality of God, the image of God cannot include the human body.

### **Misinterpretation of אֱלֹהִים in Genesis 1:26**

Many scholars have addressed the problematic plural,<sup>101</sup> but Clines correctly assesses that the issue is “peripheral to the interpretation of the image.”<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the plural term for God in Genesis 1:26, אֱלֹהִים, does not point to man’s creation after the image or pattern of heavenly beings, as von Rad would suggest. Gordon Wenham lists the six ways that scholars have interpreted the plural בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ *let us make man in our image and according to our likeness* in Genesis 1:26: (1) a heavenly court or a court of angels; (2) a reference to the Christ; (3) a remnant of polytheism; (4) the plural of majesty; (5) the plural of self-deliberation; and (6) a reference to the Holy Spirit.<sup>103</sup> As

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<sup>98</sup>“The fact is that the Rabbis and the philosophers simply do not inhabit the same universe of discourse . . . they [the rabbi] do not really qualify or mitigate either biblical anthropomorphisms or their own. The very problem of anthropomorphism did not exist for them . . . . God’s love and His justice are basically anthropomorphic . . . even as abstract concepts.” Urbach, *The Sages*, 280.

<sup>99</sup>Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 8.

<sup>100</sup>Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 223ff. The doctrine of the Imitation of God is foundational to the theory of Torah. The Torah commands morality, which consists in compliance with its precepts. God is accordingly represented as Himself obeying the precepts which He desires Israel to observe. Fulfillment of the Torah does not constitute God’s bodily actions. In fact, the rabbis declare, “A man should always learn from the mind of his Maker.”

<sup>101</sup>See, Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 144-45. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 161. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 203-8. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 63-69.

<sup>102</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 62.

<sup>103</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 27-28.

previously mentioned, von Rad ascribes to the first explanation as the best one to fit his understanding of  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$  and its connection to  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$ . Wenham and Bray concur with von Rad in the sense that they too agree that the most probable idea here is that God is speaking to the heavenly court or his heavenly hosts; although they do not suggest that man was created in the image of angels, nor did the angels participate in man's creation.<sup>104</sup> This is the majority view.<sup>105</sup>

The interpretation that the term refers to angels is problematic in the sense that the entire creation narrative presents God alone as the creator of the universe —  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$  with the singular verb. To say otherwise would present major exegetical and theological problems. As Derek Kidner opines, “any implication that others had a hand in our creation is quite foreign to the chapter as a whole and to the challenge in Isa 40:14: ‘With whom took he counsel?’”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, so that there is no confusion, God created man  $\text{בְּצִלְמוֹ}$ , singular (Gen 1:27). John Sailhamer points out that the construction of 1:27 does not allow the reader to have it both ways: “in his own image” and “in the image of God” cannot mean that God created man in his own image and the image of angels.<sup>107</sup> Gentry

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<sup>104</sup>Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 198-99. Wenham, *Genesis*, 1:28.

<sup>105</sup>Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum admit to the difficult problem of the first person plural, however, dismiss the divine dialogue within the Godhead explanation (Kidner and Mathews) as well as Clines’ theory of a dialogue between God and his spirit, as “virtually impossible” on grammatical-historical grounds. Instead, together with Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 213-14, Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 69-70, and Walton, “Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document,” 306-9, they ascribe ancient Near Eastern meaning to the verse and defend the heavenly council or angelic pantheon as an “impressive” explanation. However, Gentry and Wellum propose that the whole idea not be understood as angelic participation in man’s creation, rather it be understood as a “polemic to subvert” the ANE idea of the world’s rule as “a community effort on the part of the gods.” Waltke, on the other hand, relies on Delitzsch, and argues that in using the plural, God “connects Himself with the angels.” Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 214. Garr does admit that the theory has not advanced beyond academic theory and speculation. He observes, “Absent decisive evidence, corroboration, and theological rationale, the consensus position has yet to instill confidence.” Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 21. Although Gentry and Wellum hold to a theory, which they admit some will not accept, they agree that an explanation of the plural is not necessary for understanding the image of God. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 203-8.

<sup>106</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 56.

<sup>107</sup>John Sailhamer, *Genesis* in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 37.

and Wellum disagree with this conclusion, and relying on Garr, make a distinction between “proposal and execution,” such that the heavenly court only agrees with the proposal, but does not participate in man’s creation.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, this position is highly suspect given the plural of verse 26; addressing a heavenly court would entail the participation of the court in the action (“let us make”). But as Clines has correctly observed, there is no mention anywhere in the entire passage of a heavenly court. Also, if one did exist, it would be in conflict with the plural of 1:26 and the singular of 1:27. Finally, and worth noting, all other passages where a heavenly court is mentioned (1 Kgs 22:1; Job 1; Isa 6), it is usually followed by a description of it,<sup>109</sup> which is not the case in Genesis.

What about אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 8? The Septuagint as well as the book of Hebrews renders אֱלֹהִים to mean the angels, as do other passages (Job 1:6; Ps 82:1, 6). Nevertheless, as Bray observes, although mankind must show deference to angels (1 Cor 11:10), as redeemed humans in Christ we will judge the angels (1 Cor 6:3). By their own admission, angels are “fellow servants” with the Apostles, the Old Testament prophets, and any covenant believer that loves the Word of God (Rev 22:9); to consider them as agents of man’s creation goes out of bounds from the biblical text. These are just some examples that “there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that we are created in their image, or that they participated in our creation.”<sup>110</sup> Psalm 8:5 does not provide any definitive answer to the meaning or use of אֱלֹהִים in Genesis 1:26.

Did the rabbis understand אֱלֹהִים as the participation of a heavenly court in man’s creation? According to Urbach, not only did the Sages deny angelic participation in man’s creation, they wrote directly against it, “Against this view are directed numerous

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<sup>108</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 208.

<sup>109</sup>Relying on Cassuto, Clines makes the same observation. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 66.

<sup>110</sup>Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 198.

polemical homilies of the Amoraim, which expressly negate all participation on the part of the angels in the act of Creation.”<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, there are numerous rabbis whose positions ranged from a company of angels witnessing God’s creative work to a heavenly court directly being consulted.<sup>112</sup> But the Talmud rejected such a concept relegating it to heresy: “He created in the beginning one man only, so that heretics should not say that there are several Powers in heaven.”<sup>113</sup> Ramban opines that God was making a statement regarding the elements he would put to use:

Thus when He gave the waters the power of bring forth *a living soul*, the command concerning them was *Let the waters swarm*. The command concerning cattle was *Let the earth bring forth*. But in the case of man He said, *Let us make*, that is, I and the aforementioned earth, let us make man, the earth to bring forth the body from its elements as it did with cattle and beasts, as it is written, *And the Eternal G-d formed man of the dust of the ground*, and He, blessed be He, to give the spirit from His mouth, the Supreme One, as it is written, *And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*.<sup>114</sup>

Likewise, rabbis Joshua ben Levi, Ammi, Hilla and others rejected any concept of consultation with angels. In fact, Rabbi Hilla compared it to a king strolling in front of his palace, and seeing a boulder lying on the ground, said “What shall we do with it? . . . — that is to say, this is the way kings speak.”<sup>115</sup> Urbach suggests that an anonymous Midrash declaration was based on the spirit of the teachings of Rabbi Abbalm, when it says, “It is a foolish error to say that He took counsel with an-other [*sic*].”<sup>116</sup> Many of the

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<sup>111</sup>Urbach, *The Sages*, 203.

<sup>112</sup>Rabbi Hanina advanced the idea that the creation of the angels occurred on the fifth day and that God took counsel with them to create the first man. Rabbi Huna Rabba of Sepphoris went as far as to suggest that part of the angelic company opposed the creation of man on account of the evil in him, and during the argument with the other party of angels, God went ahead and created man. Although some rabbinic positions included angelic presence or consultation, none went as far as to suggest participation. Urbach, *The Sages*, 205-6.

<sup>113</sup>“Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 38,” 38a, accessed July 27, 2016, [http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin\\_38.html#38a\\_24](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_38.html#38a_24).

<sup>114</sup>Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides)*, 52-53.

<sup>115</sup>Urbach, *The Sages*, 207.

<sup>116</sup>Urbach, *The Sages*, 207.

Sages regarded any such interpretation of Genesis 1:26 to be sectarian-Gnostic interpretations. On one occasion the sectarians asked Rabbi Simlai his thoughts on the verse and what he concluded concerning the plural, to which he replied, “Read what follows: ‘Scripture does not write, *wa-yivre ’u ’Elohîm* [‘So God created’ (plural)] the man’, but ‘*wa-yivra ’Elohîm* [‘So God created’ (singular)]’.”<sup>117</sup> Urbach relegated all notions of angelic participation to Gnostic teaching, and summarizes the debate by suggesting that even the church fathers’ understanding of אֱלֹהִים was based on Jewish interpretation:

The Church Fathers, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus disallowed the Gnostic idea of the association of the angels with the making of man and adopted the Jewish interpretations, namely that God addressed Himself, His heart, or in their terminology, His Sophia, Logos, or ‘hands’—expressions that they identified with the ‘son’ or the ‘holy ghost’. Tertullian states expressly that those who argue that God consulted the angels do so from anti-Christian motives, in order to contradict the view that by the plural Scripture refers to the Trinity.<sup>118</sup>

The decisive rabbinic interpretation of אֱלֹהִים in Genesis 1:26 rejects any thought of angelic participation in the creation of the world, let alone man’s creation.

As mentioned earlier, the explanation of the plural has no bearing on the interpretation of the image, except when such interpretations attempt to inject some foreign element to the meaning of אֱלֹהִים, as von Rad has done. Nonetheless, if such an explanation is warranted, Kidner’s Godhead argument is preferred. John 1:3 affirms that Christ cooperated with the Father in creation. And to avoid the risk of sounding anachronistic, the Spirit’s work is already introduced in Genesis 1:2. Clines rightly argues that the change from the plural to the singular in Genesis 1:27 creates no difficulty if God is addressing his Spirit, because although the Spirit is distinguishable from God, he is “nevertheless God.”<sup>119</sup> He also convincingly challenges the notion of those that will

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<sup>117</sup>Epstein, *Berakoth*, 63.

<sup>118</sup>Urbach, *The Sages*, 207.

<sup>119</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 69.

claim that Trinitarian concepts are being imposed on Old Testament texts. Although it is encumbered upon us to interpret Genesis 1:26-28 in its cultural and historical context:

We have a right to hope, indeed to expect, that the interpretation we offer as Old Testament exegetes of this plural will not be incompatible with a proper Christian exegesis which sees here the co-operation of the Godhead in the work of creation.<sup>120</sup>

In any case, whatever the plural may suggest in this verse, it certainly does not anticipate man's creation as realized by angelic beings.

## **Conclusion**

The physical interpretation suffers from many exegetical and theological problems that render it a deficient understanding of God's image. The objections regarding a skewed dependence on ancient Near Eastern sources, followed by a narrow interpretation of *לְצַדִּיקִים*, coupled with a wrong approach to God's corporeality, and finally a misinterpretation of *לְצַדִּיקִים* in Genesis 1:26 make the entire argument for a physical interpretation implausible. For these reasons it has declined in popularity.<sup>121</sup> As Horst succinctly surmised, the physical interpretation reduces God's image to materialism.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, an interpretation so heavily dependent on extrabiblical evidence puts into question the sufficiency of Scripture. Thus, an alternative approach became necessary for modern Old Testament scholars.

### **The Functional Interpretation and the Meaning of the Image of God**

The disagreements between a structural (ontological) and a functional image of God have dominated the discussion regarding its locus for the past half century. Anthony Hoekema provides the best explanation of both approaches and their emphasis:

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<sup>120</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 62.

<sup>121</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 196.

<sup>122</sup>Horst, "Face to Face," 263. He specifically singles out Gunkel's error: "the image of God would mean nothing else than a physical sort of matter, and would presuppose that God too had physical body, form, and appearance: in short, that God is much like a man."

This distinction concerns the question of the relation between what could be called the structural and the functional aspects of man. The problem is this: Must we think of the image of God in man as involving only what man is and not what he does, or only what he does and not what he is, or both what he is and what he does? Is “image of God” only a description of the way in which the human being functions, or is it also a description of the kind of being he or she is? Some theologians lay most of their emphasis here on the structural aspect (what kind of being man is), whereas other theologians lay most of their emphasis on the functional aspect (what man does).<sup>123</sup>

The functional interpretation of the image of God rose in popularity when scholars conceptually embraced a holistic view<sup>124</sup> of Old Testament anthropology coupled with the textual emphasis on man’s mandate to rule the earth. As a result, the functional interpretation has become the “absolutely dominant interpretation” in modern times.<sup>125</sup> In his 1967 article, D. J. A. Clines provided the most thorough defense of the functional interpretation that has served foundational for modern scholars.<sup>126</sup>

Clines believed that scholarship had reached an impasse. A philological approach defined the image in physical terms. If the starting point was God’s incorporeality, the image could not include the body and therefore had to be found in man’s spiritual qualities. If male and female was the conclusive explanation, then the image was to be understood in terms of a personal relationship with its locus in married couples.<sup>127</sup> All legitimate starting points lead to varying conclusions, and therefore Genesis 1:26-27 must be pointing to something more conclusive. Like all interpreters of the image of God text, Clines admits that the essential meaning of the passage is clear, namely the desire to know in what respect man is like God. However, the obvious fact of God’s immanence and man’s finite existence “imposes limitations upon the range and

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<sup>123</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 69.

<sup>124</sup>A holistic view of anthropology means that a distinction between body and soul (spiritual part) cannot be observed, rather, the human being is a psychosomatic unit.

<sup>125</sup>Gunnlaugur, *The Image of God*, 221-22.

<sup>126</sup>Waltke, for example, leans heavily on Clines’ theory. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 215n.

<sup>127</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 61.

degree” of man’s similarities to God.<sup>128</sup> Merrill concurs, “The differences between the transcendent God and mere mortals are so vast, however, as to require a better explanation of the *imago Dei*, one that focuses not so much on ontological equivalence as on functional comparisons.”<sup>129</sup> Wherefore for some scholars, a functional view of God’s image seems to provide an interpretation with the least amount of problems.

### **The Functional Interpretation Sees the כ of Essence with Explanatory Significance**

Advocates for the functional interpretation begin with philological considerations regarding the preposition accompanying כְּצֶלֶם as it is used in Genesis 1:26 to argue for functionality instead of ontology. First, the focus is directed to כְּצֶלֶם as the key word in the passage, while relegating דְמוּת as non-essential to the meaning. Second, the manner in which the phrase is constructed should provide the primary clues. Thus, the phrase כְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים may be rendered two different ways: *in* the image of God or *as* the image of God. The former rendition translates the preposition as the כ *of norm*,<sup>130</sup> and the latter as the כ *of essence*.<sup>131</sup> On this textual nuance hinges the entire functional argument.

The כ *of norm* may be rendered either as a physical form or metaphorical — a spiritual quality — and although Clines acknowledges the legitimacy of each, he ultimately rejects both approaches as deficient for the understanding of God’s image. First, regarding the physical form, Clines understands that anthropomorphisms are used throughout the Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient Near East to describe God. Nevertheless, relying on Stamm, human depictions of God point to his personhood and

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<sup>128</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 54.

<sup>129</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 170.

<sup>130</sup>So called by Clines, relying on Gunkel and Eichrodt. The כ of norm is the usual manner in which the preposition is rendered. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 70.

<sup>131</sup>BDB, 88.

not necessarily to a bodily form. He argues, “Yahweh is depicted in human terms, not because He has a body like a human being, but because He is a person and is therefore naturally thought of in terms of human personality.”<sup>132</sup> God’s appearance would seem real, yet with no likeness (Ezek 1:26) or any existing shape (Isa 6:1). Second, in regards to the metaphorical meaning, Clines agrees that the predominant literal sense of *צלם* is contrasted by its metaphorical use, particularly in Psalm 73:20.<sup>133</sup> Nonetheless, he argues that even in the most remote metaphorical uses, “the idea of physical shape and form is present.”<sup>134</sup> To render *צלם* as matching God’s spiritual qualities would be an unlikely use of the term by the Genesis author. In the end, Clines finds both a physical or metaphorical meaning as deficient to the understanding of God’s image and “very probably not the correct meaning” of the term *צלם*.<sup>135</sup>

Clines offers the *ḥ* of *essence*, meaning man was created ‘as’ or ‘in the capacity of’ the image of God as a more satisfactory interpretation.<sup>136</sup> First, he argues that the construction in Genesis 1:26, *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ*, *let us make man in our image, after our likeness* resembles Exod 6:3, *וַיֵּרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם* and *I appeared . . . as El Shaddai* when the Lord appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *as* God Almighty. He rightly admits, however, that *עֲשָׂה* does not take a *ḥ* *essentiae* in the Old Testament.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, he relegates the opacities to “mere accident” since examples of other similar verbs using the

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<sup>132</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 70-71.

<sup>133</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 74.

<sup>134</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 75.

<sup>135</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 75.

<sup>136</sup>Gesenius, *GHCLLOT*, 379 (§119i). Similarly, Waltke argued that human beings do not have or bear God’s image, but are in their entirety the image of God. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 214. Merrill also argues for the “adverb of comparison” use of the *ḥ* preposition and concludes that “the phrase in question would read ‘as our image’” and therefore the phrase is “no longer one of ontological identification but functional representation.” Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 170.

<sup>137</sup>The usual construction following *עֲשָׂה* is either two accusatives, or one accusative and *ל* (e.g. Gen 27:9; Judg 8:27). Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 76.

כ *essentiae* abound.<sup>138</sup>

Second, image and likeness and their corresponding prepositions are not synonymous, rather the latter should be regarded as simply detail. Departing from Humbert and von Rad, Clines argues that although כ is a comparative particle, it is not sufficient to regard כ and כ as synonymous. He explains, “a perfectly satisfactory interpretation is gained by taking כְּצַלְמֵנוּ as ‘as our image, to be our image’ and כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ not synonymous but explanatory of the ‘image’.”<sup>139</sup> In fact, the apparent interchangeability of the prepositions in Genesis 5:1 and 5:3, has an exegetical reason. These verses do not speak of the transmission of God’s image, but the transmission of Adam’s shape to his physical son.<sup>140</sup> Clines concludes, “Thus we may say that according to Genesis 1 man does not *have* the image of God, nor is he *made* in the image of God, but *is* himself the image of God.”<sup>141</sup> The position in favor of כ *essentiae* is attractive to those that hold to the functional interpretation because it avoids the implications of a physical or metaphorical use of כְּצַלְמֵנוּ as well as ontological explanations for the image.

### **The Functional Interpretation Appeals to ANE Understanding of Image**

Functional interpreters find that the meaning of image in Genesis 1:26 is best understood when one comprehends what the term meant to ancient Near Eastern writers and their audiences.<sup>142</sup> The sparse and unexplained biblical phrases impose exegetical limits to the meaning of כְּצַלְמֵנוּ, which encourages finding meaning elsewhere. Clines’

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<sup>138</sup>In particular, Num 18:26, Ps 78:55, and Deut 1:13. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 77.

<sup>139</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 77.

<sup>140</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 78.

<sup>141</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 80.

<sup>142</sup>Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 65-66. Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (November 1995): 318. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 170. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 190-96.

reason for such dependence is based on Old Testament opposition to images resulting in an unsatisfactory explanation of צֶלֶם. He argues, “In order to discover the meaning of the image, we must find what it signified to those who worshipped images and thus held beliefs about the nature of images.”<sup>143</sup> The reliance on extra-biblical evidence will thus prove significant for those holding to a functional interpretation.

Two propositions form the basis for the appeal to ANE literature. First, as Bernhardt asserts, image is an indwelt statue; indwelt with the fluid of the creator being of whose image the statue is made.<sup>144</sup> Clines explains that this ‘fluid’ was often “spoken of as ‘breath’ or ‘fire’,” thus it was immaterial and could penetrate matter.<sup>145</sup> This was especially true of those images that represented gods. As Clines explains, not all statues were representational portrayals, rather the image was in possession of the divine fluid, minimizing the representational character, and highlighting the fact that the image is a “living being” as a result of possessing the indwelling spirit.<sup>146</sup> The same is true of statues representing kings. Royal images could have been simply representational or ancient billboards of the king’s claims; nevertheless to revile a royal statue was an act against the king himself. Clines reminds us, “The image is no mere symbolic portrayal of the king, but stands in a spiritual union with him.”<sup>147</sup> The second proposition, and sparsely mentioned in ancient Near Eastern data, is references to human beings, kings in particular, as god’s image.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, although the evidence may apply the image of

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<sup>143</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 81.

<sup>144</sup>Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, *Gott und Bild; ein Beitrag zur Begründung und Deutung des Bilderverbotes im Alten Testament* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1956), 17-68.

<sup>145</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 81.

<sup>146</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 82. Bernhardt argues that the Akkadian word *šalmu* may not only refer to representation, but also a “mere stelae” without any particular form. Bernhardt, *Gott und Bild*, 31ff.

<sup>147</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 83.

<sup>148</sup>Clines mentions (1) Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king, who was addressed as the “image of Bel” by his correspondents; (2) Adad-shum-usur calls Esarhaddon the image of Shamash, the king of the gods; (3) In another letter, Esarhaddon expresses that “the king, he is like unto the (very) image of god; (4)

the god to human persons in certain occasions, it is always applied to the king. As Clines clarifies, “The image of the god is associated very closely with rulerhood.”<sup>149</sup> Since it is the king who rules, he must be the one created by the god to be his image.

How do the two foregoing propositions affect the definition of  $\text{מְצַלְמֵנוּ}$  in the Old Testament? First, and correlating with the physical interpretation, is that  $\text{מְצַלְמֵנוּ}$  refers to statue, and statues are three-dimensional objects.<sup>150</sup> Thus, God’s image cannot exclude the body. Clines states, “Man according to the Old Testament is a psychosomatic unity; it is therefore the corporeal animated man that is the image of God.”<sup>151</sup> Clines further argues that such an understanding of image affirms the value of the human body and therefore requires the rejection of Platonist and Neo-Platonist thinking that relegates the body to secondary importance. Quoting Eichrodt, he affirms, “The body . . . is the living form of our essential self, the necessary expression of our individual existence, in which the meaning of our life must find its realization.”<sup>152</sup> Although denying that the Old Testament analogizes corporeal man to a corporeal God,  $\text{מְצַלְמֵנוּ}$  is primarily representation rather than similarity indicating that God willed a physically and spiritually united being to be his physical representative on earth.

Second, just like ancient Near Eastern statues were set up in conquered territories in order to represent the presence of the king in his absence, man is made in God’s image to represent an otherwise invisible (absent) God on the earth. Clines summarizes this point by relying on Renckens:

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the astrologer Asharidu the Elder tells an unnamed king “thou art the image of Marduk” and later states “the priest is the image of Marduk.” He will also point out that in Egyptian literature, the application of image of God is to the king alone as “image of the god” he represents and it does not apply to generally to all human beings. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 83-85.

<sup>149</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 85.

<sup>150</sup>Waltke makes this hasty generalization: “Selem *always* refers to a physical image, having a formed body.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 215.

<sup>151</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 85-86.

<sup>152</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 87.

It is of the greatest theological moment therefore that precisely within this depiction of God's transcendent freedom over the whole world-order we find the doctrine of God's image, that is to say, of the real presence, or immanence, of the deity within the world through the person of man.<sup>153</sup>

It was Bonhoeffer who wrote that the only continuity between God and creation was the Word,<sup>154</sup> but Clines would add a corollary in that after the sixth day and beyond, it would be man who would serve as the continuity. Man, as *צֶלֶם*, becomes the continuity between the creator and his creation, and he relies on the ancient Near Eastern texts to explain how this occurs. He opines, "The Ancient Near East provides a clear answer to this question by its concept of the divine fluid or spirit which inspires the dead matter of the image with a principle of life."<sup>155</sup> Wherefore, Clines argues that Genesis 1 is not focused on the image's mechanism as it is its function, and will therefore stop short of human divinization.

Third, functional interpreters understand the primary function of an image is to express its archetype, and not to depict it, and therefore God's image would not imply any similarity exists.<sup>156</sup> Deducing from ANE descriptions of statues—which may at times be simple pillars containing no human likeness—it is a fallacy to say that *דְמוּת* strengthens or weakens *צֶלֶם*. Clines is of the opinion that the words are not synonymous, as explained above, but at the same time *דְמוּת* carries no meaning in itself and is only explanatory of the type of image. He states, "We are suggesting that the *דְמוּת* refers entirely to the *צֶלֶם*; it has no referential meaning in itself, but only specifies the kind of image, namely a representational image."<sup>157</sup> So Genesis 1:26 speaks to human likeness

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<sup>153</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 88.

<sup>154</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John W. De Gruchy, and Douglas S. Bax, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 19.

<sup>155</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 89.

<sup>156</sup>Relying on Bernhard. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 90.

<sup>157</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 92. Unlike the vast majority of ANE literature, biblical descriptions apply the image to the entire human race. Ancient Near Eastern literature, on the other hand, almost exclusively attribute the image to the king alone. In many ways, functional interpreters see Genesis 1 as polemic in the sense of the "democratization" of God's image that not only included all men, but also all women. Clines remarks, "Man everywhere is essentially the same." Therefore, the phrase "male and

to God, but only in the sense in which the image-bearer is like the God he images in his function.

But the king was the image of the god in ANE texts and by virtue of being king and in the god's image he was a ruler, which leads to the fourth observation and the crux of the argument: the concept of man's rulership is connected to the meaning of the image of God in the strongest possible way. Clines is convinced that the background to the Genesis 1:26 phrase was formed in part by ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian descriptions of their kings, and agrees with Engnell that image terminology is royal ideology.<sup>158</sup> He notes,

The term 'image of God' in itself indicates the regal character of man, it seems to us, just as it does in Egypt, where only the king is the image of God, and where his rulership is often specifically associated with his being the image.<sup>159</sup>

From an exegetical point of view, Clines also observes the association between rulership and image. Agreeing with the NIV translation, וַיִּרְדּוּ in Genesis 1:26 may be rendered: "...so that they may rule;" an argument first advanced by W. H. Schmidt.<sup>160</sup> On the danger of being too narrow, Clines does not see functionality as definitive of the image<sup>161</sup> but argues that its definition is incomplete if it does not refer to the function of rulership. He explains,

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female created he them" does not serve as a definition of (or additional meaning to) the image of God, instead polemically amplifies the depth and scope of what it means to be made in God's image.

<sup>158</sup>The royal language is strengthened by the *Tell Fakhariyeh* inscription's use of the Aramaic דמיות and צלם. Gentry and Wellum provide a thorough comparison and argue that "while both terms can and do refer to the statue of the king, each has a different nuance." The term for image is associated with the majesty and power of the king in his role in relation to his subjects. The term likeness is related to the king's role as a worshipper of his god. This comparison provides the basis for arguing against the synonymy of the terms as well. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 193-94.

<sup>159</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 97.

<sup>160</sup>Relying on Schmidt, Clines argues that the vav joins two jussives. Another example of this type of construction would be Gen. 1:6, where two acts of creation are not referred to and 1:16ff the creation of the sun and moon includes within itself the very purpose which they are to serve. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 96.

<sup>161</sup>Hart will appeal to Psalm 8 and argue more directly that royal ideology as applied to mankind in general is the "important plank" for the functional argument. Hart, "Genesis 1," 319-20.

We agree that man's dominion over the animals cannot be definitive of the image, for we have already seen that the image must include a number of elements and cannot be defined so narrowly. But it seems to us that since dominion is so immediate and necessary a consequence of the image, it loses the character of a mere derivative of the image and virtually becomes a constitutive part of the image itself.<sup>162</sup>

Hence man is God's *locum tenens*. He is the earth's ruler precisely because he is the image of God, and no description of man is complete that does not consider him God's image and the earth's ruler.

Fifth, just as Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern kings remain the image of the god until death at which time they become reunited with the god because of the divine fluid in them, man does not cease to be God's image. Clines assesses, "There can be no question, therefore, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, of a 'loss' of the image."<sup>163</sup> Exegetically, both Genesis 9 and Psalm 8, which are both post-fall and post-flood, do not indicate any forfeiture of God's image. Clines also argues for the "permanence of the image" as a New Testament concept in Paul and James' writings.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, he returns to Genesis 1:26 and proposes that the text answers the question of loss, because it has the human species in mind, and not simply Adam and Eve. In other words, Genesis 1 narrates the creation of the species of animals and the command to multiply; likewise, the entire human race is addressed and commanded to multiply with the understanding that it propagates itself. He suggests, "Thus man, so long as he remains man, is the image of God, for man as mankind, not as primeval man, is made the image of God."<sup>165</sup> Image-

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<sup>162</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 96.

<sup>163</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 99-100. Clines claims that the functional interpretation is the only view that can argue against the loss of the image. Any ontological position will have to address and accommodate the issue because of the fall. Thus, in his opinion, the functional interpretation is the only view that does justice to Gen 9:6 and all other NT texts that affirm that man is still the image of God even after the Fall.

<sup>164</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 100.

<sup>165</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 101. Here Clines concurs with Barth, who said that the image "does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists in the fact that man himself and as such is God's creation. He would not be man, were he not the image of God. He is God's image, in that he is man." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:184.

bearing is a perpetual function of the entire human race, if Genesis 1 is read, as Clines proposes, “for its own sake, as it should be, at least initially”<sup>166</sup> and remains isolated from the sin perpetrated on the human race by the primeval couple.

## **Conclusion**

The ancient Near Eastern understanding of image as a statue of the king created to represent the god on earth through rulership should be, as functional interpreters suggest, the premise for interpreting Genesis 1:26-27. Clines’ summary is cited in full to avoid misunderstanding:

Man is created not *in* God's image, since God has no image of His own, but *as* God's image, or rather *to be* God's image, that is to deputize in the created world for the transcendent God who remains outside the world order. That man is God's image means that he is the visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God; he is representative rather than representation, since the idea of portrayal is secondary in the significance of the image. However, the term 'likeness' is an assurance that man is an adequate and faithful representative of God on earth. The whole man is the image of God, without distinction of spirit and body. All mankind, without distinction, are the image of God. The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function. This function is to represent God's lordship to the lower orders of creation. The dominion of man over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image itself. Mankind, which means both the human race and individual men, do not cease to be the image of God so long as they remain men; to be human and to be the image of God are not separable.<sup>167</sup>

## **Response to the Functional Interpretation of the Image of God**

The functional interpretation may have become the dominant view in modern times, but many unanswered questions remain. The major objections raised include the false dichotomy that positions God’s immanence against human finiteness, followed by a minority rendering of the ׀ preposition, and concluding with the improper assignments of ancient Near Eastern understandings of image versus the biblical view.

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<sup>166</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 100.

<sup>167</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 101.

## Positioning God's Immanence against Human Finiteness Is a False Dichotomy

The so-called impasse that creates problems for an ontological explanation of God's image, which Clines claims exists when God's immanence is juxtaposed against man's finiteness, particularly because of an irreducible holistic human nature, is an artificial dichotomy. First of all, human nature is dualistic, principally composed of a spiritual aspect. In order to avoid over-generalizations on studies that span two millennia regarding the biblical view of human nature, the explanation that best describes the scriptural view as a whole is dualistic holism.<sup>168</sup> John W. Cooper explains,

*Holism* means that humans are created and redeemed by God as integral personal-spiritual-physical wholes—single beings consisting of different parts, aspects, dimensions, and abilities that are not naturally independent or separable. *Dualism* means that our core personalities—whether we label them *souls*, *spirits*, *persons*, *selves*, or *egos*—are distinct and, by God's supernatural providence, can exist apart from our physical bodies after death.<sup>169</sup>

Cooper bases his findings on three observations. First, although the biblical worldview distinguishes God from creation, it views creation as having both a natural and spiritual dimension and an incorporeal God intimately involved in the creation and operation of a physical universe, not apart from it. Man is likewise dust and spirit; made of earth and also forming part of the spiritual realm.<sup>170</sup> Second, Genesis 2:7 recounts man's formation from material and immaterial substances to constitute an irreducible living being. The Old Testament will not often make "systematic division between the physical and spiritual parts" during this earthly life that would imply that body and soul operate as

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<sup>168</sup>According to Cooper, Christian intellectuals have done a disservice to the church by challenging long-held positions on human nature. "Has the church been wrong?" asks Cooper. To challenge historical conclusions is to invite doctrinal postmodernism. It is not that men are infallible, but certainly if the best Christian minds got theological anthropology incorrect, and if other "core doctrines are merely possible readings of Scripture," then we ought to acknowledge, as Cooper calls it, "doctrinal pluralism." The bottom-line is that dualistic holism has been a doctrinal consensus affirmed by Orthodox Christianity over two millennia and modern challenges weigh philosophy and science above Scripture. John W. Cooper, "The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 45-46.

<sup>169</sup>Cooper, "The Current Body-Soul Debate," 34.

<sup>170</sup>Cooper, "The Current Body-Soul Debate," 36-37.

“distinct substances;” however, as Cooper correctly insists, “refined versions of substance dualism are not necessarily ruled out by the Old Testament.”<sup>171</sup> Third, the Old Testament affirms an eternal existence of the soul that continues to survive in a disembodied state after physical death. The biblical text has in view a bodily resurrection, and as Cooper points out, to maintain a holistic earthly existence with a “dualistic view of death” is neither contradictory nor “synthesizing Hebrew and Platonic views of the soul.”<sup>172</sup> In sum, God created man as a holistic, “single person-bodily being” for earthly existence and at death sustains him as a whole person without a body, “but still possessing consciousness, bodily shape, and location.”<sup>173</sup> Therefore, man’s constitution is irreducible by natural observation, but in reality he is a dual being, composed of body and soul, of which the latter relates to God, who is a spirit.

Second, God created the human person, the spiritual component of man’s nature, for the purposes of relating to an invisible God. Gerald Bray correctly concludes that God’s image in man consists of the fact that man is a person,<sup>174</sup> yet personhood is so complex that the image only forms one component part of many biblical concepts, including name, heart, soul, and spirit to name a few.<sup>175</sup> An individual is the same person

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<sup>171</sup>Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 37.

<sup>172</sup>Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 38.

<sup>173</sup>Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 40.

<sup>174</sup>According to Bruce Ware, there are two competing broad categories for personhood: the functionalist model and the essentialist model. The functionalist determines personhood when the individual manifests “certain minimal expressions of the relevant functions.” Those not manifesting those functions are judged to be “non-persons.” Contrariwise, the essentialist determines that an individual is a human person because he/she “possesses a natural capacity” for the full range of human expression. I concur with Ware that the essentialist model is the correct one. Take an embryo for example: it must be considered ontologically a human being because it has a precise organic wholeness. In other words, the embryo is “organically complete,” and nothing can be added to it, even though a fully developed adult body is not present. So as Ware so succinctly summarizes, “an individual’s personhood attaches not to variable functional capabilities but to the kind of essence one is, whose nature is rational, volitional, spiritual, etc., and hence, personal.” Therefore, personhood is not defined by the qualities that must find expression, rather it is the nature whose natural kind is personal that the individual possesses. Bruce A. Ware, “Human Personhood: An Analysis and Definition,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 18-31.

<sup>175</sup>Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 222-23.

throughout his existence, whether an embryo, a fully developed adult, or a resurrected body in the eschaton. Cooper explains,

Each human remains the very same being throughout his or her existence even though we constantly change from the moment we are conceived, and even though our awareness of self-identity may change or be lost. Individual identity is metaphysical and logical, not just a matter of fact or of self-consciousness. It is absolutely impossible for me to be another person or for there to be two of me... The soul, spirit, or core person that exists during this life endures after death until bodily resurrection and beyond. One and the same being continues from the beginning of existence forever, whether or not there is continuity between the earthly body and resurrection body.<sup>176</sup>

Therefore, those that would include the body in the image, as Bray surmises, have attempted to do so “largely on the ground that the body is essential to the person,” which is not.<sup>177</sup>

Clines’ search for “something else” in the form of function or dominion as the essence of the image of God is unnecessary because no such dichotomy exists between God’s immanence and man’s finiteness. As Horst succinctly put it, “Man is a person, is the image of God, insofar as he can be man who hears the Word of God, who speaks with God in prayer, who obeys him in service.”<sup>178</sup> This is true whether realized in the believer, or potential in the unbeliever. Later he adds that God’s image implies the very essence of man—that which makes us human. He asserts, “In whatever measure God is no longer for man really God, in that measure man ceases really to be man.”<sup>179</sup> This ontological reality creates the very basic problem for a functional search to the definition of the image of God.

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<sup>176</sup>Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 41.

<sup>177</sup>Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 223.

<sup>178</sup>Horst, “Face to Face,” 266-67.

<sup>179</sup>Horst, “Face to Face,” 267.

## A Minority Rendering of the כ Preposition

Another problem arises for the functional interpretation in the philological arguments for a כ *of essence* (כְּצִלְמֵנוּ) in Genesis 1:26 as opposed to the כ *of norm*. By Clines' own admission, the use of the כ *of essence* is "rather uncommon in Hebrew."<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, he appeals to modern grammarians and scholars who adhere to the same minority rendering for Genesis 1:26.<sup>181</sup> Rendering the preposition in Genesis 1:26 as the כ *of essence* runs into several problems. First of all, there does not appear to be any Old Testament examples of כִּפְּ phrases where the preposition is a כ *of essence*, in fact, all are read in its normal reading of "in, among."<sup>182</sup> To argue that other examples of כ *of essence* exist with similar verbs, and thus Genesis 1:26 may be regarded as a similar expression is a stretch. Additionally, the כ *of essence* is idiomatic among its varying renderings that make such usage in Genesis 1:26 as unlikely to be anything other than its normal reading.<sup>183</sup> The simplest readings are usually best. Furthermore, the כ *of essence* is plausible if Genesis 1:26 were read in isolation, as Gardoski observed;<sup>184</sup> however, unique use of the prepositions is seen elsewhere in Genesis. For example, in Genesis 1:26 God made man "in our image" and "according to our likeness." In Genesis 5:1, Moses places the כ with likeness: God made man "in [His] likeness." However, in Genesis 5:3 a complete reversal of 1:26 occurs: Adam fathered a son "in his own likeness according to his image" in order to signal something similar and yet different from Genesis 1:26. The lack of Old Testament examples of a כ *of essence* in כִּפְּ phrases and

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<sup>180</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 76.

<sup>181</sup>Clines appeals to his "reasonably full list of adherents" including J. Hehn, K. L. Schmidt, E. Jacob, von Rad, J. Jervell, H. Gross, A. Kruyswijk, Wever, Franeker, N. W. Porteous, and H. Wildberger. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 76.

<sup>182</sup>See the Appendix.

<sup>183</sup>Gesenius calls it a "peculiar idiom" with uncertain origin that has varying renderings to include "as, that and even in" (Exod 6:3, 32:22; Isa 40:10; Eccl 7:14; Prov 3:26; Ps 68:5, and Isa 26:4). It does not seem that Gen 1:26 is idiomatic language. Gesenius, *GHCLOT*, 99.

<sup>184</sup>Gardoski, "Imago Dei," 11.

the careful use of the prepositions in the above passages cast doubts on Cline's view that *צֶלֶם* alone is the key word for interpreting the meaning of the image of God, and makes his view regarding the *כ* of *essence* indefensible.

Secondly, what the *כ* depicts is the pattern in which God created: God created man *in* (the pattern of) his image. The pattern of his image is further explained by the complimentary prepositional phrase, *כְּדְמוּתוֹ*. Clines correctly denies the synonymy of the prepositions "in" and "as;" however *כְּדְמוּתוֹ* must not be dismissed as superfluous, rather it should be regarded as providing interpretation to the entire phrase. Likeness means resemblance or similitude.<sup>185</sup> Often used in comparisons (something is like something else), likeness usually describes appearances (something resembles something in appearance). Ezekiel, for example, compares the likeness (appearance) of the faces of heavenly beings to the face of man (Ezek 1:10). The psalmist compares the wicked's venom (according to the likeness) of a serpent's venom (Ps 58:4). The preposition *according to* (his likeness) means *the like of, like, or as*, so God created man in his image *as the like of* his likeness. The terms and the prepositions they take may not be dismissed. There is a reason why Moses uses the terms separately and specifically. Likeness provides interpretation to how man images God.

### **The Improper Assignations of Ancient Near Eastern Understandings of Image on the Biblical View**

Foundational to the functional interpretation is the reliance on ancient Near Eastern texts for philological understanding of the image of God. Much like those that ascribe to the physical interpretation, ancient Near Eastern uses of words that stand as cognates of *צֶלֶם* stand as the interpretive key for the functional interpretation. This is true of almost all modern scholars who hold to the functional view.<sup>186</sup> Although cultural

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<sup>185</sup>BDB, 198.

<sup>186</sup>Clines concludes that the meaning of image of Gen 1:26-27 "cannot be satisfactorily

context is not to be ignored in the reading of the Old Testament, all Scripture is God-breathed and uniquely delivered to reveal the one true God. The prominent use of ancient Near Eastern literature on the part of functional interpreters comes dangerously close, and sometimes seems, as a magisterial use of the ANE literature over Scripture. As Hart admits, “The biblical data support this understanding [the functional interpretation] which has been drawn from the extra-biblical material.”<sup>187</sup> Clines’ two propositions for relying on ANE understanding of *צֶלֶם* presuppose that Moses was closely adhering to that understanding without any direct biblical proof. By his own admission, Clines points to Scripture that implicitly rejects the “divine fluid” in images, “It is precisely this belief that images possess the divine fluid or spirit or breath, which Old Testament polemic denies by its claim that there is no 'spirit' in idols (Hab 2:19; Jer 10:14; 51:17).”<sup>188</sup> When it comes to ANE understanding regarding rulership, supporters of the functional view on various occasions refer to Moses’ polemic intent with Genesis 1,<sup>189</sup> and if the narrative is that overtly polemic, it is to be assumed that the meaning of *צֶלֶם* ought to be sought biblically rather than within ANE texts. Therefore, the reliance on ANE definitions of *צֶלֶם* raises problems when applied directly to the Old Testament.

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deduced from the Old Testament,” thus the meaning had to be discovered among those “that held beliefs about the nature of images.” Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 80-81. Hart clearly states that the functional interpretation differs from all others “in turning to extra-biblical material for the key to the riddle of the meaning of ‘image of God.’” Hart, “Genesis 1,” 318. Waltke relies on ancient Near Eastern contexts as an enabler to the interpreter, of which one is to draw the “theologoumena.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 214. Merrill similarly applies ANE analogies to Gen 1:26-27. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 170.

<sup>187</sup>Hart, “Genesis 1,” 319.

<sup>188</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 81.

<sup>189</sup>Hart specifically addresses Clines’ second proposition regarding image and rulership citing the polemic aspect of Genesis 1, which democratizes the image of God to include all human beings. Hart, “Genesis 1,” 322, 328 and 335. Waltke not only sees the entire creation narrative as a polemic against Marduk, but also relegates any type of pagan mythic language in the biblical text as “implausible.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 177, 212. Merrill says that the imagery in the creation story was “carefully chosen” to function “polemically against pagan mythological ideas of creation.” Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 131. Although Gentry does not hold entirely to a functional view, he also admits that the creation narrative acts as a polemic to subvert the idea of participation by angelic or otherwise godlike creatures in creation. Peter John Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 37.

First, Clines' definition of  $\text{לְצַדִּיק}$  in Genesis 1:26-27 as referring solely to a three-dimensional statue forces the definition to include the human body. He believes humans are a psychosomatic unit, and thus they are God's physical representatives on earth. This first aspect of his argument is similar to the one held by proponents of the physical interpretation, and my disagreement is thoroughly explained above. In addition, however, it is well documented that Egyptian thinking regarded the king as the image of god, and that image did not emphasize physical appearance. This point tends to be ignored when appeal is made to ANE texts. Relying on Dion, Gentry and Wellum argue that the behavior of the king was where the attention was given. They contend, "The emphasis or stress is not on physical appearance, e.g., a male king could be the image of a female goddess. Rather the behaviour of the king reflects the behaviour of the god."<sup>190</sup> A similar understanding occurs in Mesopotamian writing according to Marten Stol, who contradicts the statue definition held by many adherents of the functional view:

In Babylonia, being the 'image' of a god does not point to physical resemblance but to abilities (justice, magic) or character ('fierce but merciful'). Most likely, Genesis also transcends the primitive idea of physical resemblance and sees the first human being(s) in terms of their spiritual resemblance to God.<sup>191</sup>

Most importantly, as already noted in a previous section, the non-concrete use of the word  $\text{לְצַדִּיק}$  in other portions of Scripture cannot be ignored, and actually makes more sense in a passage that describes man as created in the image of an invisible God.

Secondly, contrary Clines, man is not the continuity between God and creation — for he is part of creation — and therefore the emphasis is on his nature rather than his function. Clines argues that Genesis 1:26 goes out of its way to avoid human divinization by avoiding the mechanism of man's creation as opposed to his function in creation. But he goes on to say that the answer to how man was created lies in Genesis 2:7 when God

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<sup>190</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 191.

<sup>191</sup>Marten Stol and F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: Styx, 2000), 151.

“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” He equates the process to the concept of the divine fluid, which inspired dead matter in ANE cosmologies. Clines suggests, “It [Adam] becomes a genuine image of the deity by the infusion of divine spirit or breath.”<sup>192</sup> Thus he concludes that the processes described in Genesis 2:7 are best understood as the reason why man can function as God’s representative on earth when related back to Genesis 1:26.

The problem is that the text clearly states that man and animal share in the same physical properties (Gen 2:7, 19) and both possess the breath of life (Gen 1:30; 2:7; 7:22). Therefore, if we hold to Clines’ definition, all living creatures would be a “genuine image of the deity” and thus all would represent the invisible God on earth. But it is not so. The similar descriptions of the creation of man and beast were Moses’ intent to show that man was like any other creature: man is part of creation, not set apart from it. Nevertheless, man is a special creature in that he was created in the image and according to the likeness of God. When both descriptions of man’s creation are juxtaposed (Gen 1:26; 2:7), what comes into view is man’s ontological nature, not his functionality. Man is like any other creature — made of dust and infused with the breath of life — but created in the image of a transcendent God so that he may commune with his creator and be distinguished from the beasts.

Thirdly, Clines’ argument that the phrases *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ* and *בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ* express the Archetype, because many Mesopotamian statues contained no likeness of the king, ignores the simple depiction language of the text. He is partly correct in that the words *צֶלֶם* and *דְּמוּת* are not synonymous, and that point has been argued above. However, both words speak of depiction: how man is like God (cf. Gen 5:1, 3). The likeness to God may be seen in two aspects. First, as Bray appears to conclude, man is set apart from the rest of creation—although a creature himself—by requiring responsibility and

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<sup>192</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 90.

accountability to God.<sup>193</sup> Secondly, God's image and likeness endows man with the sole ability to relate to and worship his creator. Watson concurs, "The image of God is that point where recognition of the creator arises from within the created order. Humans are unique because they alone recognize the creator in his works and offer him the praise that is his due."<sup>194</sup> Therefore, God's image is not representational in a functional sense, but a depiction in an ontological sense.

Fourthly, Clines' attempt to narrow the definition of image and likeness to rulership alone in an effort to accommodate the ANE concepts of the king as god's image is what Bray describes as his "most generous readiness to accept Ancient Near Eastern influences of all kinds."<sup>195</sup> Rather, rulership is consequential to man being created in the God's image, and to ascribe functionality alone to the phrase ignores the grammatical construction of the text, seems to oppose Jewish ideology, and is reductive. First, the command to exercise dominion and subdue the earth is a result of God's image in man, as is the creation of man as male and female and the mandate to reproduce. The waw-consecutive discourse indicators in the narrative indicate "logical sequel of actions, events or states mentioned immediately before."<sup>196</sup> The narrative structure of verse 27, "So God created man..." is sequential to verse 26, "Then God said, Let us make man..." and therefore followed sequentially by verse 28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them..." Secondly, appealing to Westermann, Bray suggests that reliance on royal ideology that applies to all humanity would run against Jewish ideology regarding the nation's exclusivity as God's chosen people:

If this idea were borrowed from the royal ideology it would mean that every single

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<sup>193</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 195-225.

<sup>194</sup>Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 280.

<sup>195</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 195.

<sup>196</sup>Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 326.

human being was an image representing the rule of God. While this is not completely impossible, it hardly sits well with the concept of a Chosen People who were called to fulfill the Law of God in a special way . . . . At most there may be faint echoes of a royal ideology which would strike the hearer as an enormous contrast to the Israelite conception of the image of God.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, to relate the image to dominion is what Oswald Bayer called reductive interpretation.<sup>198</sup> Man was created to have the spiritual capacity to address and be addressed by the creator of the world. In Psalm 8, the majesty of the Lord comes into full view. His majesty is proclaimed “out of the mouth of babies and infants” (Ps 8:2), which in terms of human capacity are not able to rule or exercise dominion. Yet, because these human infants are made in God’s image, they are capable to proclaim God’s glory in their cry. As Horst succinctly explained, the expressions of image and likeness are points of departure that bring man back to God,<sup>199</sup> and plainly establish the unique relationship between the human creature and the Creator. It is better not to blur the lines between nature and function; they are two distinct things.

Fifth and final, Clines is correct when he states that God’s image in man is perpetual, but that understanding does not come from Mesopotamia nor can it be isolated to the absence of sin’s damage. It is true that when God speaks to Noah in Genesis 9:6, he acknowledges that post-fall, post-flood man is still in God’s image, as does other New Testament passages (cf. 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9); nevertheless, the Lord’s assessment of Noah is that the intention of his heart is evil from his youth (Gen 8:21). God did not just assess man’s thoughts and intent, but his works — his function — he also concluded as evil (cf. Gen 6:5). In Psalm 14, the Lord desires to find that quality in man that was placed in him when he was created in the God’s image, but instead he finds that “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one” (Ps

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<sup>197</sup>Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 197.

<sup>198</sup>Oswald Bayer, “Being in the Image of God,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2013): 83. Even Gentry and Wellum conclude, “Those who define the image merely in functional terms are in error both linguistically and theologically.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 201.

<sup>199</sup>Horst, “Face to Face,” 260.

14:3). This is not just an assessment of man’s heart, but of his works — of his entire existence. Therefore, there is damage. As Calvin surmised, there is no part of man that has not been maimed by sin, and the image language of Genesis 1:26-28 “admonishes us as to the excellence from which we have fallen, that he may excite in us the desire of its recovery.”<sup>200</sup> Additionally, the functional view runs amuck when faced with human perpetuity, because at death, human exercise of dominion ceases, yet in the disembodied state humanity remains an image bearer.

### **Conclusion**

The ancient Near Eastern understanding of image as a statue of the king created to represent the god on earth through rulership, which has become the foundational understanding of the functional view of God’s image, falls short of the text’s meaning. In sum, the functional view, as Merrill insists, seeks to alleviate the tension of comparing a transcendent God to the human creature, and to understand this relationship “in terms of role and not essence is much more in line with the purpose and commission of mankind.”<sup>201</sup> However, the grammatical conclusions regarding the prepositions and the appeal to ANE texts fall short of the text’s meaning. Once again, the reliance on extrabiblical sources to interpret Scripture questions the sufficiency of Scripture, and on those grounds alone it should be rejected. Only after being created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) is man blessed and commanded to subdue and rule the earth (Gen 1:28). Man is God’s creation, and the overarching theme of Genesis 1:26-28 is on God, who created the heavens and the earth and whose image man is to reflect.

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<sup>200</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 27. Even Merrill had to admit that with man’s fall, he had to surrender “much—but not all—of his capacity to be the image of God.” Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 171.

<sup>201</sup>Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 170.

CHAPTER 3  
THE TEXTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR  
THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF  
THE IMAGE OF GOD

The last century witnessed a wide array of opinions regarding the meaning of God's image among Old Testament scholars that have strayed from historical interpretation. These newer forms of dissension, as Childs' describes it, are perhaps due to the growing reliance on extra-biblical devices for biblical interpretation and diverse opinions regarding what Genesis 1:26-27 says about the nature of human beings:

The history of modern exegesis demonstrates convincingly how a consensus regarding its [the image of God's] meaning only momentarily emerges which is then shortly dissolved into newer forms of dissension.<sup>1</sup>

Gerald Bray, who correctly identified the need for a theological answer, criticized these momentary agreements. He censured exegetically based theology for its overreliance on lexical studies as the key to meaning, but most importantly on the dominance of Documentary Hypothesis over modern scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of God's image does demand a theological answer, but an exegetical study cannot be ignored; particularly one that relies on the sufficiency of Scripture and mitigates the role of source criticism. That is what will be attempted in this chapter.

An exegesis of the corresponding biblical texts (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6) will point once again to the meaning of *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* as something other than functionality, but having to do with the spiritual nature of humanity. Thus Moses' use of *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת*

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<sup>1</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 567.

<sup>2</sup>Gerald L. Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (November 1991): 202.

are ontological terms that theologically point to man's spiritual aspect. And if this is true, then perhaps of greater theological value is that God's image, as presented in Scripture, points to divine transcendence as the underlying principle behind man's creation, as opposed to the continuity that is normally drawn from ancient Near Eastern literature. In fact, the scriptural references to the image of God that have in mind divine transcendence should have greater bearing on Old Testament interpretation than any inter-text relationships drawn from ANE literature.<sup>3</sup> And perhaps if the underlying theological principle truly is God's transcendence (particularly the manner in which God relates to finite, physical beings), then God's plan for man's redemption becomes the framework by which we understand image bearing.

### **An Exegesis of the Biblical Texts Regarding the Image of God**

In Genesis, the author uses the expression *בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים* *in the image of God* in two of three passages relating to the creation of man (Gen 1:26-27; 9:6), and the allusion to the expression in Genesis 5:1-3. The phrase does not appear in the remainder of the Old Testament, therefore its interpretation must be found in Genesis along with similar uses of key words in other Scripture, including the New Testament. What emerges is a transcendent God, who by nature is a spirit, and who creates out of the ground a finite, physical human being that resembles him. Thus, the grammatical construction of each passage best supports a spiritual interpretation, as opposed to physical, functional or otherwise.

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<sup>3</sup>Briggs argues that the *imago Dei* in Genesis must be approached with Christological perspectives drawn from Col 1:15 and 2 Cor 4:4 in particular. He opines, "If this is the Christ who in the NT is now also revealed to have been present in and integral to the creation of all things, then on theological grounds there is plenty of reason to see Paul's canonical texts as every bit as relevant as, if not more so than, texts drawn from the ancient Near East." Richard S. Briggs, "Humans in the Image of God and Other Things Genesis Does Not Make Clear," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 118.

## An Exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמֹתֵינוּ  
וַיִּרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ  
וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:  
וַיִּבְרָא הֵימָּלָא אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ  
זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. And let them rule over fish of the sea, and over fowl of the heavens, and over the beasts and over all the earth, and over all the creeping animals that swarm upon the earth.’ And God created the man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The first instance of *בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים* appears in the first account of man’s creation. God creates Adam and Eve *in our image* (*בְּצַלְמֵנוּ*), a phrase repeated with a third person suffix in 1:27 for emphasis, *in his image* (*בְּצַלְמוֹ*). The text also tells us that God created Adam and Eve *according to our likeness* (*כְּדֹמֹתֵינוּ*), a phrase modifying “in our image” and interestingly not repeated again in the remainder of the pericope. A final observation is that God commands man, male and female, to rule over nature as a result of being made in his image.

**The term *צֶלֶם* in Genesis 1:26-27 means form.** Because of the correlation with Akkadian cognates advanced by modern linguistics, some scholars define *צֶלֶם* in Genesis 1:26-27 only as a three-dimensional statue.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the dependence on the modern conventions of source criticism has solidified this meaning.<sup>5</sup> However, this

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<sup>4</sup>Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, electronic ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 1028. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 65 (especially note 41). Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 170. Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, Siphrut 15 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 123. Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 192-93. Hart affirms that the understanding of image as a statue was “drawn from the extra-biblical material” that was largely “a result of the semantic studies of James Barr.” Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (November 1995): 319.

<sup>5</sup>Botterweck will rely on source criticism when he argues that the basic meaning of *צֶלֶם* is “plastic replica” as this is how the term was used “during the exilic-postexilic period,” which cues that Botterweck does not believe Moses wrote Genesis. He also states that the earliest witness for *צֶלֶם* was the ark narrative in 1 Sam 6:5,11 which speaks of the images of boils and mice. Once again cueing that he does not believe the Pentateuch was the earliest of writings. Interestingly, this “first witness” in Samuel (which by my view follows what Moses would have written earlier) does not mean statue. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and David E. Green (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans,

narrow definition does not account for the many shades of the term in Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the word *צֶלֶם* often describes physical objects that are “cut out,” such as three-dimensional statues of false gods (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Amos 5:26; Ezek 7:20), and the golden images (replicas) of the mice and tumors of God’s plagues upon the Philistines (1 Sam 6:5); but it also describes a two-dimensional painted picture of men (Ezek 23:14).<sup>7</sup> The plural construct form of *צֶלֶם* in Ezekiel 16:17, *צִלְמֵי זָכָר*, rendered as *images of male* certainly does not make reference to a statue, but perhaps “phallic symbols” used for pornographic purposes during cultic ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> The figurative use of *צֶלֶם* as a semblance or a shadow (Pss 39:7; 73:20) is further removed from the original understanding of statue,<sup>9</sup> but still relates to image, “Because a shadow is the image or likeness of the object casting it.”<sup>10</sup> In spite of scholars’ certainty that image means statue/idol,<sup>11</sup> it is remarkable that *צֶלֶם* did not become the proper designation for idols in the remainder of the Old Testament. Rather, the most common is *גִּלְגֹּלִית*.<sup>12</sup>

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1997), 390-91. My views on higher criticism and the reliance on source criticism as a basis of interpretation are explained in chap. 2, n. 51.

<sup>6</sup>Jenni provides a good summary of the different uses of *צֶלֶם* that are discussed in this chapter. He concludes that the word is more “than ‘image’ in our [modern] understanding.” Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1081.

<sup>7</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2000), 853.

<sup>8</sup>Jenni, *TLOT*, 1081. Botterweck, *TDOT*, 391.

<sup>9</sup>Koehler, *HALOT*, 1029. BDB, 854. Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 810. Botterweck rejects the *צֶלֶם* root “become black, be dark” used by some to render the word as shadow, and says that the interpretation is not certain. Botterweck, *TDOT*, 391. Jenni also says that *צֶלֶם* is “untenable” for an interpretation of image, but does say that such a rendering “is not poorly suited to the sense” and simply points to the “remarkable flexibility” that characterizes the term. Jenni, *TLOT*, 1081.

<sup>10</sup>VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, 810.

<sup>11</sup>Waltke states, “*Selem* always refers to a physical image.” Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 215. Gentry argues, “Image normally refers to a physical statue,” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 186. Von Rad insists, “*Selem* (‘image’) means predominantly an actual plastic work, a duplicate, sometimes an idol.” Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 57. Köhler also argues for *selem* as an upright statue. Ludwig Köhler, “Die Grundstelle Der Imago-Dei-Lehre, Genesis 1:26,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 4, no. 1 (January 1948): 20.

<sup>12</sup>BDB, 165. Other terms, such as *צֶלֶל* (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Isa 2:8, 18, 20) is associated with the idea of worthlessness by the prophets and *הִבְהִיל* (Isa 57:13; Jer 10:15; 16:19) is figurative language, even

The meaning of **זָלַף** that ranges from three-dimensional objects, to two-dimensional pictures, to shadows, reveal that the more sure meaning of the word in Genesis 1:26-27 is some type of form,<sup>13</sup> and not necessarily a statue, since the only modifier for this image is the likeness of God. This point has led all lexicons to define **זָלַף** in this passage as likeness, as a form that resembles God. However, let it be said that modern grammarians will frame the likeness as a functional representation due to varying reasons.<sup>14</sup> While more traditional ones see it as a simple resemblance of God.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps **זָלַף** is best read in Genesis 1:26-27 as some type of form that resembles an invisible God, and not as a statue representing God, because God is a spirit that dwells in inaccessible light. And if it resembles God, who is a spirit, then image is spiritual. The varying uses of **זָלַף** in the Old Testament allows for this approach.

**The לְ preposition means man depicts a standard or model.** Another aspect of **זָלַף** that requires attention, and has been the center of much debate, is the proclitic preposition that the term takes in Genesis 1:26: **בְּצַלְמֵנוּ** *in our image*. The simplest readings are usually best, and therefore the first clause simply means Adam and Eve were created *in* God’s image. A similar construction appears in Exodus 25:40 when God instructs Moses to make the furniture of the tabernacle according to the details of God’s model:

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derogatory, that speaks of idols that are “evanescent, unsubstantial, worthless, or vanity.”

<sup>13</sup>VanGemenen rightly observed that **זָלַף** “can refer to any type of similarity in form.” VanGemenen, *NIDOTTE*, 810 (#7512) and 969 (#1948).

<sup>14</sup>Koehler defines the likeness as “of a man as the **זָלַף** of God” in favor of *ἰ* *essentiae*. Koehler, *HALOT*, 1029 #5. As does Jenni. Jenni, *TLOT*, 3, 1082. Botterweck argues it on theological-anthropological grounds. Botterweck, *TDOT*, 392.

<sup>15</sup>BDB, 853-54 #2. Gesenius calls **זָלַף** a likeness because of its “shadowing forth.” Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2003), 710 #2. Swanson points to the Greek term *ὑποτύπωσις* as explained by Louw-Nida as a model of behavior as an example to be imitated or to be avoided. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1997), 767-68.

וְרָאָה וַעֲשֵׂה בְתַבְנִיתָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתָּהּ מִרְאֵה בְהָר:

And see you and do them *in* their pattern (*in* the model of them), which you were shown in the mount.

The preposition בְּ depicts a standard or a model in which something is done,<sup>16</sup> and in the case of בְּצִלְמֵנוּ Adam and Eve were created *in the model* of God’s image, just as the tabernacle was made *in the model* of God’s pattern.

Functionalists have questioned the normal rendering of the בְּ preposition in order to advance their interpretation, stating that בְּצִלְמֵנוּ should be read *as our image* to better accord with צֶלֶם as a statue that is representing God.<sup>17</sup> Clines,<sup>18</sup> as well as Jenni<sup>19</sup> and Botterweck,<sup>20</sup> offer the בְּ of essence: man created ‘as’ or ‘in the capacity of’ the image of God as a more satisfactory interpretation. However, the בְּ of essence runs into several exegetical roadblocks. First, there are no Old Testament examples of עֲשֵׂה clauses where the בְּ of essence seems to occur; rather all are read normally as “in, among.”<sup>21</sup> For example, the בְּ in Exodus 25:40 is not a בְּ of essence. Second, the בְּ of essence is idiomatic among its varying renderings that make such usage in Genesis 1:26 as unlikely to be anything other than its normal reading.<sup>22</sup> Third, Moses purposely uses the prepositions seen elsewhere in image passages of Genesis. For example, in Genesis 1:26 God made man “in our image” and “according to our likeness.” In Genesis 5:1, Moses

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<sup>16</sup>BDB, 90.

<sup>17</sup>According to Merrill, the Akkadian cognate for צֶלֶם demands “a different way of understanding” the בְּ preposition. He argues that it should be rendered as an adverb of comparison, and thus read “as our image, and not in our image.” The point is that image “is no longer one of ontological identification but functional representation.” Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 170. Waltke makes a similar argument: humans are in their entirety the image of God, rather than bearing his image or having it. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 214.

<sup>18</sup>David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 76-77.

<sup>19</sup>Jenni, *TLOT*, 3, 1082.

<sup>20</sup>Botterweck, *TDOT*, 12, 394.

<sup>21</sup>See the Appendix.

<sup>22</sup>Gesenius, *GHCLOT*, 99. See chap. 2, n. 181.

places the א with likeness: God made man “in [His] likeness.” However, in Genesis 5:3 a complete reversal of 1:26 occurs: Adam fathered a son “in his own likeness according to his image.” The passages may indicate deliberate use of the prepositions in order to signal something different from Genesis 1:26.

James Barr provides a different approach by observing that the א preposition, when combined with nouns of the “semantic function ‘likeness’ is thereby brought to have almost the same effect as the preposition א ‘like, as;’” therefore, it could be read “as our image” since it speaks of likeness.<sup>23</sup> However, in passages where both prepositions are present for the same word, the integrity and distinction of each preposition are maintained. For example, in Judges 20:39, the men of Israel turned אֶל־הַמִּלְחָמָה *in the battle* (retreated from the battle), and the Benjamites slaughtered the wounded, convinced that the men of Israel were defeated אֶל־הַמִּלְחָמָה *as in the (first) battle*. Both prepositions serve distinct purposes and are not interchangeable. In 1 Samuel 14:7, Jonathan’s armor-bearer pledges his support for Jonathan’s tactical strategy, and tells his master to do all that is אֶל־לְבָבְךָ *in your heart*, because he will be with him (committed to him) כְּלִבְבְּךָ *as your heart*. Once again, the prepositions are not interchangeable; both serve a distinct purpose, and it does not make sense to substitute one in place of another. It is rather convenient for Barr that the א has the same effect as the א “when *only* combined with nouns of the semantic function ‘likeness.’”<sup>24</sup> The narrow argument lacking any other evidence makes his conclusions untenable.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>James Barr, “The Image of God in Genesis—Some Linguistic and Historical Considerations,” in *Old Testament Studies: Papers Read at Tenth Meeting Held at the University of South Africa, July 1967*, ed. A. H. van Zyl (South Africa: Ou-Testamentiese Werkgenootskap in Suid-Afrika, 1967), 9. Gentry observes that Barr’s conclusions are not “technically” a א *essentiae*. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 198n46. Koehler will not define the א as a א *essentiae*; however he will define it as “according to” because it should be seen as the same as and alternating with א. Koehler, *HALOT*, 104 (3 and 8).

<sup>24</sup>Barr, “The Image of God in Genesis,” 9 (emphasis mine).

<sup>25</sup>Garr wrote an extensive discussion on the two prepositions, and correctly affirmed that the differences in prepositions in Gen 1:26 suggests that each phrase has distinct meaning. W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 95.

If Moses' intent was for כְּצִלְמֵנוּ to be regarded *as our image* rather than *in our image*, he would have availed himself of better grammatical alternatives. The more simple Hebrew construction would have been to write the clause as כְּצִלְמֵנוּ. Another alternative may have been to write the clause as an accusative of situation or a double object accusative clause.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the clause may have been written (ה)אָדָם צִלְמֵנוּ Let us make (the) man (in the status of) our image, or לְנוּ (ה)אָדָם צִלְמֵנוּ Let us make (the) man (in the status of) an image to us. Notice that man and image can form a nominal clause, *man is our image* or *man is an image to us*. This type of construction would have made better sense as the following examples demonstrate. In Genesis 2:7, the author writes, וַיִּצְרָה ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר, *And the Lord God formed the man (out of) dust*. The nominal clause could be read *man is dust*. Genesis 27:9 contains a clause with the verb *to make*, the verb in Genesis 1:26, אֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים I will make them (the goats) (into) savory meat. The nominal clause could read *they (the goats) are savory meat*. Likewise Leviticus 15:30, וַעֲשֶׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הָאֵקֶד חֲטָאת, *And the priest will make the one (as or for) a sin offering*, and the nominal clause would read *the one is a sin offering*. In another example, 1 Kings 18:32 reads, וַיִּבְנֶה אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים מִזְבֵּחַ, *He built the stones (into) an altar*, and the nominal clause could read *the stones are an altar*. The previous passages serve as grammatical evidence for a type of construction that perhaps Moses would have utilized if Genesis 1:26 were to be read *as our image*. Rather, seeing that the author chose a simple כ prepositional phrase makes the rendering clearly *in our image*.

If צִלְמֵנוּ were not understood as statue, then the blurring of the preposition would be unnecessary, as it should be. But the fact that alternate explanations and theories regarding both צִלְמֵנוּ and the כ preposition must be advanced in order to accommodate

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<sup>26</sup>Two nouns that could serve as a nominal clause, but are under a verb as objects in the clause become what A. B. Davidson and Gesenius call a double object accusative. This occurs with verbs that express *making, preparing, or forming into anything*. Along with the direct object, the verb takes a second, more remote accusative or indirect object. A. B. Davidson, *Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Hebrew Syntax*, Third ed (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), §76. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §117 ii.

“statue” as the meaning of image should immediately make such rendering suspect. A better alternative, the usual meaning of the  $\text{כְּ}$  preposition, as in Exodus 25:40, indicates that man is created *in the model of, or corresponding to*, God’s image.

**The term  $\text{דְּמוּת}$  in Gen 1:26-27 informs the meaning of  $\text{צֶלֶם}$ .** The  $\text{בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים}$  is also described in Genesis 1:26 by the complementary prepositional phrase,  $\text{כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ}$  *according to our likeness*. The nominative term  $\text{דְּמוּת}$  *likeness* appears 25 times in the Old Testament and modern lexicons define it as “model,” “shape” or “likeness” closely related to the  $\text{צֶלֶם}$  of God,<sup>27</sup> while in older lexicons it means “resemblance” or “similitude.”<sup>28</sup> Often used in comparisons (something is like something else),  $\text{דְּמוּת}$  usually describes appearances (something resembles something else in appearance). The psalmist makes a simple comparison between the wicked’s venom to a serpent’s venom (Ps 58:4). There is no specific manner in which the venom of the wicked in substance, composition, color, smell, texture or taste is like the serpent’s venom. The text does not specify, nor is that the purpose. The psalmist is simply making a comparison: the wicked resemble the poison of a serpent — in no precise nuance. In 2 Kings 16:10, King Ahaz sends Uriah the priest a model (like in appearance) to the altar; in this case  $\text{דְּמוּת}$  indicates a shape.

There are cases when the comparison made is constructed so as to express the similarity cautiously. Daniel compares the angel speaking with him to one in the likeness (appearance) of children (sons) of man (Dan 10:16). The Prophet Ezekiel compares the likeness (appearance) of the faces of heavenly beings to the face of man (Ezek 1:10); he compares the form of God to the likeness (appearance) of a man (Ezek 8:2); and he

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<sup>27</sup>Koehler, *HALOT*, 226. VanGemenen states that  $\text{דְּמוּת}$  can indicate a simple comparison, an image or a shape, or any specialized comparison that seeks to be cautious in its analogy. VanGemenen, *NIDOTTE*, 968-69, #4.

<sup>28</sup>BDB, 198a.

compares the expanse to the likeness (appearance) of a throne (Ezek 10:1). The style of the language demonstrates Daniel and Ezekiel's efforts to relate the unfamiliar to the familiar, or something that remains inherently foreign to resemble something understandable.

Nowhere else in Scripture do צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת appear together or in connection to one another as they do in Genesis 1:26. It seems that Moses is providing the interpretation with the unique construction: likeness interprets what kind of image it is. And because of the nature of God, a spiritual likeness is in the context. In much the same way as the previous usage, man is created in the likeness (appearance) of the image (form) of God.<sup>29</sup> Simply put, דְּמוּת provides interpretation to צֶלֶם and informs us that God's image is those things in us that make us like him.

**The ׀ preposition informs that a comparison is being made.** The ׀ preposition means *like* or *as* and is of particular nature.<sup>30</sup> It expresses “a relation of either perfect (equality), or imperfect (resemblance) similitude” and mostly without any “precise nuance.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the phrase כְּדְמוּתֵינוּ means *the like of, like, or as* God's likeness. This is not a superfluous statement, but a strategic complimentary prepositional phrase that serves as an interpretation of what it means to be created in God's image. In a

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<sup>29</sup>Botterweck and other modern scholars hold to Wellhausen's theory that דְּמוּת is an Aramaic loan word. The premise is that the word is found in exilic and post-exilic texts (Gen 1 is considered part of the post-exilic Priestly documents). Once again, source criticism is the presupposition. Botterweck states that the predominant usage in exilic texts suggest “form” or “appearance”, and that the earliest texts, such as 2 Kgs 16:10, the meaning is “image” or “copy, reproduction.” Such positioning is what informs the thesis that “very little distinction can be made between the two words:” צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת. This then leads to very little distinction sought between the prepositions. I make the point that the functional theory is largely based on these modern explanations, particularly the ones that at best question Mosaic authorship. Botterweck, *TDOT*, 7:257-59.

<sup>30</sup>Both BDB and *HALOT* see the ׀ as expressing conformity to a standard or rule. BDB, 454. Koehler, *HALOT*, 454, 3. Botterweck opines that likeness defines “more precisely” image, and to be rendered, “Let us make man as our image, just like us.” Although I disagree with his rendering of the ׀, as already explained, I agree that “according to our likeness” in 1:26 expresses “more precisely the aspect of similarity between humanity and God, already implicit in the notion of an image.” Botterweck, *TDOT*, 7:6.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical, 2011), § 133g.

literal translation, God created Adam in his image *as the like of* his likeness.

The use of the prepositions in the image texts is indicative of their importance to the interpretation of the image of God. First, as stated above, the prepositions are not interchangeable. Moses made use of each to communicate meaning. If both terms were transposable, why not use  $\text{בְּ}$  in all instances? Or why not use  $\text{כְּ}$  in all instances? Instead,  $\text{כְּ}$  is used both times in 1:27, clearly indicating that the prepositions are not interchangeable. Furthermore,  $\text{כְּדְמוּתוֹ}$  had already served as the interpretation of  $\text{בְּצִלְמוֹ}$  in 1:26, and it was not necessary to repeat that fact in 1:27. Nevertheless, the Latin Vulgate and the Septuagint see Genesis 1:26 as “according to our image, according to our likeness.” However, the Targums and the Peshitta, as well as the modern translations, distinguish the prepositions. In Genesis 5:1, Moses places the  $\text{כְּ}$  with likeness: God made man  $\text{בְּדְמוּת}$ . However, in Genesis 5:3 a complete reversal of 1:26 occurs: Adam fathered a son  $\text{בְּצִלְמוֹ}$   $\text{וּתְוִבְדָּם}$  in order to signal that Adam was created in God’s likeness, just as Seth was created in God’s likeness, but Seth’s likeness to his father is not the same as his likeness to God. Moses wanted to be sure a distinction between the two was made. Clines correctly observed that this passage does not speak of the “transmission of the divine image,” rather Seth’s likeness to Adam, and thus Genesis 1:26 “is not to be interpreted by 5:1, 3, but vice versa.”<sup>32</sup> In Genesis 9:6, Moses uses the  $\text{כְּ}$  when speaking of God’s image in man, once again indicating that the prepositions are serving a specific purpose and are not interchangeable.

Second,  $\text{בְּצִלְמוֹ}$  and  $\text{כְּדְמוּתוֹ}$  (the prepositions and the terms they are attached to) stand as clear statements that man was created after God’s pattern, and that pattern resembles God. There is no doubt that Moses was comparing man to God at the moment of man’s creation. The likeness of God serves as interpretation of what it means to be created in his image: God created man in (the pattern of) his image, which is the like of

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<sup>32</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 78.

his likeness. And since God is an invisible spirit, man is like God in that he is spiritual, or has a spiritual nature.

**The functional clause in Genesis 1:26-27 is a purpose clause, not a defining clause.** The command to exercise dominion and subdue the earth is a result of the image of God in man, and not its essence. In Genesis 1:26, the cohortative *נַעֲשֶׂה* *let us make* is followed by the imperfect *וַיִּרְדּוּ* *and (so) let them rule*. This type of verbal construction is called a purpose-clause, because it marks a result or expresses consecution.<sup>33</sup> For example, in Genesis 27:4, *וְהָבִיֵאָה לִּי וְאֹכְלָהּ* *and bring it to me so that I may eat*, the imperfect follows the cohortative and context points to purpose. In Genesis 19:32, the clause *וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ* *let us give drink to our father of wine, so that we may lie with him*, the imperfect once again follows the cohortative, expressing the purpose for why Lot's daughters wanted to make him drunk. Earlier in 19:20, the verse once again points to consecution and purpose, *וַיִּתְהַי נַפְשִׁי* *and my soul will live*. The same pattern of the cohortative followed by an imperfect is present. Likewise, in the Targums, the imperfect takes a simple *ו* to form a single purpose clause in Genesis 1:26.<sup>34</sup> If perchance the passage were to teach the functional interpretation, perhaps the clause would have appeared as the participle *רֹדֵה* to signal an accusative of situation, or “in the state of ruler,” and possibly rendered: “And let us make man in our image, according to our likeness in the condition (or status) of a ruler.” This would have been the more common, simpler way to express the verb, if Moses wanted to communicate that ruling was God's image in man. Instead, it is constructed as a simple purpose clause. Furthermore, dominion (ruling) will not appear again in the other image passages (Gen

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<sup>33</sup>Joüon and Muraoka, *Hebrew Grammar*, § 116a. In fact, the exact nuance between purpose and consecution can only be ascertained from the context.

<sup>34</sup>Stephen A. Kaufman, ed., *Targum Onqelos to the Pentateuch* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 2005), Gen 1:26.

5:1-3; 9:6). If ruling were the meaning of God's image, it is curiously missing in those passages. Syntactically speaking, ruling cannot serve as the explanation or the interpretation of the image of God.

In sum, Genesis 1:26-27 is simply explaining how man is like God and what are the immediate results of that reality. The term *צֶלֶם* does not strictly mean a physical statue, but rather a form that resembles God. It is a form that was created in the model of God; not as God or an epiphany of God, but like God. And because God is a transcendent, invisible spirit, the likeness of God is not in the physical aspect of the human being, but in the spiritual aspect of the human being. Therefore, as a result of being made in God's image, man is able to rule over God's creation, exist as male and female, and procreate. But no matter how closely the ruling aspect is related to the Divine image, it is consequential to Adam and Eve being made in God's image. Because the image cannot be confined to dominion, and because Adam and Eve were made into the image of God before they were given instructions to rule and to procreate, the image reflects a work that God did when he formed Adam and Eve with a spiritual nature that reflected their Creator.

### An Exegesis of Genesis 5:1-3

זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם  
 בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ:  
 זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאֵם  
 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁמֶם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָם:  
 וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בְּדַמּוֹתָו כְּצֶלְמוֹ  
 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת:

This *is* a book of the generations of Adam: In the day of God's creating man, in the likeness of God He made him. Male and female (he) created them, and blessed them, and called their name Man, in the day of their being created. And Adam lived 130 years, and begat in his likeness, according to his image, and called his name Seth.

Genesis 5:1—3 closely resembles 1:26—27: God created Adam and Eve *בְּדַמּוֹת* *in the likeness of God*. But now the narrative includes Adam's offspring. The

passage emphasizes Adam's תולדות *generations*, so Moses explains how the image of God is passed on to the next generation. Both Adam and Eve were blessed, and have another son after Cain and Abel, and named him Seth. Adam's new son is born to him כְּצִלְמוֹ בְּדְמוּתוֹ *in his likeness, after his image*. Seth is a copy of Adam, and this copy would be physical and spiritual.

Moses uses the terms צֶלֶם and דְמוּת again in 5:1-3 for the two-fold purpose of describing man's creation and procreation. First, the passage reaffirms that man was created in God's likeness (5:1). Like 1:26, no explanation is given for what constitutes likeness to God. Second, Seth is born in the likeness and according to the image of Adam with no explanation to its meaning either (5:3). Yet, it is reasonable to assume that Seth resembled his father in some way, and yet was not an exact copy of Adam. Therefore, the juxtaposition of 5:1 and 5:3 assumes an analogy: Adam and Eve resemble God, but are not an exact copy of God. However, the reversal of the same terms in 5:3 may point to different processes, as discussed in the exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27. Moses may have deliberately inverted the terms and their corresponding prepositions to signal a distinction between what had occurred in Genesis 1:26 and 5:1, and what was happening in 5:3. Like Adam, Seth was also created in the image of God, because he is human; however, his likeness and image to his earthly father was not the same thing.

So, how is בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים *in the likeness of God* to be interpreted in Genesis 5:1-3? Seth is third to Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-2, 25) and one of many children born to Adam and Eve (Gen 5:4); however, he is the only one the text specifically mentions born to Adam כְּצִלְמוֹ בְּדְמוּתוֹ *in his likeness, after his image*. Moses may be attempting to portray God as the father of all humanity,<sup>35</sup> or he may be attempting to establish the image of God as “an actuality for all humans.”<sup>36</sup> The text could imply that Seth perpetuates God's

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<sup>35</sup>John Sailhamer, *Genesis* in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 70. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 195.

<sup>36</sup>Arnold relies on von Rad on this point. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge

blessing on humanity, but also inherits the consequences of Adam's sin.<sup>37</sup> But could all of this be said of Cain, or Abel, or of the other children of Adam? Were not his other children made in the image of God, inherited blessing and the curse, and have God as their father? All of the interpretations mentioned, although textually possible, do not answer the question why Seth is singled out, unless Moses is attempting to establish an uninterrupted line of those that "walked with God" from Seth, to Enoch, to Noah (Gen 5:3, 22; 6:9). Calvin opined that the text affirms "among the multitudes of men, there was always a number, though small, who worshipped God."<sup>38</sup> If this was Moses' intent, then perhaps the image language of Genesis 5:1 is even more significant. Perhaps that is the reason why Moses precludes Adam's תּוֹלְדוֹת with the observation, "At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). The passage may be recording the first evidence of spiritual growth since Abel and the first disclosure of *Yahweh* as the name of God by which man worships.<sup>39</sup> This is speculation, of course, as the text does not specifically say; nevertheless, the language of Genesis 5:1-3 becomes clearer when the image of God is interpreted spiritually. All of Adam's children are made in God's image, and all inherited the consequences of his sin; but it is Seth's line that may have been "renewed by the grace of the Spirit."<sup>40</sup> The text does confirm that it is Seth's line by which Moses identifies the "spiritual ancestors" of Abraham descended from Noah.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the terms צִלְמֵם and דְּמוּת are incorporated into the text of 5:1-3 to make a spiritual point.

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University, 2008), 86.

<sup>37</sup>K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 310.

<sup>38</sup>John Calvin, *Genesis*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 63.

<sup>39</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 84.

<sup>40</sup>Calvin, *Genesis*, 64.

<sup>41</sup>Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 293.

In sum, Moses may have made a deliberate effort to differentiate between Seth's likeness to God and his likeness to his father Adam, as seen in the flipped terms and prepositions. By the same token, Seth's likeness to God was the same as Cain's and his other siblings, because they were all human. Cain was a son of Adam, had a wife and begat a son, Seth likewise. But Seth's likeness to God also seems different than Cain's or his other siblings. Seth's line called upon the name of the Lord and walked with God, but Cain's line "went away from the presence of the Lord" (Gen 4:16). Seth's line was perhaps the first evidence of the renewal of God's image from the fall, by the working of the Holy Spirit. This view can only make sense if the image of God is interpreted spiritually.

### An Exegesis of Genesis 9:6

וְאֵדָּא אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֶדְרֹשְׁנֹהּ  
 וּמִיַּד הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֶדְרֹשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ הָאָדָם:  
 שִׁפְךָ דַּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָּךְ כִּי בְצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם:

And only your blood for your lives do I require; from the hand of every living thing I require it, and from the hand of the man, from the hand of every man's brother I require the soul (life) of the man. Whoever sheds the blood of the man, by man is his blood shed: for in the image of God made he the man.

The final instance of *בְּצַלְם אֱלֹהִים* appears after the flood narrative when God makes a covenant with Noah. God's image is the reason for the gravity and severity of Genesis 9:5-6, and thus makes the proscription unconditional: The murder of another human being is to attack "the part of creation that most resembles God."<sup>42</sup> As an affirmation of the grave tone in the Law of Moses, Genesis 9:5 emphasizes the weighty consequences for homicide. There is a personal tone in 9:5 as Yahweh declares, "I will require." The form of the verb *דרש* *reckoning* appears three times, and all three times Yahweh requires it for taking a human's *נַפְשׁ* *soul (life)*. The use of the term alludes to man's creation in

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<sup>42</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 444.

Genesis 2:7. Whether by man’s own hand (9:5a), by an animal (9:5b), or by the hand of another human being, God will require an unconditional reckoning: the life of the offender. Because man is God’s image-bearer, God “deems himself violated in their person” and one cannot injure another human being “without wounding God himself.”<sup>43</sup> Also, there is no reckoning for taking animal life, but animals are held responsible for killing humans.

The elevation of human life in Genesis 9:6 is conspicuous when Scripture speaks clearly of the similarity of both human and animal life. The beasts of the fields are נִפְשׁ הַחַיָּה *souls*<sup>44</sup> that live and were brought forth from הָאָרֶץ *the earth* (Gen 1:24). Scripture regards all animals as having the רוּחַ חַיִּים *spirit of life* (Gen 6:17; 7:15) and the רוּחַ חַיִּים *spirit-breath of life* (Gen 7:22). Scripture also states that man was formed from the אֲדָמָה *dust from the ground* and became לְנִפְשׁ חַיָּה *to a soul that lives*, because of

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<sup>43</sup>Calvin also observed that although man has nothing of himself with which he can obtain God’s favor, “God looks on his own gifts (his image and likeness) in them, and so loves and cares for them.” Calvin, *Genesis*, 90.

<sup>44</sup>The meaning of the word נִפְשׁ has been debated. It is true that the range of use in the OT varies from throat, neck, breath, soul, living being, life, to self, person, emotion and passion. BDB, 659-60. Koehler, *HALOT*, 711-13. Because of these varying uses, Joel Green argues that נִפְשׁ must primarily refer to the “whole person as the seat of desires and emotions” but never to a soul separate from one’s being. He adds that Gen 2:7 never pictures man’s creation as “a process leading, finally, to his receiving a soul,” rather the “consequences of God’s formation and animation of a human.” Joel B. Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 182-83. This is a position first advanced by Jacob. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1958), 158-61. Also held by Hoekema and Merrill. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 212. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 176-77. Interestingly, Waltke attempts to bridge the modern with the historical by defining the term as “passionate vitality” that should be translated soul “only when it clearly refers to the appetite.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 223. The crux of the modern argument lies in that נִפְשׁ is not something that man received or forms a constituent part of man’s nature, rather describes man as a living being—man is a soul. However, the Old Testament speaks of living beings possessing “breath of life.” For example, Gen 6:17 states that God destroyed all flesh רוּחַ חַיִּים בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ *which in him (in which or wherein) has spirit of life*. In Gen 7:15, two by two all flesh entered the ark רוּחַ חַיִּים בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ *which in him (in which or wherein) has the spirit of life*. The same construction is seen in Gen 1:30 when speaking of all living things including human beings, which God gave plants for food, נִפְשׁ חַיָּה בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ *which in him (in which or wherein) has a soul that lives*. Interestingly, the ESV and NIV translate it “everything that has the breath of life,” while the NASB95 ignores it altogether. Nevertheless, the clause does not say רוּחַ חַיִּים *breath of life*; rather it speaks of everything that has (possesses) נִפְשׁ חַיָּה *a soul that lives*. Other English translations render it “everything that has life,” however, it would be difficult to translate the נִפְשׁ חַיָּה “life” in Gen 1:20, 24 and 2:19, but especially in Gen 2:7, “and man became *life*.” The LXX and the Vulgate, as well as the Targums, render it “a soul that lives.” Therefore, there is a sense in the creation passages that living creatures, human and animal alike, possess a soul that lives, and although נִפְשׁ may be rendered person, the duality of material and immaterial is present in the text. This is the reason why I chose to render נִפְשׁ *soul*.

God's נְשֻׁמַת חַיִּים *breath of life* (Gen 2:7). In fact, Scripture continually reminds of human earthliness, “he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps 49:12, 20) and “all go to one place” (Eccl 3:19-21). In essence, man and beast are the same: composed of the same material and receiving life from God.

What makes man different from animal in the light of Genesis 9:6 is God's image. God has fellowship with man, and not with animals (Gen 1:28-30; 3:8-9). Unlike the animals, man is commanded to obey God's decrees, which makes man a moral being (Gen 2:16-17). Thus, unlike the animals, man will be held accountable for his moral choices (Gen 3:9-13). And unlike the animals, man is invited to share eternal life with his Creator (Gen 2:9, 16; 3:22). All these characteristics are spiritual, and a spiritual interpretation of God's image only makes sense here. Both man and beast are made of body and soul, and the bodies of each return to dust; but it is man's soul that is stamped with God's image and lives forever. Man is spiritual, “possessing the ability to commune with God and share in God's very life,”<sup>45</sup> which results in his ability to act and live in the spiritual realm of existence.<sup>46</sup> This is not something animals and the rest of creation share. Only man's נְפֹשׁ חַיָּה resembles God, has fellowship with God, and has an eternal existence as a person in the eschaton. Because of God's image, only man's נְפֹשׁ חַיָּה with his unique creative thought, reasoning, self-consciousness and morality, is capable of ruling the rest of creation. Man's spiritual likeness to God explains why Gen 9:6 requires a high price from man and beast alike for taking human life. God's image sets Adam and Eve apart from the rest of creation as a reflection of God, gives value to human life above all creation, and equips them to rule over nature.

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<sup>45</sup>Kenneth M. Gardoski, “The Imago Dei Revisited,” *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* 5, no. 37 (2007): 21.

<sup>46</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446.

## The Image of God in the New Testament

As seen above, the *בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים* does not occur often in the Old Testament, but it reemerges in the New. The New Testament follows the lead of the LXX when it renders *בְּצַלְמֵ* as *εἰκῶν* *image* and *דְּמוּת* as *ὁμοίωσις* *likeness*. Of the NT passages that directly reference the image of God, two reference human beings in God's image or in his likeness (1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9); others reference Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15); and the rest speak to the spiritual transformation in believers that conforms them to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Before each of the NT passages are briefly addressed, it is important for the sake of context to acknowledge corollaries that have attached themselves to the different interpretations of the image of God as a result of the NT passages. Philo first advanced the belief that man is created in the likeness of an archetype — *the Logos*.<sup>47</sup> As a result, some see a Christological reinterpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 and conclude that either Christ is the heavenly man in Genesis 1:27 by which Adam was patterned after in Genesis 2:7,<sup>48</sup> the promise of the spiritual body was in view in Genesis 1:27,<sup>49</sup> or that what it means to be human is learned from Jesus — an anthropological and functional approach.<sup>50</sup> Others deny any connection between Christ and Genesis 1:26 on the grounds that Christ is the image of God to differentiate him from ordinary humans.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>47</sup>Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 791.

<sup>48</sup>Gerhard Kittel, "Εἰκῶν: The Metaphorical Use of Image in the NT," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 395-96.

<sup>49</sup>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* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 617-28.

<sup>50</sup>Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 277-300. Both Merrill and Hoekema take the approach that Christ came as the perfect image of God to help us learn the proper functioning of the image of God, which includes ruling over nature. Thus, Christ is the man par excellence, not the archetype. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 172-73. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 73-75.

<sup>51</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 195-225. I. Howard Marshall, "Being Human: Made in the Image of God," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 47-67. The greater point is that Christ is in a fuller way the exact replica of God than man is.

many of the Christological approaches are due to a reliance on Philo, but a closer look at what the NT passages state in light of what has already been studied in the OT passages will affirm a spiritual interpretation of God’s image in man that is to be patterned after Christ.

**First Corinthians 11:7 and James 3:9 allude to man’s creation in Genesis**

**1:26-27.** The first New Testament passage that specifically references man in the image of God is 1 Corinthians 11:7:

ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν, εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν.

For a man, indeed, should not to cover the head, the image and glory of God he is, and a woman is the glory of a man.

Certainly the Apostle Paul knew that man was created *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ* and that both the man and the woman were created *בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים*, so for Paul to say that a husband *is* the image and glory of God, he must have had something else in mind. The entire pericope centers on worship in the “assemblies of God” (11:16), thus Paul is drawing a comparison between the practical environment of corporate worship and the creation order in Genesis 1 and 2. This is a common allusion in Pauline exegesis (cf. 1 Tim 2:13). It may be that Paul is concerned with authority in this text, as some contend;<sup>52</sup> or he may be referring to image and glory as counterbalances to the shame of the previous verses.<sup>53</sup> In a worship setting, a woman without her head covered would honor herself and her husband (11:15), but divert the glory away from God alone, thus bringing shame upon them both.<sup>54</sup> Whatever the case, allusion is made to the created order: man reflects the

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<sup>52</sup>W. Harold Mare, *First Corinthians* in vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 255. William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation*, The Anchor Bible 32 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 263-64.

<sup>53</sup>David E. Garland, *I Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 523.

<sup>54</sup>Morna D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor 11:10,” *New Testament Studies* 10, no. 3 (April 1964): 414-15. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 186. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 523.

glory of God and woman reflects the glory of her husband. Therefore, Paul is not providing commentary on the meaning of God's image in Genesis 1:26, but he does allude to the created order of Genesis 2 to bring order in the church.

The reference in James 3:9 is the only other NT passage that refers to the image of God in man; however, unlike Paul, James will use likeness:

ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν κύριον καὶ πατέρα, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας.

With it we do bless the God and Father, and with it we do curse the men made according to the similitude of God.

James rebukes those that with the same lips bless the Lord and curse people who are made according to God's likeness. It seems that he is applying Jesus' teaching regarding the commandment on murder and insulting words and anger (Matt 5:21-22) for the readers of his day. Therefore, the line of argument seems to follow Genesis 9:6, which prohibited homicide on the basis of God's image. Once again, the NT writer is not providing a commentary on the meaning of God's image, although he confirms all human persons are still image-bearers.

**Second Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 affirm that Jesus is the image of God.** Attention now turns directly to Jesus Christ and a specific aspect of Christology regarding Christ's essence as Son of God. Both passages are similar and therefore considered together:

ἐν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων εἰς τὸ μὴ ἀγᾶσαι τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ.

in whom the god of this age did blind the minds of the unbelieving, that there does not shine forth to them the enlightening of the gospel of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God.

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως

who [Christ] is the image of God the invisible, firstborn of all creation.

What each of the passages have in common is that both are immediately connected to

Christ's saving work. Corinthians speaks of the illumination of the Gospel and how the glory of Christ is the glory of God.<sup>55</sup> Colossians speaks of redemption — in Christ we can see the Invisible.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ is to be understood in terms of Christ's essence to effect salvation, expressing “an ontological identity” between the Father and the Son.<sup>57</sup> In terms of essence, a comparison can be quickly made: Man is finite and mortal; contrariwise, Jesus is the second person of the Trinity and infinite. Jesus is also immortal, which produces the apparent paradox of the incarnation: immortal takes on a mortal body. This poses a problem for Philo's “heavenly man:” Adam was not a copy of the *Logos*; rather it was Christ that came in the likeness of flesh in order to redeem sinful man (Rom 8:3). And because of Christ's immortality, the incarnation of the Son of God carried the inevitable purpose of the resurrection (Phil 2:6-11).<sup>58</sup> Consequently, it seems apparent that God's image in Jesus Christ is radically different from God's image in man (1 Cor 15:49), especially when man is created בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ and Jesus is εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ in essence. Even so, the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ only makes sense spiritually, because the Son of God was the express μορφή θεοῦ before the incarnation (Phil 2:6a).

**The remaining New Testament passages speak to a believer's conforming to Christ's image.** The believer's transformation by conforming to Jesus, the image of God, is the common theme in the remaining passages (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) and therefore all may be considered together, and organized in what seems to be the Apostle Paul's train of thought. As the previous texts seemed to show, Christ, εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, is different from man's creation בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים. Although Adam and Eve

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<sup>55</sup>Howard Marshall also interprets Paul this way. Marshall, “Being Human,” 58.

<sup>56</sup>Gerald Bray reads Paul the same way. Bray, “The Significance of God's Image in Man,” 211.

<sup>57</sup>Marshall, “Being Human,” 57.

<sup>58</sup>Marshall, “Being Human,” 58.

were created in God's image and according to his likeness, their disobedience affected them and their offspring. And although their physical bodies, like all other creatures, must return to dust, the effects of sin are seen as spiritual failures (Rom 1:18, 21-25; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-20; Eph 5:4; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 1:10-11). Man is created in God's image, and the assessment of such a creative process was *טב מאד* *very good* (Gen 1:31). After the fall, man continues to resemble God, but the appraisal is *כי לא יצדק לפני כל־ה' for no living man is righteous before you* (Ps 143:2; cf. Rom 3:9-23; 5:12).

God's purpose in redemption in Christ Jesus is so that the repentant will be *συμμόρφους τῆς εικόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ conformed to the image of his Son*, who is the image of God (Rom 8:29). Consequently, a spiritual renewal begins in the immaterial aspect of man — *νοῦς the mind* (Rom 12:2). This spiritual renewal occurs as believers are clothed in a new man *κατὰ θεὸν according to [after the likeness of] God*, created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24), and in knowledge *κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν after the image of his Creator* (Col 3:10), so that the redeemed man may be *τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα to the same image [of Christ] be transformed* from glory to glory by beholding Christ's glory (2 Cor 3:18). All the passages point to a spiritual renewal in a process explained in 2 Corinthians 4:16ff. Indeed, the consummation of the renewal process is at the moment of resurrection: *καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου as we did bear the image of the earthy, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly* (1 Cor 15:49). However, all indications are that the renewal is already taking place in the redeemed, and the redeemed should live with the hope that the process has already happened spiritually (Rom 8:30).

Hence, what emerges from the NT is that the *εἰκὼν* of Christ is different from man created in the image of God, and that this new image is related to spiritual character and glory;<sup>59</sup> however, man, redeemed and unredeemed alike, is still an image-bearer.

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<sup>59</sup>Marshall, "Being Human," 60.

Thus, the meaning of God's image in man as spiritual is secured by the fact of redemption, by the willingness of the Son of God to become human and die in the place of man, so that the redeemed may be renewed to the image of Christ. In other words, the image of God in man is to be understood spiritually, because it is what makes human beings able to be redeemed and conformed to the image of the Son of God.

### **The Theology of the Spiritual Interpretation of the Image of God**

The exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-3, and 9:6 seems to point *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* to man's ontological nature, and if so, a spiritual interpretation would be more reasonable for understanding man in the image of God. God's image is spiritual, because to ascribe it to any physical aspect would necessitate God having a physical form, to which the Scriptures are very clear that God is without body (Deut 4:15-18). Similarly, Ross argues that the image of God in man cannot "signify a physical representation of corporeality, for God is spirit. The term must therefore figuratively describe human life as a reflection of God's spiritual nature."<sup>60</sup> God is a spirit (John 4:24; Isa 31:3), and when he appeared to the children of Israel in the desert, he appeared as a voice with no form (Deut 4:12). The Prophet Isaiah was also unable to see God's form, "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" (Isa. 40:18). Ezekiel's carefully crafted language sees a *דְמוּת כְּמִרְאֵה אָדָם* *a likeness as the appearance of a man* (Ezek 1:26). It was a human form, but only a likeness resembling a man. And to leave no doubt that he saw an appearance of a likeness, Ezekiel writes *דְמוּת כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה מִרְאֵה* *the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord* (1:28). Scripture affirms that God has no form; he is spirit.

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<sup>60</sup>Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 112.

## Understanding God's Image as Spiritual Because it Resembles an Incorporeal God

But how is image and likeness to be understood when God has no physical form? Likeness to God does not reside in creaturely limitations, because God is infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, and unchangeable in all his non-communicable attributes, which man is not (Ps 90:2; Mal 3:6; Jer 23:24). Adam and Eve resembled God in having a free, rational, personal spirit, including conscience with God's law written upon the heart (Rom 2:14-16), or as Gardoski summarized, likeness is "the complex of uniquely personal characteristics that God imparted to man at creation, which adhere to the immaterial aspect of man's being."<sup>61</sup> But there is still a more fundamental question: what in Adam enabled him to fellowship with God that no other creature had? This question cannot be answered in terms of likeness to God in functionality or physiology. The Lord breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, "and the man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7). The Targums link Adam's rational, personal spirit with the breath of life, "and it (the breath of life) became in man as a spirit that speaks." Adam and Eve were persons, and in contrast to the rest of creation, they could reason, converse, and fellowship with one another.<sup>62</sup> But most importantly, because Adam and Eve resembled God spiritually, they could fellowship with God. Hodge offers the following assessment:

God is a spirit, the human soul is a spirit. The essential attributes of a spirit are reason, conscience and will . . . in making man after his own image, therefore, God endowed him with those attributes, which belong to his own nature as a spirit.<sup>63</sup>

God's nature as a spirit is the pattern, and the צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת of God in Adam and Eve is

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<sup>61</sup>Gardoski, "Imago Dei," 22-23.

<sup>62</sup>Reason, above all else, is the most important for Gordon Clark. He argues for reason because "God is truth, and fellowship with him requires thinking and understanding." He added that reason is how man can enjoy God forever, and without it there would be no morality or righteousness. Gordon Haddon Clark, "The Image of God in Man," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 218. While reason is part of man's immaterial aspect, to say that reason is exclusively the image of God raises other questions, particularly what does it mean for those with less mental faculties? The meaning of God's image must encompass much more than reason alone.

<sup>63</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1906), 97.

therefore spiritual in nature.

Wherefore, the likeness to God may be understood in two ways. First, as Bray appears to conclude, man is set apart from the rest of creation — although a creature himself — by requiring responsibility and accountability to God.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, God's image and likeness endows man with the sole ability to relate to and worship his Creator. Watson concurs,

The image of God is that point where recognition of the creator arises from within the created order. Humans are unique because they alone recognize the creator in his works and offer him the praise that is his due.<sup>65</sup>

So, man resembles an incorporeal God in those qualities that by nature pertain to man's spiritual aspect. Also, without God's image, man would glorify God in his creaturely existence like the animals, but he could not enjoy Him forever.

### **The Ontological Question Regarding God's Image in Man as a Spiritual Interpretation**

It has been established that God's *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* forms part of man's ontology — specifically man's spiritual aspect — and particularly when speaking in terms of man's ability to relate and commune with an incorporeal God. However, man is also an embodied being; therefore, to describe God's image as spiritual raises questions regarding man's constitution and aspects of his ontology. Questions also arise regarding gender roles, and even functionality as physical intelligent beings that occupy space and time. These questions may be answered by six observations, which argue that the image of God is best interpreted as spiritual. The theological observations made regarding man's nature are not meant to be exhaustive because the studies on this have been legion.

First, as discussed in chapter 2, the explanation that best describes the

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<sup>64</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 195-225.

<sup>65</sup>Watson, *Text and Truth*, 280.

scriptural view of human nature is dualistic holism.<sup>66</sup> Human nature is not ontologically monistic; rather, it is dualistic in nature, principally composed of a spiritual aspect; thus, “our core personalities—whether we label them *souls, spirits, persons, selves, or egos*—are distinct and, by God’s supernatural providence, can exist apart from our physical bodies after death.”<sup>67</sup> In Genesis 35:18, Scripture describes Rachel’s death as a “departing soul.” Job used similar language writing that if God gathered unto himself his spirit (and his breath), man would return to dust (Job 34:14-15). Scripture also declares that no man has power to restrain his spirit — speaking of the departing soul at the moment of death (Eccl 8:8). Furthermore, Scripture speaks of not knowing when the spirit unites with the body in the mother’s womb (Eccl 11:5)<sup>68</sup> and the process of death when “dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12:7).

John Cooper has perhaps provided the most reasonable summary of what the above scriptures tell us regarding human ontology. Although the biblical worldview distinguishes God from creation, it views creation as having both a natural and spiritual dimension and God as an incorporeal Being intimately involved in the creation and operation of a physical universe. Furthermore, Adam’s formation in Genesis 2:7 combines material and immaterial substances to constitute an irreducible living being in this life. Moreover, the Old Testament affirms an eternal existence of the soul that continues to survive in a disembodied state after physical death. For Cooper, the most coherent conclusion is that “God created body and soul/spirit as an existential-functional

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<sup>66</sup>According to John W. Cooper, dualistic holism has been a doctrinal consensus affirmed by Orthodox Christianity over two millenniums. John W. Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 45-46.

<sup>67</sup>Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 34.

<sup>68</sup>The interpretation of this verse is controversial, particularly regarding questions of conception. Duane Garrett opines that the Teacher is simply making a point regarding the mystery of life. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 338.

holistic unity,” however, “they are sufficiently distinct” so that the soul — the individual person — can exist and respond to God apart from the body by God’s power.<sup>69</sup> Bray rightly concludes that God’s image speaks of the unique human person, yet the subject of personhood is so complex that the image and likeness only forms one component part of many biblical concepts regarding humanity.<sup>70</sup> Matthew Anderson said it best: “God is a mystery, and therefore so are humans.”<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, an individual is the same person throughout his existence here on earth and in the eschaton.<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, although man is created male and female, human gender is not the image of God, but rather a consequence of it. There is without a doubt an “intentional link” between man created in the image of God and man created male and female.<sup>73</sup> However, contra Barth, the link that exists is consequential and not definitive of God’s image, because any relational philosophy is going to deemphasize substance. Those who

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<sup>69</sup>John W. Cooper, “Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 35.

<sup>70</sup>See Chap. 2, n. 172, and Bray, “The Significance of God’s Image in Man,” 222-23.

<sup>71</sup>Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 59. Anderson, however, clearly expressed that personhood consists of the inner life, “We have, in other words, an inner life that is reserved for us—and God—alone. Where the early Christians spoke of the soul to explain this phenomenon, today we speak of ‘consciousness,’ which from what I can tell remains very much a mystery. In fact, some philosophers have suggested that there is no possible explanation for consciousness. Second Corinthians 4:16-18 contains one of Paul’s clearest statements about the distinction between our inner and outer lives. He writes: ‘Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.’ Just before this, Paul highlighted the persecution that he and his compatriots experienced for the sake of the gospel. According to him, they ‘carry about in their body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in the body.’ In other words, Paul’s inner life is shaped by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who lives in the temple of Paul’s body and forms it according to the pattern of Jesus on the cross.”

<sup>72</sup>According to Cooper, “Each human remains the very same being throughout his or her existence even though we constantly change from the moment we are conceived, and even though our awareness of self-identity may change or be lost. Individual identity is metaphysical and logical, not just a matter of fact or of self-consciousness. It is absolutely impossible for me to be another person or for there to be two of me... The soul, spirit, or core person that exists during this life endures after death until bodily resurrection and beyond. One and the same being continues from the beginning of existence forever, whether or not there is continuity between the earthly body and resurrection body.” Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate,” 41.

<sup>73</sup>Gardoski, “Imago Dei,” 16.

claim that the image is only realized in community relationship<sup>74</sup> fail to see that an incomplete image was not what God had in mind when he assessed man's need for companionship. Bray maintains, "When God decided that it was not good for the man to be alone, He did not indicate that one reason for this was that His image in man was imperfect on that account."<sup>75</sup> If God's image consisted of a human physical form or of the function of men and women distinctively, then image and likeness would have to be a bisexual form since both male and female are made in the image of God.<sup>76</sup> Or at a minimum, God's image would need to have female characteristics.<sup>77</sup> This point makes it inconceivably difficult to interpret *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* as referring to physical gender or relationship between genders. Yet, gender and human male/female relationship is a consequence of being created in God's image and likeness and thus part of the human experience. But principally a person, Adam and Eve are made in the image of God with those ontological spiritual qualities that resemble and relate to God.

Third, it is generally agreed, as noted in the exegesis of the previous section, that dominion is a consequence of Adam being made in the image of God; as a person who resembles God, and thus exercises rule as a result of that personal likeness. As Bray suggests, ". . . the concept of dominion, however important in itself, is merely an attribute of the *צֶלֶם* and does not constitute part of its essence."<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the language of Genesis 1:26—28 establishes dominion as arising out of the fact that the human person is made in God's image. Bayer concurs, ". . . it is accurate to say that the

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<sup>74</sup>Karl Barth, in particular, held that the *imago Dei* was the "I, Thou" community relationship between God and man, and male and female. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1:200.

<sup>75</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 223.

<sup>76</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 59.

<sup>77</sup>Gösta Ahlström opines that man was created in the "same forms" as the pantheon of gods, which included female goddesses. This would provide the "female principle" in God's image. Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*. (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1963), 50.

<sup>78</sup>Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," 197. So Horst. Friedrich Horst, "Face to Face: The Biblical Doctrine of the Image of God," *Interpretation* 4, no. 3 (July 1950): 262.

*dominium terrae* immediately rises from being in the image of God.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the text shows that dominion is not a constituent part of the human person, and thus not a constituent part of the image of God, although certainly a consequence of such.

Fourth, because of the existence of the soul, man is capable of fellowship with God. In order to fellowship with God, however, the image of God in Adam and Eve must reflect God’s holy character, especially in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of the truth. Admittedly, Scripture affirms that post-fall, post-flood man is still in the image of God (Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9); nevertheless, the Lord’s assessment of Noah after the flood is that the intention of his heart is evil from his youth (Gen 8:21). The psalmist reveals God’s desire to find that quality in man that was placed in him when he was created in the God’s image, but instead he finds that “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one” (Ps 14:3). This is an indictment on man’s entire existence. Therefore, God’s image, although present, is corrupted by sin and in need of regeneration.<sup>80</sup> As Calvin concluded, there is no part of man that has not been maimed by sin, and Scripture “admonishes us as to the excellence from which we have fallen, that he may excite in us the desire of its recovery.”<sup>81</sup> In Colossians 3:10, Paul speaks of God’s image, “and having put on the new man that is being continually renewed in knowledge according to the image of He who created him.” In regeneration, God is renewing his image within the believer in the knowledge of God.

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<sup>79</sup>Oswald Bayer, “Being in the Image of God,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2013): 83.

<sup>80</sup>Kilner provides a brief, but excellent bibliography on differing positions regarding the loss of the image of God. John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 601-17. Kilner correctly observes that Scripture does not contain “an explicit” affirmation that the image of God has or has not been damaged. In an appeal to wisdom, he asks the church to not suggest that the image is damaged for the sake of the “church’s protection of human life and dignity.” However, that appeal stands in contrast to what Scripture says regarding the human spiritual condition. Man is created in God’s image, therefore his value and dignity is inherent; but man needs a Savior because he is sinful and broken. As Gardoski correctly observed, “if the image did not even suffer a partial defacement by the fall, why do the redeemed need renewal to the image of God in Christ?” Gardoski, “Imago Dei,” 26.

<sup>81</sup>Calvin, *Genesis*, 27.

Such knowledge of God is eternal life, the spiritual life of the soul. In the parallel passage, Ephesians 4:24, Paul writes, “and put on the new man, which is created according to the (image of) God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” This time God renews his image in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Paul reveals that God’s image includes more than a free, rational, personal spirit, but that God’s image possesses an original knowledge (of God), righteousness, and holiness in the truth. The righteousness and holiness of the truth reflects God’s moral excellence. Again, humanity’s resemblance to God is spiritual. Adam’s sin destroyed this original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of the truth, but regeneration by the merits of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, begins the renewal process, which continues until the resurrection—the new man in Christ.

Fifth, how is the image of God to be explained at death, when man becomes disembodied? The clarity of Scripture regarding the separation of body and soul at death cannot be disputed (cf. Gen 35:18; Job 34:14-15; Eccl 8:8; Eccl 12:7; Luke 23:46). But even at death, when body and soul are separated, humanity continues to be an image-bearer. When speaking to the thief crucified together with him, Jesus reassures the man’s repentance with the words, “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). In other words, today, at the moment of death, your complete person will be in Paradise with my complete person. The former thief will not exist in some comatose state or exist in some foreign metaphysical condition, but rather his person as it exists now—granted, as a regenerated sinner—will continue to live disembodied. In regards to the moment of death, Paul declares that ἐχδημῆσαι *to be absent* from the body is ἐνδημῆσαι *to be at home* with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). This separation is both spatial and qualitative.<sup>82</sup> At the

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<sup>82</sup>Garland argues that Paul means a literal spatial separation: “to be away from the body (a metaphor for death) and at home with the Lord (a metaphor for resurrection).” But Paul’s declaration is also qualitative: “The picture he paints shows that as soon as we are away from the physical body we are present with the Lord in a new dimension that is qualitatively different from our experience of the Lord’s presence in this body.” David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 265.

moment that the spirit is separated from the body, the regenerated person is in a new and better fellowship with the Lord, in his presence. In an instant, the complete person, absent the body, is knowing and being known by the Lord in the intermediate state while awaiting the resurrection.

Luke, for instance, records Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). There is some debate as to whether the account was historical or a parable.<sup>83</sup> However, even if an argument could be made that Jesus was retelling an event that had happened, since the man Lazarus is named,<sup>84</sup> or if the majority opinion prevailed that such a story was another parable, the fact remains that Jesus is describing conditions of the disembodied state, as Calvin opined.<sup>85</sup> Jesus contrasts two men: one dies and is carried to Abraham's side (16:22), and the other also dies and ends up in Hades, "being in torment" (16:23). Jesus' description of the conditions of a disembodied person include feeling anguish (16:24), memory (16:25), intelligence and reason (16:26, 30), remorse, regret and pleading (16:27-28), and not to mention the ability to see and speak without physical eyes or a mouth. The rich man's experience was reality, and the eternal conditions of an unrepentant image-bearer. Lazarus was likewise experiencing reality, but as a repentant image-bearer. This story does not provide much detail regarding Lazarus' disembodied state, except that he was being comforted (16:25); however, it provides details regarding the self-conscious state of the disembodied rich man. In fact, hell is the consequence of an unrestored image of God, of an unrepentant image-bearer that must exist eternally as an unredeemed image-bearer.

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<sup>83</sup>See Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 422.

<sup>84</sup>Ryken suggests that Luke does not refer to the story as a parable and thus perhaps it is historical. Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 195.

<sup>85</sup>John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 119.

In another example, John speaks of the souls under the altar (Rev 6:9—11): the disembodied souls in the intermediate state awaiting the resurrection. Although without a physical brain, they remember their martyrdom, have a sense of justice, express emotions, and even desire vengeance. Although without a physical mouth, they cry out and communicate. Although without a physical body, they were given (spiritual) robes, as they wait for justice. As regenerated disembodied spirits, God's image is still very present. In fact, at death, in the disembodied state, the spirits of believers will be made perfect in resembling God (1 Cor 13:12). If contrasted with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it provides the details of heaven in the manner that the parable provides the details of hell. In both experiences, the disembodied image-bearer is quite self-conscious. For the believer, at the resurrection, when all that God has purposed is consummated, the image-bearer's resemblance to him will be complete.

Sixth and final, although the modern views of the inclusion of the physical as part of the image of God are rejected, the traditional view does not devalue the body. Indeed, because man's spirit bears God's image, man's body becomes a type of temple housing God's image,<sup>86</sup> just as the Holy Spirit residing with our spirit makes the body of a Christian the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Accordingly, the Scriptures often speak of our bodies as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13); they speak of putting to death the deeds of the body as dominated by sin (Rom 8:13), and of presenting our bodies living and holy sacrifices (Rom 12:1). The image of God elevates the body above all earthly creation.

But one thing probably agreed upon by many scholars is that human beings

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<sup>86</sup>Anderson provides one of the best explanations regarding the relationship of the body and the spirit: "The close identification of the human person with the bodily form in our original creation suggests that the best understanding of the body may be Gilbert Meilaender's striking phrase: it is the 'place of our personal presence.' As human persons, we live, communicate, and move in the flesh and bones that we indwell. Our bodies are not instruments for us to operate, as though we were driving them about like captains of a ship. They are not tools for us to communicate with others, or pieces of property to dispose of as we wish. What our bodies do, we do. What we do to other animated bodies, we do to other persons." Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 59-60.

were created to be embodied beings, with the body serving as a sheath for the spirit (Dan 7:15). This was God's design. God took dust from the ground, formed the human body and breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and man became a "living being" (Gen 2:7). As a physical being, he is commanded to procreate and rule over physical nature (Gen 1:28). However, because of sin, the process is reversed: the body returns to the ground from which it came (Gen 3:19; Eccl 3:20; 12:7a) and the spirit returns to the Lord who gave it (Eccl 3:21; 12:7b).

### **God's Transcendence as Foundational to the Spiritual Interpretation of the Image of God**

God created the person of Adam (like Eve) in his image for the purpose of relating to an invisible God. Because of God's immanence and man's finiteness, the image of God perhaps points to transcendence as an underlying principle in Genesis 1:26-27. John Oswalt argued best for the principle of transcendence as underlying the biblical text.

First of all, Scripture uniquely compares God's nature to human nature that stands in contrast to ancient Near Eastern understanding of the divine role in creation. Oswalt argues that ancient Near Eastern myths emphasize "continuities" among humanity, nature and the divine realm, meaning that continuous divine reality in a real invisible world is actualized in this visible world as a reflection of that reality.<sup>87</sup> The idea of continuity offers no distinction between symbol and reality, thus an idol of Baal is Baal, and what is done to the idol is done to Baal.<sup>88</sup> As opposed to Scripture, where "God is not the world, cannot be identified with the world, and cannot be manipulated

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<sup>87</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 45-46.

<sup>88</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 48-49.

through the world.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, to interpret God’s *עֶלְוֶת* as a physical statue or functional representative would easily align to ANE understanding. The biblical accounts are rehearsals of “nonrepeatable acts of God” that occur in history (identifiable time and space) and in “concert with human beings.”<sup>90</sup> To interpret and understand historical moments, such as man’s creation as God’s image, through the lens of the continuity ancient Near Eastern texts provide, is unwise at best, because Scripture is so diametrically different in its worldview.

Secondly, the manner in which Scripture speaks of God — his reliability, his holiness, his plan and work — he is fully proficient and fully involved in all aspects of human existence. Here lies the tension in Scripture. The Bible presents “a full-orbed Person who is capable of interacting with his creation on any number of different levels.”<sup>91</sup> The Scriptures uniquely record important moments of historical events (such as creation and the deliberations surrounding man’s creation — Gen 1:3-28) and unique activities of individual people (cf. Gen 2:23; 3:8; 5:24; 6:9; 8:20), particularly their decisions (cf. Gen 3:6; 4:8, 26; 6:22; 9:21; 11:4; 12:4), because it is in those instances, “and not in the great recurrences of nature, that the personal God is to be most truly known.”<sup>92</sup> The Lord is a personal God that makes himself known in his interactions with human persons.

Third, the continuity prevalent in all nations and religions formed an unstable foundation that always led humanity back to animism, idolatry and polytheism; therefore, the biblical writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, went to great lengths to provide an accurate account of the one true God. Moses understood that the faulty logic of continuity

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<sup>89</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 65.

<sup>90</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 49.

<sup>91</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 70.

<sup>92</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 80.

thinking led directly back to theological darkness, “and knew that if transcendence was ever to be maintained, it was going to require a radical denial of God’s continuity with the world in any form.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, God’s צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת, for example, cannot be understood in the physical terms of the continuity thinking of the ancient Near East, but in terms of God’s transcendence in creating finite human beings that can commune and relate to him.

One of the most important conclusions drawn from what is postulated regarding God’s transcendence and man created in his image and likeness is that the image of God provides the framework for God’s plan of redemption. Without God’s image in the human person, redemption would not exist. This does not imply that possessing the image of God entitles redemption to sinners, but redemption requires that sinners be made in his image. God’s purpose for sending his Son in the likeness of Adam was to renew God’s image in mankind through the Gospel (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Indeed, Christians have been foreknown and predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). As image-bearers, man is uniquely set apart from creation, including angels (1Pe 1:12), to be restored to fellowship with God the Father and his Son (1 John 1:3). Bayer concludes, “The human as created, fallen, and redeemed is in every specific respect the image of God.”<sup>94</sup> The Gospel, once believed, renews the image that was marred by both Adam’s sin and our own so that the believer may “bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor 15:49). As Marshall wrote, “The worth of humanity is secured by the fact of redemption, by the willingness of the Son of God to die for them.”<sup>95</sup> Because God created man in his image, he crowned him with glory and honor. Because of God’s infinite grace towards undeserving sinners made in his image, God sent his Son to redeem man and man is capable of being redeemed.

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<sup>93</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 82.

<sup>94</sup>Bayer, “Being in the Image of God,” 87.

<sup>95</sup>Marshall, “Being Human,” 61.

Wherefore, Scripture provides a high view of humanity, because it provides a unique and transcendent view of God, as well as the plan of redemption that is possible for image-bearers alone. In Genesis 1:26-27, a sovereign God creates man in his image with “all that means of freedom, nobility, and personhood.”<sup>96</sup> Perhaps image-language is the best manner to understand how Adam and Eve, and all of humanity to follow, were created to relate, speak to, and commune with, and to be redeemed by an infinite, invisible God.

### **Conclusion**

The grammar and syntax of Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-3, and 9:6 favors a spiritual interpretation of the image of God, as opposed to a physical or functional interpretation. The semantic range of the terms *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת*, including Moses’ seemingly strategic use of the *ב* and *כ* prepositions, and the construction of the purpose-clause point to an ontological explanation of God’s image, and offers better a alternative to a physical, functional, or relational interpretation. The image of God in the biblical text, when viewed ontologically as an aspect of human nature, emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the human being. As Gentry correctly observed, the definition of the divine image is not functional or relational, “but an ontological one.”<sup>97</sup> Man created in God’s image extends beyond his physical nature to something inward: his spiritual aspect. In New Testament terms, it is the renewing of God’s image through the Gospel that points to image bearing as something spiritual; as something that is found in man’s being, not his role. Paul exhorted that while the physical aspect of the believer is returning to dust, the spiritual aspect is renewed every day (2 Cor 4:16). Ultimately, a transcendent, infinite God created finite man in his image and according to his likeness so that man can relate to him, and through his Son, have fellowship with him, glorify him and enjoy him forever.

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<sup>96</sup>Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 70.

<sup>97</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 200.

## CHAPTER 4

### OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS TO THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

For two millennia, biblical scholars have searched for a definitive interpretation for the meaning of the image of God and the results have varied as was outlined in chapters 1 and 2. But a brief assessment of the host of studies and approaches yields that the traditional or majority conclusion among Christian and rabbinic sources is that God's image is to be interpreted as spiritual. Paul Enns succinctly summarized his theological anthropology in this way; "The image of God in man is spiritual, not physical. Man is not simply a physical being, but also a moral being with a conscience, intellect, emotion, and will."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, to defend the interpretation that says that God's image in man has to do with the spiritual part of his ontology that enables him to enjoy God forever, and that spiritual attribute exists primarily so that finite man may fellowship with a transcendent God, will draw objections from modern scholars. In this chapter, I will explore the more common objections to the spiritual interpretation and provide answers.

#### **Objection: The Image of God Should Not Be Identified with the Soul**

Joel Green questions what he calls the traditional theological answer to human uniqueness: "human creation in the divine image is realized in the human possession of a soul."<sup>2</sup> He argues that theologians should "sever the link" between God's image and the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 188.

<sup>2</sup>Joel B. Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 179. This is not what I have argued in chap. 3, rather man and creature alike are constituted by a physical body and an immaterial soul, and man's soul is uniquely stamped with the image of God. However, because I argue for holistic dualism and the fact that the divine image is found in the spiritual aspect of the human being, Green's objections should be addressed. Furthermore, Green

human self on the grounds that to identify the image of God with the human soul or even introducing “the idea of a human soul in the creation accounts” is not scriptural. Green’s objections are based on his interpretation of Genesis 2:7, in which he argues that the text provides no evidence of the creation of the soul; that no true ontological distinction exists between humans and animals, except that humans are made in God’s image.

### **There is no Evidence of the Creation of a Soul in Genesis 2:7**

Green provides his own exegesis of Genesis 2:7 to emphasize that the use of the term “soul” is not evidenced in the text. Rather, soul is a product of the vernacular surrounding early translations and the preservation of “widespread theological tradition:” a tradition that is flawed and being corrected in modern translations of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> He concludes that the human being is not comprised of parts, but wholly earthy, thus the purpose of Genesis 2:7 is to disclose the continuity and difference of humans to non-humans. The distinction cannot be found in different capacities, rather in terms of how those same capacities are manifested.<sup>4</sup>

**The human being is not comprised of parts.** Green offers two reasons why the creation of the human soul and man’s existence as possessing a soul is not present in the clause *וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה* — *And the Lord God formed the man*

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provides the most detailed objection to associating the *imago Dei* to the human soul. Although more orthodox scholars will not ascribe completely to Green’s monistic, non-reductionist anthropology, many seem to arrive to the same conclusions. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 203-18. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 71. Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 215. Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 176-77.

<sup>3</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 180. Green points out that the modern translations avoid the use of the term soul, “exemplifying an easily documented trend away from using the term in English translations since the rise of modern biblical studies.”

<sup>4</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 184-85. Stone provides an expanded explanation of Green’s conclusions. Lawson G. Stone, “The Soul: Possession, Part or Person? The Genesis of Human Nature in Genesis 2:7,” in *What about the Soul*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 47-61.

*dust from the ground*. First, he argues that the text does not say anything regarding the creation of a human body apart from any other substantive part of a human being, rather God created the human person, as a whole. The creation of separate parts is foreign to the text.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Green argues that the description of man's creation is to indicate the shared existence human beings have with the animals. He asserts that the language "identifies the human being with the rest of creation."<sup>6</sup> At this juncture, Green calls attention to the fact that the animals are made of the same ground (Gen 2:19). Likewise, the psalmist affirms that man is composed of the stuff of the earth (Ps 103:14; cf. Pss 90:3; 104:29; 146:4). In fact, humans and animals alike face the same fate (Eccl 3:18-21). Therefore, all מִן־הָאָדָמָה עָפָר is doing is reflecting on the "humble character of human life" through "human morality and fragility," and not speaking to human constitution.<sup>7</sup>

**God simply brought the human being to life.** Next, Green argues that the subsequent clause, וַיִּפֶּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים — *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*, is the writer's "potent affirmation that human life is dependent on the God who gives life," and not evidence of the impartation of some other part of the human constitution.<sup>8</sup> To demonstrate this interpretation, Green calls attention to God's purpose to destroy "all flesh in which is the breath of life" (Gen 6:17). Animal pairs "which there was the breath of life" entered the Ark (Gen 7:15). And finally, everything that died "took its last breath" (Gen 7:21-22). Having the breath of life is the mere fact of being alive, and vice versa. Thus, the language in these passages is only there as "a sign of humanity's

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<sup>5</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 181. Green renders אָדָם as "a person."

<sup>6</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 181.

<sup>7</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 181.

<sup>8</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 181.

essential solidarity with nonhuman creatures.”<sup>9</sup> Man and creatures are alive because God brought them to life.

**The human being became a living being.** Green’s final observation of Genesis 2:7 becomes the crux of his argument. After God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a *לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה* *a living being* “with reference to the whole person as the seat of desires and emotions.”<sup>10</sup> Of the more than 700 references of the term *נֶפֶשׁ*, a separate inner-soul is not one of them; rather, the term denotes the entire human being as well as animals. Simply put, Adam came to life.

Both Green and Lawson Stone stress that the Hebrew Scriptures know nothing about the distinction of the physical and the spiritual.<sup>11</sup> And that the language of Genesis 2:7 says nothing regarding the giving or receiving of a soul for Adam. Stone summarizes the position:

The term *נֶפֶשׁ* in Genesis 2:7 refers not to a part of Adam’s nature, nor to some possession such as a transcendent personal spiritual hypostasis termed a “soul” that lives forever and distinguishes humanity from the animals. Rather, *לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה* denotes Adam as a living creature like the animals created in Genesis 1 and 2. It underscores Adam’s linkage with the animal creation, not his difference from it.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, being created living *נֶפֶשׁ* is not what makes Adam human, nor is it a unique characteristic of humanity, but it is best rendered as a reference to the gift of life.

### **The Similarities between Man and Animal Are Emphasized in the Genesis Text**

A second component of Green’s objection to the image of God being

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<sup>9</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 182.

<sup>10</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 182.

<sup>11</sup>Stone argues that the linking of *נֶפֶשׁ* to physical existence “fits well with the Old Testament’s overall disinterest in the afterlife.” Stone, “The Soul,” 56.

<sup>12</sup>Stone, “The Soul,” 56-57.

associated with the soul forms more of a corollary to his exegetical argument: the text accentuates the fundamental solidarity of humans and animals. In order to summarize this perspective, both Green and Stone observe that man was created from “the stuff of the earth” (Gen 1:24; 2:7).<sup>13</sup> Both humans and animals were given vegetation for sustenance (Gen 1:30). Both humans and animals were given the command to reproduce (Gen 1:22). Both humans and animals were animated by נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים (Gen 1:30; 6:17; 7:15, 21-22) and נְפֶשׁ is used to reference both (Gen 1:12, 24; 2:7; 9:10). In essence, “no special part of humanity, not even the mind, escapes this creaturely continuity.”<sup>14</sup> To say that these passages provide evidence to the human’s possession of a soul is to read into the text subject matter that is foreign to it, not to mention out of context.

If the text is read in the manner Green proposes, there is no basis for understanding the image of God as forming part of man’s spiritual aspect. Green opines that the evidence provides “no basis for supporting what is variously called a structuralist, substantialist, or essentialist understanding of the divine image in which humanity is created. That is, the divine image cannot be understood in terms of the claim that humans have a soul.”<sup>15</sup> And because the differences between human and animal may only be understood in terms of the “relative degree” to which each manifest their capacities, more modern interpretations of God’s image in man find their home in the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 184. Stone argues that all the Genesis texts stress Adam’s “fragility and commonality with the animals.” Stone, “The Soul” 50-57.

<sup>14</sup>F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 164.

<sup>15</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 184.

<sup>16</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 184-85. Stone illustrates this perspective by interpreting the serpent in Gen 3 as the creature that “would have been” the most suitable of all animals to serve as Adam’s partner. His argument is based on the comment in Gen 3:1 regarding its cunning, and the play on words in Gen 2:25 and 3:1. Stone believes these observations provide the reason the serpent could speak and engage in debate. And because it could speak and debate, it demonstrates a hostile personality toward Eve that can easily be understood as resentment for its “rejection from serving as Adam’s companion.” Therefore, the serpent is an example of the continuity between man and animal, and how the “relative degree” to which human and animal manifest their capacities is the emphasis of the entire Gen 1-3 narrative. Stone, “The Soul” 58-59.

Nevertheless, Green will not ascribe to any alternative interpretation of the divine image; instead his point is that the text only articulates the relationship between man and beast. Wherefore, the divine image cannot be spiritually interpreted when no soul exists.

In sum, Genesis 2:7 knows nothing of the human soul, thus its essential purpose is to affirm human solidarity with the animals. If the soul does not exist, as the rest of the Old and New Testaments attest, then its association to God's image cannot exist.

### **Response to the Soul Objection**

The objection to the spiritual interpretation of the image of God as presented by Joel Green is a common protest, although the motive for more orthodox scholars is a defense of the body, rather than denying the existence of the soul.<sup>17</sup> Green's research has wholly centered on the question of soul existence, and particularly because of presuppositions led by the introduction and preeminence of scientific discovery, particularly neuroscience.<sup>18</sup> As Green succinctly remarks,

Well known in the annals of the relationship between scientific innovation and theology are the revolutionary proposals of Copernicus and Darwin. Today, a further scientific innovation, among neurobiologists, has the potential to be just as sweeping in its effects among theologians and within the church.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to call attention to Green's obvious presupposition of a non-existent soul, because his objection stands on the premise that the existence of the soul has been presupposed!

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<sup>17</sup>Hoekema's entire defense for a psychosomatic unity is to include the body as part of the image of God. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 217-26. Waltke also defends the body without denying the existence of the soul. Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 65. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 215.

<sup>18</sup>Joel B. Green, "Science, Religion and the Mind-Brain Problem: The Case of Thomas Willis (1621-1675)," *Science and Christian Belief* 15, no. 2 (October 2003): 165-85. Joel B. Green, ed., *What about the Soul?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004). Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul."

<sup>19</sup>Green, *What about the Soul*, 6.

The Genesis 2:7 exegetical objections raised by Green and Stone in regards to ascribing the image of God to man's spiritual aspect have been addressed in chapter 3 and summarized as follows. First, in Genesis 1:26-27 the semantic range of the terms *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת*, including the strategic use of the *ב* and *כ* prepositions, and the construction of the purpose-clause point to an ontological explanation of God's image. Secondly, if the explanation is ontological, then it must point to the spiritual aspect of the human being because God is a spirit by nature, and to be in his image and according to his likeness requires a spiritual resemblance. Thirdly, in New Testament terms, it is the renewing of God's image through the Gospel that emphasizes image bearing as something to do with the spiritual aspect of the human being (2 Cor 4:16).

If indeed the purposes of the creation narratives were to demonstrate the solidarity of man and beast, as Green posits, how is God's reckoning for the murder of human *נֶפֶשׁ* alone in Genesis 9:6 explained? The text answers the question in that man was created in God's image. But according to Green, that can only be explained as human function, if any explanation for God's image exists.<sup>20</sup> However, the text plainly speaks of *נֶפֶשׁ* as something that is similar in both humans and beasts (Gen 1:24; 2:7). Yet, humans are moral beings (Gen 2:16-17), accountable for moral choices (Gen 3:9-13), and share eternal life with their Creator (Gen 2:9, 16; 3:22). These are not characteristics that animals manifest in "relative degrees of capacity to humans," but are unique to man. Because of God's image, only man's *נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה* with his unique creative thought, reasoning, self-consciousness, and morality, requires a high price from man and beast alike for taking his life.

Green and Stone are correct in that both man and animal share the "breath of life," and thus it is not unique to human beings, rather it establishes the so-called solidarity with animals. However, they ignore that the text speaks of humans and animals

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<sup>20</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 184.

possessing a living soul. The construction אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים *which in him (in which or wherein) has the spirit of life* (Gen 6:17; 7:15) is seen in Genesis 1:30 when speaking of all living things including human beings, אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ נַפְשׁ חַיָּה *which in him (in which or wherein) has a soul that lives*. The clause does not say נְשַׁמַּת חַיִּים *breath of life*; rather it speaks of everything that has (possesses) נַפְשׁ חַיָּה *a soul that lives*. There are modern English translations which render the verse “everything that has life,” however, it would be difficult to translate the נַפְשׁ חַיָּה “life” in Genesis 1:20, 24 and 2:19, but especially in Genesis 2:7, “and man became *life*.” The LXX and the Vulgate, as well as the Targums, render Genesis 2:7 “a soul that lives.” Therefore, there is a sense in the creation passages that living creatures, human and animal alike, possess a soul that lives, and although נַפְשׁ may be rendered person, the duality of material and immaterial is present in the text.

Furthermore, Green and Stone reject the idea of duality or the existence of the soul on the basis that the notion is foreign to the Old Testament. However, it is clear that man and animal alike possess נְשַׁמַּת חַיִּים *breath of life* or רוּחַ חַיִּים *spirit of life*. The text does not just present “breath of life” as some vitalizing agent, but rather something possessed by the human being that makes him נַפְשׁ חַיָּה *a living soul*. According to Daniel, the body serves as the sheath for the spirit (Dan 7:15). When Scripture describes death, such as Rachel’s death, it is explained as a “departing soul” (Gen 35:18). Job declared that if God gathered unto himself his spirit (and his breath), man would return to dust (Job 34:14-15). In fact, no man has power to restrain his departing soul at the moment of death (Eccl 8:8), and the process of death is described as when “dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12:7). Green and others exaggerate that the Old Testament views man monistically, when a dualistic anthropology is evident in the narratives, the prophets and the writings.

In sum, the spiritual interpretation of the image of God is supported by the grammar and theology of Genesis 1-2. Man was created to resemble the invisible God, therefore the manner in which man images God is spiritual. Also, the creation of man is

recorded in two passages, thus when juxtaposed with one another, Genesis 2:7 naturally ascribes God's image to the immaterial aspect of man. This is not to say that the image of God is man's soul, but what is being said is that the image of God is what makes man's soul unique and distinguishable from the rest of creation. Furthermore, a spiritual interpretation of God's image assumes a dualistic anthropology, which is well attested in Scripture.

### **Objection: The Spiritual Interpretation is Mired in Greek Philosophy**

A common objection to the spiritual interpretation of God's image is the pervasiveness of Platonic influence on Hellenistic and Western thought that led to theories regarding the existence of a human soul;<sup>21</sup> however, Green traces the origins of dualism much farther back than Greek philosophy.<sup>22</sup> The Platonic categories were almost unavoidable because dualistic presuppositions had worked their way into the fabric of ancient societies leading up to Plato. With the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the presuppositions were embedded. Green hypothesizes, "It would seem only natural to find in the term ψυχή (the Greek translation of נִשְׁמָה) a reference to the soul of anthropological dualism, irrespective of the narrative context provided by Genesis 1-2."<sup>23</sup> Stone reaches further and claims that the pervasiveness of Plato yielded no other

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<sup>21</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 180. Modern Old Testament scholars who hold a similar position include: Stone, "The Soul" 47-61. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 203-26. Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 176-77. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 57-58.

<sup>22</sup>Green relies on Stone's theory that the belief in the afterlife among Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Canaanites eventually found its way into Jewish and Christian thought. The pervasive religious veneration of the dead among the pagan cultures would eventually (and inevitably) influence biblical thought that would transform the Old Testament's נִשְׁמָה from a "this worldly sense" into an "other worldly concept." Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 185.

<sup>23</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 186. Earlier, Green argues that ψυχή does not mean "soul," but that it broadly refers to "life." The term took on the sense of soul "when anthropological dualism had already been established." Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 183.

hermeneutic.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to the New Testament, Green and Stone differ on their reasons for the appearance of dualism,<sup>25</sup> and Green is alone in his conclusion that the New Testament does not teach the existence of a soul. When it comes to death and the resurrection, the New Testament, like the Old, does not “anticipate a waiting period,” rather it anticipates “an immediate resurrection.”<sup>26</sup> In Jesus’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Green urges that “we would be ill-advised to imagine that Jesus speaks in this account of disembodied existence in a place and time that stands between this life and the next.”<sup>27</sup> Luke, as an example of the New Testament writers, only spoke of immediate judgment upon death. Green claims, “the dead experience neither a period nor a place of waiting but enter their eternal reward immediately upon death.”<sup>28</sup> As far as Paul is concerned, his language is dualistic but only “in an anthropological sense . . . contrasting the now and the not-yet.”<sup>29</sup> So when it comes to the New Testament, there is nothing

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<sup>24</sup>Stone argues that centuries before Jesus’ birth, dualism was the “ideology du jour providing the controlling model for reading the Old Testament.” He goes on to claim that dualism was so pervasive “that it shaped a sophisticated hermeneutical method” that reached far into the writings of the Church fathers. Stone, “The Soul” 57.

<sup>25</sup>Stone attributes New Testament dualism to Platonic influence “centuries before Christ” and argues that when Christians exalted the meaning of the soul, “it soon became common to move from the text of Genesis to the teaching and idiom of the New Testament, and back again, with virtually no conception of the terrain over which one was flying.” Stone, “The Soul” 57. Green, on the other hand, refuses to ascribe any dualism to the New Testament writers, and ascribes any thought of the existence of the soul to the influence of Platonism among the Church fathers. Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 189-90. Waltke seems to agree with Stone, accusing traditional Christian interpretation of reading back into Gen 1:26 “the dualism of human nature as taught in the New Testament.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 215.

<sup>26</sup>Green relies on F. F. Bruce, who remarked that “the tension created by the postulated interval between death and resurrection might be relieved today if it were suggested that in the consciousness of the departed believer there is no interval between dissolution and investiture, however long an interval might be measured by the calendar of earth-bound human history.” F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 312. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2434, Kindle.

<sup>27</sup>Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, Loc. 2581, Kindle. Green states earlier that when the Old Testament speaks of persons that dwell in Sheol, there is “no suggestion that some essential part of the human being has survived death.” Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2468, Kindle.

<sup>28</sup>Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2622, Kindle.

<sup>29</sup>Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2787, Kindle.

“intrinsically immortal”<sup>30</sup> about the human being, and thus the existence of a soul or existence apart from the body cannot be read into the text. Any interpretation to the contrary is attributed to Platonic influences.

With very few exceptions, Neo-Platonism was present in the works of all the church fathers, according to Green. He accentuates that it would be an exaggeration to ascribe all of the era’s thought to Plato. Nevertheless, an attempt to distinguish the human soul from animal gave way to the emergence of Philo’s “rational soul,” which used Platonic categories.<sup>31</sup> Reason was the chief characteristic that differentiated man from beast, and according to Green, it seemed natural for Philo to identify the soul with the image of God.<sup>32</sup> The church fathers espoused Philo’s philosophy and eventually the Reformers would argue the same. The belief in the soul would continue until the introduction of neuroscience.<sup>33</sup> Once the existence of the soul was questioned, its association with the image of God was also placed in doubt.

Wherefore, a spiritual interpretation of God’s image in man “requires a decisive departure from scripture’s own witness”<sup>34</sup> and an adherence to the philosophy of Neo-Platonism that ascribes anthropological dualism to Genesis 1-2.

### **Response to the Platonism Objection**

The philosophical arguments for the existence of the soul are beyond the scope of this work, therefore suffice to say that there are as many scholars defending the

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<sup>30</sup>Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2771 Kindle.

<sup>31</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 188. Gentry and Wellum also claim that the spiritual interpretation did not originate with the Christian church, but can be traced to Philo, and thus the reason for their rejection of it. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 186.

<sup>32</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 188-89.

<sup>33</sup>Green attributes the beginning of the end of the belief in the soul from the perspective of the natural sciences to Thomas Willis (1621-1675), founder of neurology, who attributed the soul to ancient philosophy, and not science. Green, “Science, Religion and the Mind-Brain Problem,” 165-85.

<sup>34</sup>Green, “Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 190.

existence of the soul, such as LaRock<sup>35</sup> and Cooper,<sup>36</sup> as there are those that oppose it, such as Green and Stone. Furthermore, it is remarkable that for Green, hermeneutics and theology require rethinking under new scientific discoveries, but the science itself is never questioned.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the focus of this response is Green and Stone's claim that Platonism controlled the hermeneutic leading to a spiritual interpretation of the image of God.

### **The New Testament Teaches the Existence of the Soul and it is not Platonism**

As noted above, Green vehemently denies Platonic influence upon the New Testament writings, and if Greek thought were to be read, it is because the text is approached with Philonic lenses on the part of the reader.<sup>38</sup> If those lenses were

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<sup>35</sup>Eric LaRock's recent work centers on empirical findings that substantiate human dichotomy, although not entirely embracing substance dualism for a more philosophical approach he named Emergent Subject Dualism. Nevertheless, his theory proposes that once a brain "achieves suitable organization," a subject emerges that "possesses causal power to influence the structures and functions of its brain." LaRock describes a rare case of a stroke patient with severe right motor cortical damage who was able to rewire neural areas in her left motor cortex through a process called subject-directed neuroplasticity. While trying to exercise her left thumb, the patient would experience her right thumb moving along with her left thumb in almost mirror-like fashion. She experienced her consciously directed left thumb movements in tandem with her non-consciously directed right thumb movements, because her conscious effort to bring about left thumb movements recruited neurons in the left motor cortex that normally carried out right thumb movements. Through sustained conscious effort, she eventually carved out new neural pathways in her left cortex for left-sided movements that did not involve right-sided interference proving that the brain can be adapted by the conscious voluntary power of a subject. Thus, further proving that human consciousness, or the soul/mind, can act upon the brain because it is separate from the brain and does not depend on brain function for existence. This evidence is significant, because neuroscience is finding more and more that there are events in the human person that cannot simply be explained by human brain processes, but that there is causal power acting upon the material body. Scripturally, that causal power is the human soul. Eric LaRock, "An Empirical Case against Central State Materialism," *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): 409-26. Eric LaRock, "From Biological Naturalism to Emergent Subject Dualism," *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 1 (2013): 97-118.

<sup>36</sup>John W. Cooper, "The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 41-46. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000). John W. Cooper, "Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 27-42.

<sup>37</sup>Green insists, "Insofar as science is present as one of the sources for the theological enterprise, theology remains open to the possibility of reformulation on account of scientific discovery." Green, *What about the Soul* 10.

<sup>38</sup>Green, "Why the Imago Dei Should Not Be Identified with the Soul," 190n34.

removed, one would find that the Gospel writers and Paul did not teach the existence of the soul. But what if the New Testament writers were presupposing a “commonsense, dualist anthropology,” as Stewart Goetz suggests?<sup>39</sup> For example, when Jesus and the disciples were visiting Caesarea Philippi, he posed a question to them, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt 16:13). The answers ranged from John the Baptist, to Elijah and to one of the prophets — all having died already. Even Herod wondered if Jesus was John after John’s execution (Matt 14:2). If the thinking of the time, as Green and Stone suggested, was an anticipation of an immediate resurrection, and in first century Judaism that resurrection was not until the end of the age, how does one account for the disciples’ answer? As Goetz analyzed:

Given that [the people of that era] were apparently intellectually comfortable with the dualistic/animistic metaphysics of demon expulsion [that Christ would often exhibit], it is hard to dismiss as thoroughly implausible the idea that people might have believed John’s soul was re-embodied in Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

The Scriptures are clear regarding the separation of body and soul at death in Luke’s gospel (Luke 23:43), in Paul’s description of the moment of death (2 Cor 5:8), Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), James description of death (Jas 2:26), and the Apostle John’s description of the souls under the altar (Rev 6:9-11).<sup>41</sup> If dualism was not presupposed and Jesus did not exist between Good Friday and Easter morning, it presents a problem for what Jesus told the thief. If the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a description of the final blessing and judgment, as Green suggests,<sup>42</sup> a problem exists when the rich man begs for Lazarus to return from the dead and warn his brothers. If resurrection and judgment is immediate and no intermediate state exists,

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<sup>39</sup>Stewart Goetz, “Substance Dualism,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 130.

<sup>40</sup>Goetz, “Substance Dualism,” 131.

<sup>41</sup>See point five under “The Ontological Question Regarding God’s Image in Man as a Spiritual Interpretation,” in Chap. 3.

<sup>42</sup>Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, loc. 2549, Kindle.

serious questions arise when the Hebrews' author speaks of the church approaching the assembly of "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Heb 12:23), or the disembodied martyrs ask God "how long" and God answers "rest a little longer" (Rev 6:10-11). Therefore, it is plausible to say that New Testament thinking in general, and the New Testament writers in particular, assumed a dualist distinction in human anthropology, and that distinction informed their writings.

What the Scriptures assume is what Goetz calls "mere dualism:"<sup>43</sup> a pre-philosophical distinction of body and soul. What Green, Stone and others have done is confuse biblical dualism with Platonic philosophical dualism. It is correct to say that the Scriptures were not written to philosophize or teach about anthropological makeup. It is even correct to say that Platonic philosophy is not present in the New Testament texts. However, as seen above, dualism is assumed and taught.

### **Dualism in Rabbinic Thought Was not Platonism**

Dualistic anthropology among the church fathers is debatable, as there is evidence for and against Platonic influence; however, it is well documented that the rabbis understood a dualistic anthropology present in the Old Testament that was not influenced by Greek philosophy. According to rabbinic thinking, the soul was understood as the part of man that distinguished him from all other aspects of creation, including the animal world, and made him a moral creature.<sup>44</sup> It was also distinguishable within the human person. Rabbi Judah b. Menasiah drew an analogy from God's incorporeality to characterize the human soul:

Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole world, so the soul fills the body.  
Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, sees, but is not seen, so the soul sees but is not

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<sup>43</sup>Goetz, "Substance Dualism," 131.

<sup>44</sup>Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (Lexington, KY: BN Publishing, 2008), 83.

itself seen. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, feeds the whole world, so the soul feeds the whole body. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, so the soul is pure. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, abides in the innermost precincts, so the soul abides in the innermost precincts.<sup>45</sup>

When it comes to the terms נִפְשׁ, רִיחַ, and בְּשָׁר, which are all used in different parts of the Old Testament to refer to the human person, man's creation and the spiritual interpretation of the image of God informed the rabbis as to the words' distinguishable differences. The terms נִפְשׁ and רִיחַ are often used interchangeably,<sup>46</sup> however, בְּשָׁר does not appear interchangeable with any of the other two terms.<sup>47</sup> Biblically and pedagogically speaking, the rabbis believed in the existence of the soul as a unity with the body, yet a distinct aspect of the human person.<sup>48</sup> In Genesis 2:7, עָפָר does not mean that God formed Adam "from the dust of the ground," but rather "dust, from the ground." The עָפָר is absolute. Rabbi Hirsch noted,

God formed from the dust only that which is earthly in man, and which will eventually return to earth. God, however, did not take man's human life, from the earth: God breathed that part into his countenance and only thereby did man become a living creature.<sup>49</sup>

The clarity of Genesis 2:7 was indisputable to the rabbinic mind.

The reality of death "strengthened the sense of duality,"<sup>50</sup> as did the reality of life. The Sages saw the נִפְשׁ as containing "all the vital parts of man, all his senses,"

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<sup>45</sup>Rabbi Isidore Epstein, ed., *Soncino Babylonian Talmud Berakoth*, trans. Maurice Simon (Teaneck, NJ: Talmudic Books, 2012), 10a.

<sup>46</sup>The two terms appear to be used interchangeably, to denote the psyche of the human being and is exclusive to him. It is the immortal part of his composition, the "breath" infused into him by God. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 83.

<sup>47</sup>BDB points to the distinguishing terms בְּשָׁר וְלֹא-רִיחַ "horses are flesh not spirit" Is 31:3. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2000), 142.

<sup>48</sup>Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 7.

<sup>49</sup>Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, *Bereishis = Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (New York: Mesorah, 1977), 70.

<sup>50</sup>Urbach explains that death deprives man of the faculty of speech and the ability to move, but leaves the body with all its organs. Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 218.

which they ascribed as the “portion of the Creator in man.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the image of God resides in the soul, because the rabbis saw it as man’s heavenly part<sup>52</sup> and the part of the human being that best “resembled divine intellect.”<sup>53</sup> It was understood that if the soul departed at death, so did God’s image.

Could this dualism be attributed to Platonic influence on the rabbis? Rabbinic dichotomy cannot be ascribed to Platonic influence, because the Sages were unacquainted with or rejected Greek philosophy in many ways. Urbach asserts, “The Sages were not acquainted with Greek philosophy, and not one of its great representatives is mentioned anywhere in rabbinic literature, except Epicurus.”<sup>54</sup> The first reason rabbinic dualism was not Greek is simple disinterest. Steinsaltz proposes that due to the nature of Jewish faith, Hellenism could not synthesize with Judaism the way it did with Persian and Syrian cultures; the Sages “displayed no interest whatsoever in philosophy, whether in its Classic Greek, Hellenistic, or Roman versions.”<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Cohen attests to rabbinic disinterest in philosophical thought: “The interest in metaphysical speculation which characterized the thinkers of Greece and Rome was not shared by the teachers of Israel to any great extent.”<sup>56</sup> The rabbis were not interested in philosophy because they were not philosophers. Montefiore notes, “The Rabbis were no philosophers . . . They had but a casual acquaintance with Greek thought.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Kadushin concludes, “The Rabbis

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<sup>51</sup>Urbach, *The Sages*, 219.

<sup>52</sup>“All creatures which are formed from heaven, both their soul and body are from heaven; and all creatures which are formed from earth, both their soul and body are from earth, with the exception of man whose soul is from heaven and his body from earth.” Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 73.

<sup>53</sup>Maimonides also added that the soul allows humans to commune with God, Moshe Reiss, “Adam: Created in the Image and Likeness of God,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2011): 184.

<sup>54</sup>Urbach further explains that in the Mishna Sanhedrin the Epicurean is counted among those who have no share in the world to come, but never in a way to explain their philosophies: “He who does not believe that God governs the world is an Epicurean.” Urbach, *The Sages*, 29.

<sup>55</sup>Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 19, 97.

<sup>56</sup>Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 29.

<sup>57</sup>C. G. Montefiore and H. M. J. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Meridian, 1960), xciv.

were not philosophers.”<sup>58</sup> Rabbinic literature more than once demonstrates this fact.

A second reason why rabbinic thought is not Platonist is simply that the rabbis had great disdain for Greek philosophy. Cohen discerns this point: “So far as Greek thought is concerned, there is almost unanimity against it. One rabbi declared vehemently, ‘Cursed be the man who has his son taught Greek philosophy’.”<sup>59</sup> This animosity toward philosophy is illustrated by this question and answer exchange with a rabbi:

A Rabbi asked, “Since I have learnt the whole of the Torah, may I study Greek philosophy?” In reply the verse was quoted, “This book of Torah shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Josh i, 8), and the remark was added, “Go and search at which hour it is neither day nor night and devote it to the study of Greek philosophy”<sup>60</sup>

It was more than simple incompatibility; there was just no room for Greek philosophy in Jewish thought.

A final reason why rabbinic thought avoided Platonic influence is simply that the rabbis did not teach philosophy. Montefiore states, “They [Rabbi] had no training in philosophy.”<sup>61</sup> He also attributed rabbinic ignorance of philosophy to an all-encompassing dedication to the Torah: “. . . Rabbinic Judaism is purely Jewish. It had no Greek strand . . . Rabbinic Judaism is almost purely a native growth, and depends upon the Old Testament alone.”<sup>62</sup> Kadushin argues that rabbinic thought and philosophy do not intersect in any way:

“The fact is that the Rabbis and the philosophers simply do not inhabit the same universe of discourse . . . Indeed, this entire discussion only shows that when we employ the terms of classical philosophy even in an attempt to clarify rabbinic ideas, we are no longer within the rabbinic universe of discourse. Rabbinic

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<sup>58</sup>Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Blaisdell, 1965), 273.

<sup>59</sup>Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 188.

<sup>60</sup>Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 143.

<sup>61</sup>Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, xix.

<sup>62</sup>Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, xx.

statements about God arise as a result of interests entirely different from those that philosophic thought . . . . In other words, unless we emancipate ourselves from philosophic influences, we shall struggle in vain to comprehend what the Rabbi said or felt about God.”<sup>63</sup>

Steinsaltz claims that philosophy had no influence even among those that were acquainted with it: “Some of the Mishnaic and Talmudic sages were acquainted with Greek and classical literature, but this knowledge had almost no impact on their way of thinking where Talmudic scholarship was concerned.”<sup>64</sup> Montefiore correctly concludes, “Rabbi, for good or for evil, knew no philosophy.”<sup>65</sup> Wherefore, to bridge rabbinic thought with Platonic philosophy in order to explain why the rabbis ascribed the image of God to the human soul, faces a wall of contradiction and poses problems for Green’s assertions.

The existence of the human soul is not a result of reading Platonic philosophy into the text; in fact, Platonism is not the dualism being taught in Scripture, and Platonism is not the reason why early students of Scripture, such as the rabbis, believed in a dualistic anthropology. Biblical anthropology assumes a mere dualism. Man can be held responsible, can be redeemed, can exist beyond death, can be resurrected, and can enjoy God forever, because his soul is stamped with God’s image.

### **Objection: The Spiritual Interpretation Cannot Be Rehabilitated without Recourse to Supplemental Theses**

Certain modern scholars, such as Oliver Crisp, argue that the spiritual interpretation of the image of God in man is mired in difficulties, and the only way to defend it is for proponents to seek supplemental theses and additional arguments.<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup>Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*, 280-81.

<sup>64</sup>Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, 99.

<sup>65</sup>Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, xlii.

<sup>66</sup>Crisp does not completely reject the spiritual interpretation of God’s image; he only claims that it cannot stand alone. It requires supplemental resources, such as Christological doctrine. Oliver Crisp, “A Christological Model of the Imago Dei,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 217-

most prominent of those supplemental theses is the Christological approach, which Crisp defends.<sup>67</sup> Whatever those supplemental theses may be, they are necessary, according to Crisp, because the traditional interpretation of God's image cannot stand on its own.

First, if the image of God is manifested in some internal quality, which traditionally has been human rationality, it is becoming increasingly difficult to "demarcate human beings from other sorts of created entity."<sup>68</sup> Crisp illustrates this difficulty by mentioning angels, simians and dolphins, as demonstrating some form of rationality in one way or another. He argues, "The divine image cannot be identified with rationality, for it is not all clear that that is a characteristic unique to human beings."<sup>69</sup> Scientists are finding evidence that fish may have subjective awareness of pain.<sup>70</sup> Mammal recreation may support the theory that they have ability for a range of emotional feeling.<sup>71</sup> There have been documented cases where animals were able to imagine hypothetical scenarios and their outcomes,<sup>72</sup> and by utilizing video games, monkeys displayed the ability to think about their own thinking.<sup>73</sup> All of these abilities were assumed to be exclusively human, and efforts to differentiate humans and animals

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229. See also, Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 66. I. Howard Marshall, "Being Human: Made in the Image of God," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 47-67. 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* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 617-28.

<sup>67</sup>Developing the Christological doctrine of the image of God is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, Crisp provides a thorough exposition on the view. Crisp, "A Christological Model of the Imago Dei," 217-29. Again, the purpose of this section is to outline Crisp's objections to why the spiritual interpretation cannot stand on its own.

<sup>68</sup>Crisp, "A Christological Model of the Imago Dei," 219.

<sup>69</sup>Crisp, "A Christological Model of the Imago Dei," 219.

<sup>70</sup>James Gorman, "Fishing for Clarity in the Waters of Consciousness," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2003.

<sup>71</sup>Jaak Panksepp, "Beyond a Joke: From Animal Laughter to Human Joy?" *Science*, no. 5718 (2005): 62.

<sup>72</sup>Elizabeth Pennisi, "Are Our Primate Cousins 'Conscious'?" *Science* 284, no. 5423 (June 1999): 2073-76.

<sup>73</sup>Nate Kornell, Lisa K. Son, and Herbert S. Terrace, "Transfer of Metacognitive Skills and Hint Seeking in Monkeys," *Psychological Science*, no. 1 (2007): 64.

along cognitive lines have become an embarrassing venture for some.

Second, problems arise when there are those that do not exemplify those internal qualities that have been identified as manifestations of God's image. This raises the question regarding how much "given power or capacity is necessary to exemplify the image."<sup>74</sup> The difficulty is not just on those that have suffered traumatic brain injuries or the mentally impaired, but also the human being still in the uterus or infants. Take for instance rationality; there are certainly "some humans that lack a necessary condition for being made in the divine image."<sup>75</sup> Most Christians would not exclude these souls from human personhood, but under which categories and to what extent can they manifest God's image? According to Crisp, those lines get blurred when one attempts to assign internal qualities to image bearing.

Overall, Crisp's objection to the spiritual interpretation of the image of God in man is that it cannot stand alone without some supplemental thesis to undergird it. The reasons postulated can be summarized in the difficulties of finding similitudes between the attributes of the transcendent God and that of mortal man, especially when such attributes are evident in animals and angels. The difficulties are aggravated when those identified essential attributes are missing from some human persons. Without help, such as the doctrine of Christology, the traditional spiritual interpretation is untenable.

### **Response to Supplemental Theses**

There is no doubt that the image of God in man requires renewing because of sin, and that spiritual renewal is conformity to Jesus Christ, the image of God, through redemption. Grenz correctly maintains:

The early Christian writers set forth a Christocentric understanding of the image of God that draws from, but also transformed, the perspective found within the pages

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<sup>74</sup>Crisp, "A Christological Model of the Imago Dei," 219.

<sup>75</sup>Crisp, "A Christological Model of the Imago Dei," 220.

of the OT in accordance with their belief that Jesus was the fulfillment of what God had intended from the beginning.<sup>76</sup>

However, as explained in the third chapter, God's image in man and Christ as the image of God are two related, but different things.<sup>77</sup> Contrary to Oliver Crisp, the Genesis account does not need a New Testament corollary for its meaning. Furthermore, Genesis 1:26-27 reminds us that man was made (created) in God's image, not that he simply functions as God's image. As Horst assesses, "That man, as opposed to all other created beings and things, as something set apart is emphasized by the very form in which the account of his creation is introduced."<sup>78</sup> That uniqueness is his likeness to God. As David Scaer notes, "The image of God simply means that the object bears a resemblance to God."<sup>79</sup> And because God is a spirit, man's likeness seems to be spiritual. Thus, the spiritual interpretation of God's image in man does not require supplemental theses in order to stand.

First, to answer Crisp, it was argued above and in the third chapter that similarities between human beings and animals are well attested in Scripture. Both humans and animals have God's *נְשֻׁמַת חַיִּים* *breath of life* (Gen 2:7; 6:17) and both are *הַיְהוּדָה* *souls that live* (Gen 1:24; 2:7). Although certain cognitive characteristics of living creatures may be observed in various animals, only man is a moral being commanded to obey God (Gen 2:16-17). Only man is held accountable for moral choices (Gen 3:9-13). Only man has an eternal destiny (Gen 2:9, 16; 3:22). And only man resembles God in having a free, rational, personal spirit, including conscience with God's law written upon the heart (Rom 2:14-16). Man, like all other creatures, glorifies God in his existence, but

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<sup>76</sup>Grenz, "Jesus as the Imago Dei," 618.

<sup>77</sup>See "The Image of God in the New Testament," in chap. 3.

<sup>78</sup>Friedrich Horst, "Face to Face: The Biblical Doctrine of the Image of God," *Interpretation* 4, no. 3 (July 1950): 259.

<sup>79</sup>David P. Scaer, "Man Made in the Image of God and Its Relationship to the First Promise," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1977): 21.

man alone can enjoy God forever. Furthermore, when a companion was sought for Adam, God determined to “make him” a helper that was fit for him (Gen 2:18). No animal fit that purpose (Gen 2:20). In fact, Adam described the woman made in the image of God as *מִבְּשָׂרִי מִבְּעָצָי* *flesh of my flesh* (Gen 2:23). As a curious note, no animal has ever documented its own findings regarding its cognitive abilities. No animal has ever presented its findings of its own reasoning skills to any human being. Rather, human beings, by their own devices and experiments, have determined certain cognitive similarities in other creatures. All this because only man has a rational, personal spirit imparted to him at creation, with uniquely personal characteristics that resemble God.

Second, how are human beings that fail to exemplify certain cognitive characteristics still in the image of God? The Scriptures testify to man’s inherent dignity precisely because he is made in God’s image, “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). Being created in the image and after the likeness of God sets Adam and all his descendants above all nature. According to Christ, one human soul is more valuable than the rest of nature (Matt 6:26; Mark 8:36). No specific quality is mentioned other than the fact that it is a human soul. In fact, God indicated his value of the soul by sending his son to redeem it. Kohler wrote, “that which distinguishes man from the animal as well as from the rest of creation . . . is his self-conscious personality, his ego, through which he feels himself akin with God.”<sup>80</sup> No human condition mitigates this truth, whether it is physical limitation, deformity, or cognitive capacity. Sin alone has a debilitating effect (Rom 1:21-25; 3:9-18; 5:12), but it can only damage the image of God, not remove it. Neither naked lunatics living in tombs nor paralytics on the side of the road are beyond the compassion of Christ (Matt 4:24; 17:15; Mark 5:1-13).

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<sup>80</sup>Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (Amazon Digital Services, 2011), Locs. 3281-3282, Kindle.

Finally, the spiritual interpretation as explained in the third chapter answers the broader question regarding man's ability to resemble a transcendent God in his inner qualities.<sup>81</sup> Admittedly, there are no single or group of human characteristics that can be definitively identified as the image of God, especially when God's immanence is unfathomable.<sup>82</sup> It is in the fact that man is a spiritual being, able to fellowship and enjoy his Creator that one can say that man is in God's image. David Meconi summarized it best:

In creating God has relinquished his claim to be "all," but has chosen now to share his being and life and attributes, becoming "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). This is a key passage in Christian anthropology: in creating, the God of Genesis longs to share his life with those of an ontologically distinct order, and in making those in his own image, God wants other persons to reflect him precisely while remaining "other" and distinct in their creatureliness.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, God is capable of making Himself known and providing redemption to the image bearer alone. And that is where the worth of humanity lies.

The spiritual interpretation of the image of God does not require a supplemental thesis. There are many implications that stem from humanity being created in the image of God, but none are necessary underpinnings for comprehending what God did on the sixth day of creation. Man was created in God's image, so that he can relate to his creator, and through the merits of the Son of God, glorify and enjoy him forever.

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<sup>81</sup>See "God's Transcendence as Foundational to the Spiritual Interpretation of the Image of God," in chap. 3.

<sup>82</sup>Scripture does identify knowledge, holiness and righteousness as some of the characteristics of being created in the image of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), but not in a way to say that these characteristics alone is what makes us the image of God.

<sup>83</sup>David Vincent Meconi, "The Dual-Functionality of the Imago Dei as Human Flourishing in the Church Fathers," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 204.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Although modern scholarship, particularly Old Testament scholarship, have argued for man's function through his physical body as the meaning of or forming an integral part of the image of God, the view that the image of God is found in the spiritual aspect<sup>1</sup> of the human being is more faithful to the biblical text. In this dissertation, Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-3, 9:6 and other relevant New Testament texts were analyzed in their historical-grammatical contexts to provide a proper theological understanding of the image and likeness of God. In chapter 1, descriptions of the methods of important personalities were provided to establish the history of interpretation. In chapter 2, selected issues of the physical and functional views of the image of God were analyzed to provide the data that supports the thesis and the reasons why I disagree with these modern conclusions. In chapter 3, a historical-grammatical reading of the relevant texts was provided to demonstrate the reasonableness of a spiritual interpretation of the image of God. In chapter 4, the counter claims to the thesis were examined and defenses to the findings of this study were provided.

The grammar and syntax of Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-3, 9:6 and other New Testament passages were considered and the passages favor a spiritual interpretation, as opposed to a physical or functional interpretation of the image of God. For example, in chapter 2, when *צֶלֶם* is juxtaposed with God's incorporeality, the image of God cannot include the human body. In chapter 3, an exegesis of Genesis 1:26 provided that *צֶלֶם* does not necessarily mean "statue," but the term means that man is created in the model of, or

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this dissertation, "spiritual aspect" has been defined as man's soul/spirit.

corresponding to God's image. Furthermore, *דְּמִיּוּת* provides interpretation to *צֶלֶם* and informs the reader that God's image is those things in man that makes him like God. Also, Moses's seemingly strategic use of the *כ* and *ב* prepositions, and the construction of the purpose-clause point to an ontological explanation of God's image; the image of God is an aspect of human nature, particularly the spiritual aspect of human nature. In New Testament terms, sin has damaged the image of God, but even if the mind is sinful, it is still human. It is the renewing of God's image through the Gospel that emphasizes image bearing as something to do with the spiritual aspect of man; as something that is found in man's being, not his role.

The conclusions of this dissertation do not devalue the body in any way, nor does it relegate it to uselessness or as obsolete. Rather, as explained in chapters 2 and 3, because man's spirit bears God's image, man's body becomes a type of temple housing God's image. Thus, the human body is an instrument of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13) that should be presented to God as a living and holy sacrifice (Rom 12:1). Nevertheless, it is the image of God in man, and not the body, that makes man human. Horst opined, "The man who no longer lives face to face with God, who is no longer called by him to existence as a person . . . that man sinks into subhumanity and inhumanity."<sup>2</sup> The image of God is what gives man identity and makes him human.

The dissertation provided an opportunity to examine the modern appeal to ANE texts as a basis for alternate views of God's image in man and why such an approach should be abandoned at the most, or is suspect at the very least. For example, in chapter 2, von Rad appeals to Mesopotamian cultic legends for understanding the divine image narrative, while functional interpreters, such as D. A. Clines, appeal to ANE writers and their audiences for the meaning of the term "image." However, as the

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<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Horst, "Face to Face: The Biblical Doctrine of the Image of God," *Interpretation* 4, no. 3 (July 1950): 267.

research of John Currid and John Oswalt demonstrates, students of the Scriptures would do well to oppose a departure from the position that holds to the sufficiency of Scripture, as well as to Scripture's singular and unique worldview. It was observed that dependencies on extra-biblical texts stemmed from the proliferation of Documentary Theory within modern scholarship. Document distinctions have led some to view the Genesis 1 account differently and from a different source than Genesis 2, creating artificial parameters. The dissertation assumes Mosaic authorship and defends the unity of Genesis 1 and 2.

The purpose of the dissertation was to defend the spiritual interpretation of the image of God and urge caution on those that wish to dismiss it as archaic. For example, in chapter 1 it was demonstrated that the spiritual interpretation has been the dominant view among Christian and Jewish scholars until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as outlined in chapter 4, scholars still object to the traditional view because some do not believe man to be a dual being composed of a physical and spiritual aspect. Others ascribe any distinction of body and soul as Platonic influence. And still others require supplemental theses, such as a Christological approach, for the spiritual interpretation to withstand scrutiny. But even in the midst of detractors, the spiritual interpretation is supported by the grammar and theology of Genesis 1 and 2. For example, in chapter 3, it was demonstrated through exegesis and theology that man was created to resemble the invisible God, therefore the manner in which man images God is found in his spiritual aspect; a spiritual interpretation of God's image assumes a dualistic anthropology that is well attested in Scripture. Furthermore, in chapter 4, the allegation of Platonism was analyzed, and although an area for further study, particularly the extent of Platonism on the teachings of the church fathers, the analysis provided that existence of the human soul is not a result of reading Platonic philosophy into the text. Biblical anthropology assumes a mere dualism, which was believed by the rabbis, who were not influenced by Greek philosophy. The preponderance of the evidence presented cautions the modern scholar

and theologian from dismissing the spiritual interpretation or traditional view long held by the rabbis, the church fathers and the reformers.

The principal argument in defense of a spiritual interpretation is that a transcendent, infinite God created finite man in his image and according to his likeness so that man can relate to him, and through his Son, have fellowship with him, glorify him and enjoy him forever. Yet salvation history as underpinning the meaning of the image of God is a conclusion not shared by modern scholars, thus they search for alternatives. For example, in chapter 2, functionalists advanced a false dichotomy for the problems of juxtaposing God's immanence with man's finiteness. In chapter 4, objections were raised concerning the particular inner abilities that constitute the image of God, and the problems that may rise when such abilities are missing from a human person. However, such objections are unnecessary because the alleged dichotomy between God's immanence and man's finiteness does not exist. For example, in chapter 3, it was argued that Scripture provides a high view of humanity, because it provides a unique and transcendent view of God, as well as the plan of redemption that is possible for image-bearers alone. As Reno said:

Creation in the image of God seals us as those destined for fellowship with God. The image of God is stamped into our human nature, which is precisely why we experience our desires and capacities as fit for more than animal survival.<sup>3</sup>

So, the predominant view of popular culture may be that man is a material being like all other animals. But perhaps image-language appears in the very first page of God's Word so it may be understood that Adam and Eve, and all of humanity to follow, were created to relate and to be redeemed by an infinite, invisible God.

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<sup>3</sup>Russell R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), loc. 966-67, Kindle.

APPENDIX  
OLD TESTAMENT עֲשָׂה PASSAGES

Adherents to the functional interpretation of the image of God appeal to the *ב* of *essence* as the proper reading of בְּצַלְמִנוּ, and thus it is rendered “as the image of God.”<sup>1</sup> The problem with this view is that there does not appear to be any Old Testament examples of similar עֲשָׂה phrases where the preposition is a *ב* of *essence*, in fact, all are read in its normal reading of “in, by, among.” The following are examples of similar Old Testament עֲשָׂה passages that demonstrate that none are joined to a *ב* of *essence*.

**Genesis 6:6a**

וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ

“And the Lord repented *that he made man in the earth.*”

**Genesis 29:26a**

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא־יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּמִקוֹמִנוּ

“And Laban said, ‘It is not *done so in our place,*’”

**Exodus 36:11b-12a**

כֵּן עָשָׂה בְשֵׁפֶת הַיְרִיעָה הַקִּיצוֹנָה בְּמַחְבְּרַת הַשְּׁנִיָּת:  
חֲמִשִּׁים לְלֵאֵת עֲשָׂה בְּיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת וְחֲמִשִּׁים לְלֵאֵת עֲשָׂה  
בְּקִצָּה הַיְרִיעָה אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחְבְּרַת הַשְּׁנִיָּת

“So *he made in the edge* of the outmost curtain, in the joining of the second; fifty loops *he made in the one curtain*, and fifty loops *he made in the end* of the curtain which is in the joining of the second,”

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<sup>1</sup>See chap. 2, n. 181.

**Leviticus 7:9a**

וְכָל־מִנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תֵּאֲפֶה בַתְּנוּר וְכָל־נֶעֱשָׂה בַמִּרְקָשׁ וְעַל־מִחְבֵּת

“And all offering which is baked in an oven, and all *made in the cooking pan*, and on a griddle,”

**Numbers 28:6a**

עֹלֹת תָּמִיד הַעֲשִׂיהָ בְּהַר סִינַי

“A continual burnt-offering *was made in mount Sinai*,”

**Judges 20:9**

וְעַתָּה זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה לְגִבְעָה עָלֶיהָ בְּגֹרֶל

“And now, this is the thing which *we will do* to Gibeah, against it *by lot!*”

**1 Kings 9:26a**

וְאֲנִי עָשִׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בְּעֶצְיוֹן־גִּבְרָ

“And a fleet *made* king Solomon *in Ezion-Geber*,”

**Psalms 111:8**

סְמוּכִים לְעַד לְעוֹלָם עֲשׂוּיִם בְּאֵמֶת וַיֵּשֶׁר

“They are established forever and ever. *They are made in truth and uprightness.*”

**Psalms 139:15a**

לֹא־נִכְחַד עֲצָמַי מִמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָי בְּסֵתֶר

“My frame was not hidden from you, when *I was made in secret*,”

**Song of Songs 8:8b**

מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לְאַחֲתָנוּ בַיּוֹם שִׁידְבַר־בָּהּ

“What *will we do* for our sister, *in the day* that it is told of her?”

## 2 Chronicles 35:18a

וְלֹא־נִעְשָׂה פֶסַח כְּמִהוּ בְיִשְׂרָאֵל

“And no Passover was *made* like it *in Israel*”

Each of the previous passages seems to indicate that there exists no example of an עָשָׂה clause in which the כ prepositional clause that follows is rendered as anything other than “in, by or among.” The textual evidence makes arguing for a כ *of essence* in Genesis 1:26 problematic.

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ABSTRACT

DEFENSE OF THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION  
OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

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Mankind's scientific, technological, artistic, and intellectual capacities are complemented by an impressive list of physical achievements; nevertheless, it is the remarkable inner abilities that testify to the human being as God's crowning creation. The single most distinctive aspect of Adam's creation is that he was created in the image of God and his nature bears that image. But what exactly is the image of God in man? The image of God consists of the spiritual part of a human that reflects the character of God and is the only firm basis for advocating human dignity and the gracious redemption of sinners. Although modern scholarship, particularly Old Testament scholarship, have argued for man's function through his physical body as the meaning of or forming an integral part of the image of God, the view that God's image is found in the spiritual aspect of the human being is more faithful to the biblical text. This dissertation argues for the spiritual interpretation of God's image by providing a historical-grammatical reading of the relevant texts and a proper theological understanding of the image and likeness of God.

The first chapter provides the history of interpretation by describing the important personalities and their methods, and explaining the evolution of the topic that has led to the modern departures from the traditional view. The second chapter discusses the data that supports the thesis by analyzing selected issues in current scholarship that leads to a physical and functional view of the image of God and why I

disagree with their conclusions. The third chapter provides a historical-grammatical reading of selected texts that demonstrate the reasonableness of a spiritual interpretation of the image of God, and why it should be defended. The fourth chapter examines the counter claims to the thesis and presents a defense to the findings of this study. The fifth chapter briefly summarizes the most important findings and provides a conclusion.

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