

The Intelligent Design of Humans: The Meaning of the *Imago Dei* for Theological Anthropology

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The Challenge of Defining the *Imago Dei*

Just what is the image of God that God created in human persons? To what extent was the image of God damaged or destroyed in the Fall? How may the image of God be recognized in human beings today? In this paper I will attempt to provide answers to these questions from biblical, theological, and philosophical perspectives.

At least four challenges confound any attempt to write a definition of the *imago Dei* in reference to human personhood. I shall label these the biblical challenge, the uniqueness challenge, the functional challenge, and the bioethical challenge.

The *biblical challenge* arises from the fact that nowhere in Scripture is the image of God in humans defined in an unambiguous way. Furthermore, the descriptions of the image of God within Scripture vary at points, particularly between the Old Testament and New Testament portrayals of the image of God. Old Testament scholars are virtually unanimous in understanding the image of God in Old Testament texts to refer to the cultural mandate, that is, for humans to exercise dominion over Nature. The New Testament texts, however, refer to two divergent understandings of the image of God—as an essential basis created by God in all humans, and as Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God toward which humans strive through sanctification. In fact, Scripture provides no clear, consistent, comprehensive definition of the image of God.

The *uniqueness challenge* consists in stipulating precisely what mark, capacity, trait, characteristic, or function separates human persons from other members of the animal kingdom and from forms of artificial intelligence. Philosophers and theologians through the ages have sought to distance human beings from other animals species, accentuating characteristics or capacities that were uniquely human. Human persons have been variously described as rational animals, laughing animals, cooking animals, tool-making animals, linguistic animals, among other labels. The effort to draw a clear line of separation between humans and animals has been frustrated as numerous examples have arisen of instances of animals that have exemplified primitive abilities that previously were thought to have been unique to humans. This similarity, in turn, has spurred a second quest for human uniqueness—i.e., to find some unique capacity that is not reflected in animals and cannot be duplicated by any form of artificial intelligence.

The *functional challenge* relates to the limitations of defining personhood according to a particular set of capacities, abilities, or functions. The irony of raising the bar high for a definition of the image of God in separating humans from animals and artificial intelligence is that it can inadvertently disqualify large groups that we would normally take to be human persons. If rationality and relational skills are defined as irreducible marks of humanness, for example, fetuses, Alzheimer's patients, and persons with profound mental illness may not measure up to the mark.

The *bioethical challenge* is to achieve a definition of the image of God in human persons that is observable—that is, one that could be utilized in making decisions regarding bioethics. It is one thing to say that human persons bear the image of God; it is another thing to stipulate how one might recognize this *imago Dei* when one sees it. And yet such an empirical definition is essential to determine ethical issues such as the beginning of human personhood (abortion) and the end of personhood (euthanasia). New procedures in addressing infertility, such as *in vitro* fertilization, the GIFT procedure, and cloning raise questions about the transmission of the image of God. Biomedical research has raised issues about how partial replacement of body parts through organ transplants and stem cell research impact personhood. The progress of science in genetics has opened up a whole spectrum of interconnected issues such as genetic engineering, cloning, and chimeras. In order to address these bioethical issues, it is not enough to insist that human persons bear the mark of the *imago Dei* if there is no observable capacity or function by which such a mark could be discerned.

In attempting to address these challenges, the biblical material will be summarized, as well as theological interpretations arising from the text of Scripture. Based on these theological and biblical perspectives, I will propose a definition which attempts to avoid these biblical, uniqueness, functional, and bioethical challenges.

Biblical and Theological Approaches to Defining the *Imago Dei*

The biblical material on the image of God is ambiguous, although it does provide ideas about the identity of the image of God. The Hebrew words *tselem* ("image") and *demuth* ("likeness") are the words used in the Old Testament to describe the image and likeness of God. The etymology of *tselem* is ambiguous; but if it comes from an Arabic root word meaning "to cut," it could suggest the idea of "a cutting" or, more popularly, "a chip off the old block." The etymology of *demuth* is more straightforward, meaning "resemblance" or "likeness."¹ Although some follow Irenaeus in drawing a distinction between "image" and "likeness," the majority view is that these terms are used synonymously as an expression of the device of synonymous

¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, 52 vols., ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Waco: Word, 1987), 1:29.

parallelism in Hebrew poetry.² In the Septuagint and the New Testament, the word “image” is rendered by the Greek word *eikon*, and “likeness” with *homoiosis*.³

Based on the affirmations in Gen. 1:26-28 and Ps. 8:5-8, Old Testament scholars are nearly unanimous in interpreting the image of God to be expressed in human dominion over Nature. Just as human kings placed their images or statues around their kingdoms to remind their subjects of the king’s dominion, God has made human His vice-regents or ambassadors to represent Him on earth. In this “royal interpretation” of the image of God, humans are appointed and authorized by God to serve as His visible agents or representatives on earth, ruling and administering the created world and its inhabitants.⁴

The New Testament, however, presents two very different perspectives on the image of God. N. W. Porteous describes the New Testament perspective on the image of God as a “sea change” from the Old Testament perspective.⁵ Several of these New Testament texts echo the creation language of Genesis 1 in affirming that humans are or have the image of God created within their essence (1 Cor. 11:7, Jas. 3:9). However, other New Testament texts portray the image of God as being represented perfectly in Jesus Christ, who is the target for humans to work toward to achieve full and complete humanity (2 Cor. 3:13, Rom. 8:29, Col. 3:10). In these texts, the image of God must be “transformed” or “renewed” to come into alignment with Christ, the perfect image of God.⁶ Porteous underscores (and possibly overstates) this distinction between the Old and New Testament perspectives on the image of God by asserting that apart from two

²Ibid., 1:29-32; James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:393; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. in 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 500-501.

³Garrett, 1:393-394.

⁴J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 25-29. Gerhard von Rad is usually associated with this interpretation. See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 60 ff.; and *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “*eikon*,” by Gerhard von Rad, et al., ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:381-397.

⁵*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Image of God,” by N. W. Porteous, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:682.

⁶For more commentary on these texts, see Garrett, 1:392-394; and Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1986), 11-32.

exceptions, the image of God in the New Testament “does not belong to man. It is identified with Christ, image now being the perfect reflection of the prototype.”⁷

So, what can be discerned from the scriptural content that addresses the image of God? While the biblical meaning of the image of God must be foundational to any proper understanding of the *imago Dei*, this diversity of possible interpretations within Scripture does not provide a definitive understanding of the precise meaning of the image of God. As Carl F. H. Henry puts it, “The Bible does not define for us the precise content of the original *imago*.”⁸ G. C. Berkouwer affirms that Genesis 1 provides us “with no explanation given as to exactly what this likeness consists of or implies.”⁹ Or, as Charles Lee Feinberg expresses or perhaps overstates this biblical dilemma, “After all, what is the image of God? The biblical data furnish no systematic theory of the subject, no clue as to what is implied.”¹⁰ However, this is not to say that we are left as agnostics about the biblical meaning of the image of God. As Carl F. H. Henry words it, the presence of diverse meanings of the *imago* suggested in Scripture provide “no ground for viewing the *imago* as having only a vague and indefinite content before the Fall.”¹¹ The hermeneutical and theological task is to weave these scriptural images into a consistent and coherent whole.¹² Millard Erickson describes the task of developing a clear understanding of the *imago Dei* in this way: “The existence of a wide diversity of interpretations is an indication that there are no direct statements in Scripture to resolve the issue. Our conclusions, then, must

⁷Porteous, 1:682.

⁸Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols., *God Who Speaks and Shows*, vol. 2. (Waco: Word, 1976), 2:125.

⁹G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 69.

¹⁰Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Image of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129, no. 515 (July-September 1972), 238.

¹¹Henry, 2:125. While professing to be a critical realist in interpretation, Middleton appears to concede too much to postmodernity at this point when he affirms, “But the dialogical character of interpretation further suggests that the text does not have one fixed, legitimate true meaning, waiting passively to be discovered. Indeed, the meaning of a text does not strictly speaking reside within the text at all, but is always a product of an encounter between the text and an interpreter or community of interpreters.” Middleton, 38.

¹²Werner Lemke, a renowned Old Testament scholar, has urged his fellow biblical studies specialists “to become more conversant with theological perspectives and be willing to move beyond merely antiquarian concerns” in order to address issues such as the *imago Dei*. See Werner E. Lemke, “Theology (Old Testament),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:455.

necessarily be reasonable inferences drawn from what little the Bible does have to say on the subject.”¹³

Biblical scholars and theologians have developed construals of the image of God based upon just such inferences from Scripture as Erickson described. Erickson categorizes theological definitions of the image of God in three categories—substantive, functional, and relational definitions.¹⁴ *Substantialist* definitions, which are the most dominant in Christian theology, define the image of God as some essential characteristic or quality at the essence of human existence which reflects the divine nature in some way. In this view, the image of God is what humans *are*, because God created these innate or inherent characteristics within humankind. Erickson himself proposes a substantive or structural view in which the image of God is reflected in several composite elements. Other recent advocates of this position include J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, who identify their view as “substance dualism.” They define the image of God/personhood in substantialist terms (following Boethius) as “immaterial substances with a rational nature.”¹⁵ *Functionalist* definitions understand the image of God to be reflected in humankind fulfilling the cultural mandate of Gen. 1:26-28 and Ps. 8:5-6 to exercise dominion over all the created world. In this view, then, the image of God is something that humans *do* or *have*. Humans are authorized by God to serve as His visible representatives on earth. Calvinists in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper and/or Christian Theonomists and Christian Reconstructionists are among the advocates of this position.¹⁶ *Relationalist* definitions were made popular by neo-orthodox theologians such as Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. They define the image of God not by any structural quality or essence that humans are or possess, but precisely as humans being in relationship with God and other persons. Barth particularly emphasizes the image of God as it was expressed in the male-female relationship. It is in the I-Thou relationship with God and others, and in mirroring the perfect image of God as expressed in Jesus Christ, that we attain our full humanity. Even in rebellion against God, as humans we still reflect the image of God because we are accountable and answerable to God.

Although the functionalist and relationalist perspectives on the *imago Dei* are at least partially correct and faithful to the biblical witness, these approaches are not comprehensive enough to account adequately for all the biblical content relevant to the image of God. In particular, *functionalist* definitions have the following weaknesses:

¹³Erickson, 512-513.

¹⁴Ibid., 498-512.

¹⁵J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 157.

¹⁶Middleton, 34-35.

- Function presupposes substance. The ability to function as God’s vice-regents presupposes that God has created humans with inalienable traits in our essence or constitution which enable us to function in this way. Therefore, an essentialist definition of the image of God is more foundational than the cultural mandate.
- The royal mandate is a consequence of the image of God, not the *imago Dei* itself. The image of God is described in Gen. 1:26-27 before the statement of the royal mandate. Therefore, it would appear that the royal mandate flows from humans being created in the image of God.
- The connection of Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 is possible, but not necessary. Since Psalm 8 does not utilize the terms “image” or “likeness,” the direct dependence on Genesis 1 is speculative.

Relationalist definitions of the image of God have another set of difficulties:

- Defining the image of God by relationships would seem to limit its universality. It is not clear how those who have no relationship with God (i.e., those in complete rebellion against God or ignorant of God) could reflect His image. This appears inconsistent with the biblical witness that all persons have the image of God innately within them.
- Relationship requires an ontological foundation. Without some essential content in two beings, there can be no relationship. A relationship must be a relationship between two substantial entities. The relationalist interpretations do not give adequate attention to this ontological foundation for relationships.

Essentialist definitions of the image of God would appear to avoid these objections. In addition, it would seem that a well-crafted essentialist definition of the image of God can avoid the biblical, uniqueness, and bioethical challenges previously described. Essentialist definitions address the *biblical challenge* by focusing on the scriptural content which describes the image of God as created within all humankind. In order to be faithful to Scripture, a distinction must be made between the *imago Dei* as it was created by God; the image of God as it was damaged through the Fall; the image of God as a target for Christian sanctification; and the image of God as perfection, exemplified in Jesus Christ. Anthony Hoekema describes these four moments or aspects of the image of God in Scripture as the *original image* (as created by God), the *perverted image* (as impacted by the Fall), the *renewed image* (as Christians strive to become more Christlike in the process of sanctification), and the *perfected image* (as Christians in glorification are aligned completely with the perfect image of God, Jesus Christ). Essentialist definitions refer primarily to the original image of God, which remains to some extent throughout all four of these stages.

Well-crafted essentialist definitions avoid the *uniqueness challenge* in that the image of God itself is precisely what separates humans from other animals and the rest of creation. The

image of God is uniquely given to human beings, unlike anything else in the animal kingdom.¹⁷ While the other animals were created “after their own kind” (Gen. 1:21, 24-25), man and woman were created distinctively “in His own image” (Gen. 1:26-28). Humans are created a little lower than Elohim, crowned with glory and honor, and given dominion over all other creatures (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-6).

Regarding the *functionalist challenge*, essentialist definitions regard the image of God as being created by God in all human persons. All human persons (even unborn fetuses and mentally challenged adults) have these aspects within their essence, whether they are able to exercise them or not. A distinction must be made, therefore, between the *foundational* qualities created by God within our essence or constitution (primary qualities) and the *exercise* of these qualities in human existence (applied, exercised, secondary qualities).¹⁸ For example, the aptitude or characteristic of communication is innate within all humans, but this is separable from learning a particular language or being unable to speak at all because of some physical defect or limitation. All human persons in their essence are communicating beings, but the way that individual human beings express this innate ability varies from person to person. One person may learn French, another may learn German, and still another learn both languages. The foundational ability to communicate, however, is in all human beings. Essentialist definitions thus avoid the functionalist challenge by identifying the image of God with the essential, foundational qualities at the center of our being, rather than the exercise of particular functions.

An essentialist definition is also helpful in addressing the *bioethical challenge*. If being in the image of God is a fundamental aspect of human personhood, then all human beings have moral standing—unborn fetuses, the mentally ill, or a comatose patient. All of these humans have the image of God woven into the essence of their being, and therefore deserve to be treated as such. The sanctity of human life extends not just to healthy adults, but to all who bear the image of God. Essentialist definitions address the bioethical challenge adequately by providing empirically observable aspects of personhood which reflect the image of God, and extending moral standing to all human beings.¹⁹

¹⁷Hoekema, 85.

¹⁸Moreland and Rae make this same distinction, describing what I am calling foundational, essential, or primary qualities as “higher-order capacities, and what I am calling expressed or secondary qualities as “lower-order qualities.” Moreland and Rae, 334-336.

¹⁹For a more detailed defense of this position and more specific application to specific bioethical issues, see Moreland and Rae, 231-345.

An Essentialist Definition of the Created *Imago Dei*

It would seem, then, that an adequate essentialist or substantialist definition seems to avoid the major challenges confronting a definition of the image of God. I shall propose an essentialist definition that refers to the *imago Dei* as it was created by God. This created essence remains in humankind universally in all times, places, genders, and races, even if it is marred to some degree through the Fall. Nevertheless, at least some vestige of the image of God is retained by all persons, and indeed it is at the essence of the being of every human person, even after the Fall.

I propose the following description of the image of God:

The image of God is the reflection/likeness/similarity of God's essence which He created in human beings, and is reflected most noticeably in the personal, spiritual, relational, rational, volitional, moral, responsible, and emotional aspects of human life. This definition does not suggest that humans are of the same substance (*homoousia*) with God—this, of course, is the case only for Jesus and the Holy Spirit—but merely that humans bear a likeness (*homoiosis*) to God. However, it is to say that humans do mirror some of the aspects of God's nature, and indeed that God created these aspects within humans. Humans are a reflection or copy of the divine image, but humans are obviously not divine.

The image of God is more than the sum of the parts of any list of composite aspects which make up the image of God, but it is through these aspects that the *imago Dei* is most clearly seen.²⁰ The list of eight characteristics in this definition is not intended to be exhaustive, but these are at least some of the primary characteristics which reflect the image of God in humankind.

- *A Personal Being* – God is personal in each of the three Persons in the Trinity, and this personal nature is reflected in human persons as well. Human beings are selves with individual personhood. Each person has a personal center of identity often associated with the

²⁰Garrett describes several “composite” definitions of the image of God, which describe the image of God as the sum a cluster of various capacities such as those listed in my definition. These composite definitions were proposed by John L. Dagg, Charles Hodge, John Miley, A. H. Strong, E. Y. Mullins, H. C. Thiessen, Anthony Hoekema, and Millard Erickson (Garrett, 1:400-402). While my definition has much in common with these composite definitions, I would distinguish my view from these by its stronger emphasis on the image of God as being a fundamental, essential character created by God which is reflected in these various aspects, but it is more than the sum of these various capacities. This is consistent with a view of human personhood as a psychosomatic unity. See Moreland and Rae, 206.

soul or mind.²¹ Like a boat that is replaced one plank at a time, the cells of the body are replaced day by day through the process of mitosis, effectively creating an entirely new body in about each 15 years. However, the soul is that center of personal identity which remains constant throughout all the outer changes in the body.²² Each individual person is a self with a particular personality. Personhood is the basis of consciousness, personal memory, self-consciousness, self-directedness, self-transcendence, purpose, and intentionality. One of the clearest reflections of the image of God in humankind is our ability to form intentions and make decisions as free agents which initiate changes in the created world.²³

- *A Spiritual Being* – God is Spirit (John 4:24), and He created a spirit within each human being so that we can worship Him in spirit and in truth. Each human being has an innate need for God, an empty vacuum which only God can fill.
- *A Relational Being* – In the *classicus locus* for the creation of the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), it is notable that both God (“Let *us* create . . .”) and humans (“man and woman . . .”) are described as being in relationship. God is relational, and this is an inbred component of human existence as well. Humans are social beings. We are not just capable of relating; we need relationships. We find fulfillment only when we are properly related to God and to other humans, the tasks which Jesus described as the first and second greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36-40; c.f. Deut. 6:5).
- *A Rational/Creative Being* – God is omniscient and wise (Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25). Humans, of course, can never approach the completeness of divine knowledge. However, God created us with minds and with reason. When we exercise rationality and creativity, we are reflecting the nature of God. Humans are, after all, *homo sapiens* – thinking beings. Rationality is probably mentioned most consistently through Christian history as the one trait that exemplifies the image of God in persons, perhaps largely because of the high place that

²¹One reason that I believe in the creationist account (or, more accurately, a procreationist account) of the creation of the soul rather than a traducian account is that it accounts more adequately for the origin of the image of God within mankind. However, that is an argument for another day.

²²For more on personal identity, see Steve Lemke, “Personal Identity and the Afterlife,” presented at the Baptist Association of Philosophy Teachers biennial meeting at Samford University in 1997; available online at <http://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/ItoR/LemkeSW/Personal/afterlife.html>

²³I affirm agent causation, the view that persons are intentional agents who have the ability to rise above the flow of deterministic causation and initiate actions themselves. See Steve Lemke, “Agent Causation, or How to Be a Soft Libertarian,” presented at the March 2005 Southwest regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, available online at <http://nobts.edu/Faculty/ItoR/LemkeSW/Personal/libertarian%20agent%20causation.pdf>.

reason held in the Greek philosophical worldview of the time. However, although this is clearly one of the traits of God's nature that are reflected in human nature, it is not the only defining characteristic of either God's nature or human nature.

- *A Volitional/Free Being* – God is free and sovereign, and He creates humans with freewill. Freedom is one of God's most precious but dangerous gifts to humankind. By creating humans like Himself (rather than as mere animals or puppets), He gave humans the possibility of rebelling against Him. I affirm a perspective of action theory which I describe as soft libertarianism.²⁴ Libertarian freedom is propaedeutic to any robust view of moral responsibility and accountability.
- *A Moral Being* – God is holy, and He created humans to be holy (Matt 5:48; Rev. 4:8). God created a conscience within all humans (Rom. 2:14-15). Conscience can be seared or ignored, but it is part of the innate hardware of every human person. Morality presupposes volition, because without a moral will, one cannot have moral accountability.²⁵ Good deeds are not praiseworthy if they are not freely chosen, and evil deeds are not justly punishable if they are not freely chosen.
- *A Responsible Being* – God has charged humans with dominion over the world He created (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-6). This may be a consequence of the image of God rather than the essence of human existence, but being God's representative or steward requires a foundational essence which is capable of managing all aspects of creation. God has given persons the ability to represent Him and exercise dominion over all the earth.
- *An Emotional Being* – God is love, and He created humans with the capacity to love (1 John 4:7-20). Although some theologians affirm a doctrine of impassibility, the majority of Christian theologians understand the scriptural language that speaks of God as caring and loving toward persons but angry toward sin. Although the Greek philosophical worldview led many early Christian theologians to diminish or deny the role of emotion, the Bible actually portrays emotion when used correctly as a positive reflection of the image of God.

²⁴Lemke, "Agent Causation, or How to Be a Soft Libertarian."

²⁵*Akrasia*, or moral weakness, is the fulcrum of this issue. For more on this, see Steve Lemke, "Teaching Moral Virtue: How Can We Overcome Moral Weakness?" presented at the College Theology Society on the campus of Loyola University of New Orleans in 1999; available online at <http://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/ItoR/LemkeSW/Personal/akrasiacts.html>.

The *Imago Dei* after the Fall

If the proposed definition of the originally created image of God were found to be faithful to Scripture, what remains of the image of God after the Fall? Was it obliterated, marred, or undamaged as a result of the Fall? What applications might be drawn from Hoekema's categories of the perverted image, the renewed image, and the perfected image? Several Scripture verses suggest that the image of God (at least the essentialist or foundational aspect of the image of God) was not destroyed through the Fall. In Gen. 9:6, human life is portrayed as sacred, underscored by capital punishment for murderers. The basis for this respect for human life is that "God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6). A similar line of argument is presented in reference to treating other persons with respect in Jas. 3:9. The basis for not speaking negatively about other people is that humans are "made in the likeness of God" (Jas. 3:9). The rationale of the argument is the hypocrisy of praising God with our speech and yet cursing other humans who are made in God's likeness. A third reference to a post-Fall intact image of God is found in the rather unusual wording of 1 Cor. 11:7. In addressing proper attire and appearance for men and women, the Apostle Paul asserts that while women should wear a head covering, a man should not cover his head, since "he is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7). While determining the specific ethical teaching intended by this account raises a number of hermeneutical issues, it is clear that even after the Fall, at least male humans continued to reflect the image of God (and, presumably, in women as well through men).²⁶

Clearly, the originally created image of God remains intact to some degree even after the Fall. Being a sinner does not necessitate that humans have lost the image of God; in fact, being able to sin presupposes the image of God. Animals and other created things are not morally accountable as are humans. So being a sinner and sinning are possible precisely only if we remain to some degree in the image of God.²⁷

The Fall thus damaged but did not destroy the image of God—causing a fall from created moral righteousness, turning away from our spiritual nature, blurring human rationality by perverted perspectives, breaking our relationship with God, turning our will toward sin, and utilizing creativity for evil purposes. But the image remains intact with a moral conscience, a spiritual capacity, limited rationality, the possibility of restored relation to God, a will that can be turned back toward God, and the opportunity to utilize creativity to enhance God's kingdom.²⁸

Each of the essentialist elements referred to as aspects of the image of God in humankind are damaged to some degree through the Fall, at least in their utilization or function. After the Fall, *personhood* becomes self-centered and selfish, as sin impacts the human agent. The human

²⁶For further discussion, see Hoekema, 16-20.

²⁷Ibid., 85.

²⁸Ibid., 17, 32, 66, 83-85.

spirit is stillborn in sin without the vitalizing power of redemption. Human *relationships* are damaged significantly by the Fall, as exemplified so perfectly by Adam and Eve. First the relationship with God is broken, then interpersonal problems begin. Human *rationality* is damaged in the Fall—not so much that we are incapable of great intellectual achievements, but that our minds are hindered by our sinful wills. Particularly as our attention turns to moral and spiritual issues, the aberration of sin increases (Brunner’s law of the closeness of relation). The great potential of human creativity is often turned to achieve great evil. After the Fall, human *volition* becomes willful and selfish. Obviously, human *morality* is greatly damaged because of the Fall. The human *responsibility* to exercise dominion over the created world, as assigned by God, becomes selfish exploitation of resources after the Fall. Pollution, strip mining, nuclear destruction reflect destruction rather than dominion. Under the impact of the Fall, human *emotions* become selfish and self-centered.²⁹

The impact of the Fall is catastrophic, impacting every living being. Animals and infants suffer the effects of living in a fallen world even though they have not sinned personally. However, sin itself is something we do which is grounded in who we are. It might be said that the relation of sin to the sinner is a kind of hermeneutical spiral between who we are and what we do. What we do is grounded in who we are, and who we are is defined in large measure by what we do. In our fallen condition, the image of God is mirrored opaquely but not clearly.

What, then, can be done to restore the image of God in fallen mankind? Sin is a kind of madness, and it is through salvation that we come back to what we were originally created to be. Like the prodigal son, when we recognize our sin and turn back toward God, we come to ourselves (Luke 15:17). Our minds and our inner personhood are renewed by the grace of God (Rom. 7:22, 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16, 4:23; Col. 3:10). Through the process of justification persons become right with God juridically; and through the process of sanctification persons renew and exercise the image of God rightly by aligning themselves with Christ, the perfect image of God. Through sanctification, we approach the fullness of God’s intention for us as persons. In the final stage of salvation, glorification, God will change in us what we cannot change for ourselves (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), the cycle of redemption will be completed, and we shall finally be like Him who is the perfect image of God (1 John 3:2).

²⁹Pascal voiced so well the immense gap between human potential and human actuality. As he wrote in one of his *Pensées*, “What a figment of imagination human beings are! What a novelty, what monsters! Chaotic, contradictory, prodigious, judging everything, mindless worm of the earth, storehouse of truth, cesspool of uncertainty and error, glory and reject of the universe.” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi, ed. Anthony Levi, World Classics series (New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1995), *Pensée* 164, p. 41.