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FINDING AN ETHIC OF THE *IMAGO DEI* THROUGH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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PAUL J. MORRISON

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THE CHIEF BEGINNING OF MAN:
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“What is the chief end of man?”² It has nearly been four centuries since that profound question was asked, answered, and recorded in Westminster’s Shorter Catechism. For centuries, it has been a guiding interrogation of the purposes and desires of countless believers across the globe. It is a sound question; but there is another which has not been asked:³ “What is the chief beginning of man?” Yet, the chief beginning of man may well offer a deeper interrogation of mankind’s purpose and desire. The answer to this question may even hold resolution for the disparate, and often discouraging, frameworks of Christian ethics. This paper argues that the *Imago Dei* offers a unifying created function and ethic of the people of God. This functional Image of God, over against purely structural or relational conceptions, offers the fullness of purpose in the heart and life of humanity and the church.

This argument develops in two parts. First, it will trace the Image’s place through a biblical theology of Scripture to demonstrate it as a unifying ethic of the people of God in all times and places. In the Old Testament, this Image is patterned in man and Israel: formed,

¹ Paul J. Morrison is Vice-President of Academic Affairs and Provost at Emmaus Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Ohio, as well as Theologian in Residence at City Church in Cleveland Heights.

² Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 1.

³ As a deeply scientific demonstration, if you were to Google the two questions, the search results for “What is the chief end of man?” would yield more than 83,000 results, while “What is the chief beginning of man?” yields, at the time of this writing, a total of 0.

marred, idolized, stumbling, and longing for fulfillment. In the New Testament, it is finally typified in Christ, and then imitated by those in whom he dwells. Second, this argument will propose a fourfold taxonomy of the Image's created end: dominion, ethical action, ethical being, and functional representation—*dominion* being the classic understanding of a functional image in the creation story, *ethical action* being the responsive concern of those made in the Image, *ethical being* standing as a deontological virtue ethic rooted in the perfect Image of the person of Christ, and *functional representation* working as a distinct people imaging God in mission and purpose. What remains is a unified ethic which elevates human dignity and flourishing as well as provides an embodied mission of the believer and the church before a holy God.

Before moving to the argument, itself, it would be helpful to define the scope and uniqueness of this contribution. Others have offered similar biblical theologies of the *imago Dei*. In 1966, French professor and Dominican priest, Dominique Barthélemy, offered a devotional approach to a biblical theology of the Image.⁴ Barthélemy's argument is that one facet of divine revelation is an endeavor by God to rehabilitate errant theologies by restoring a right view of the Image. A similar, more modern, devotional approach can be found in Hannah Anderson's 2014 work, *Made for More*, targeted primarily at women, but insightful for all.⁵ Greg Beale has taken more than one approach to the task; first in an examination of the divine image in relation to

⁴ Dominique Barthélemy, *God and His Image: An Outline of Biblical Theology* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1966).

⁵ Hannah Anderson, *Made for More: An Invitation to Live in God's Image* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2014).

God's dwelling place,⁶ then later in its inversion by idolatry.⁷ More recently, Richard Lints took up the task in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, centering primarily on the idolatrous inversions of the Image, and a picture of its rightful pursuit.⁸ Finally, one last comparison is Benjamin Gladd's recent addition to the Essential Studies in Biblical Theology series, in which he frames the functions of the Image along those roles of prophet, priest, and king.⁹

What will be offered here differs from these endeavors, and others, in two primary ways. The first, perhaps most obviously, is that due to the constraints of a paper of this length, the interaction with the biblical text will be somewhat truncated compared with monograph length approaches. It is still maintained that even this cursory examination of the biblical text sufficiently demonstrates the thesis herein. The second, perhaps more relevantly, is that this approach is not strictly a biblical-theological one as it relates to a doctrine of the *imago Dei*, but one specifically aimed at application through an ethical theory framework. But first, this project must ask if Westminster ought to be reformed.

⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

⁷ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

⁸ Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁹ Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

I. REWRITING WESTMINSTER?

“What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”¹⁰ The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is a profound summary of Scripture’s anthropology. Across cultures and histories, nations and peoples, there is a unity in the *imago Dei* which shoulders the profound burden of humanity’s ultimate purpose in this life. The unique diversity of each life will shape the expressions of this purpose, but will—according to Westminster—never negate it. Well beyond a service to the churches of England and Scotland, these words, and those which accompany it, have been a servant and companion to many believers in the some three-hundred-seventy-five years since the Shorter Catechism was first sent to Parliament.¹¹ Richard Baxter even describes it as the best book in the world next to the Bible.¹²

What is intended here, is not a rejection of these words, nor of similar catechetical endeavors. Rather, it is the intent of this paper to offer a deeper rootedness to the ideas of that first question—to add detail and precision to what it means to glorify and enjoy. To say that this

¹⁰ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 1.

¹¹ Concerning the date of the Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Assembly first met in June of 1643, but did not send its Shorter Catechism to Parliament until November of 1647. Both the Shorter and Larger Catechisms were presented in their final forms in April of 1648. See John L. Carson, and David W. Hall, *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), vii. It is further interesting to note, that a third Catechism for British youth—which would precede the Shorter and Longer Catechisms—was initially begun in December of 1643 and continued until January of 1647 but was never finished. See Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), 408–421.

¹² Francis Beattie, *et al. Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly 1647–1897 Containing Eleven Addresses Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States at Charlotte N.C. in May 1897* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication. 1897), 260.

is the chief end of man is to argue that these ends find their intent in the Creator. That is to say, as a single and universal end for all people, this end is the created purpose of all humanity. As such, this purpose ought to be seen to some degree in the creation account, and by extension in the *imago Dei* as the defining mark of that creation.

Westminster, of course, includes some address of the Image in other questions. Question 10 asks how God created man, “God created man male and female, *after his own image*, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.”¹³ Question 35 asks to define sanctification, and replies, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man *after the image of God*, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”¹⁴ What it lacks is the centrality that the biblical narrative seems to place on this significant doctrine. To that end, one must look to the Image’s place in the metanarrative of the Old and New Testaments.

II. THE IMAGE’S PLACE IN SCRIPTURE’S METANARRATIVE

The significance of this doctrine can be traced through a biblical theology of the image of God. It is not a lengthy affair in the sense that it is not a central image by means of its frequency but rather by virtue of its placement as an undergirding concept for the people of God.¹⁵ As Lints explains, “This is not to argue for a peculiar way of ‘interpreting’ any part of Scripture. It is the admonition to interpret books of the Bible as connected to the drama of Creator and creature.”¹⁶

¹³ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 10, Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 35, Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 67.

¹⁶ Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 26.

From its inception at the inception of the world, to the fullness of the kingdom in the eternal reign of Christ, a biblical anthropology may start and end with the image of God.

A. The Image in the Old Testament

To understand the chief beginning of man, one must look to the chief beginning of the Image. Genesis 1:26–27 makes reference to those words of God spoken over dust and bone, filling the lungs of the first man and the first woman. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27).¹⁷ The image of God is formed alongside the rest of creation, yet distinct from it. It is not a state unique to sinless man, as it persists, though marred, throughout the rest of the biblical narrative. As Genesis 5 records the book of the generations of Adam, verse 3 mirrors the language of 1:26, where Adam “became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image.” This image then, is not reserved for the first man or woman, alone, but for every human person.

As the narrative progresses, so does a fullness surrounding the Image. After the great flood in Genesis 6–8, God forms a covenant with his people. Genesis 9 echoes much of the language of Genesis 1. The call is again to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and rule over the other creatures upon it, but there is now a distinction that this provision should not be corrupted again by the shedding of blood. Genesis 9:6 reads, “Whoever sheds human blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made mankind.” The blood of Abel has cried out to God, and he has answered. This foreshadow of the sixth commandment is more than a civil ordering of what will be the various societies which fill the earth. It is an assessment of the value of a human life. Justice is owed not because man might destroy some piece of that

¹⁷ All Scripture quoted will be in the NASB unless otherwise stated.

which God has created, but because that piece of creation bears the very image of its Creator. Chrysostom writes, “Consider the fact that the person has been created in God’s image. Mark the degree of honor accorded to him by God! Think on the fact that he has received authority over all creation. Then you will give up your murderous intent.”¹⁸ In the darkest moments of human sin, the image of God is a mark and reminder to preserve the life made by God.

Murder is not the only harm which may come to the Image. Jumping ahead to Exodus 20:4, the Image is seen again in the decalogue, not in the sixth commandment, but in the second.¹⁹ Idolatry is an inversion of the created image of God.²⁰ Man needs no image to worship, because God is spirit and because God has already formed his image for another purpose. The image which God created was not a thing to be worshipped in place of him, but to bear his presence in the world—an abiding presence of his nature, will, and relationship. Israel’s habitual affairs continued to idolize and displace the true image of their creation. Yes, this idolatry can be found in Asherim and pillars (1 Kings 14:23), golden calves and stars (Ex. 32:4; Amos 5:26), but it can also be seen in the subjugation of peoples, the charging of usury (Neh. 5:7),²¹ the neglect of widows and the poor (Is. 10:2). It is not simply the forming works of false images which displeases the Lord, but also the deforming works of the true Images. Distortions of the image of God exist not because the Image had been removed, but because the Image had in some ways

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 27.15*, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (New York, NY: Catholic University of America, 1947), 82:173.

¹⁹ Second, that is, by most protestant and orthodox numberings. Roman Catholics and Lutherans instead group 20:4 with the first (20:3) and later split the tenth, while Jewish readers make the same grouping, but understand the prologue of 20:2 to be the first commandment.

²⁰ Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 86.

²¹ Usury may be understood as the charging of interest that is unreasonably high.

been “re-created in the image of sin.”²² The Hebrew Bible is then consumed with longings for this image to be restored again.²³

B. The Image in the New Testament

Colossians 1:15–20 meets this longing with the hope of Christ. It reads of Christ, that

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

The sinless God-man is the restoration of the Image for all who find their hope in him. He is the image of God perfected and typified. Adam bore the image of the Creator. Jesus is the Creator incarnate. This image is seen in the life of Christ as portrayed in the gospels. Jesus’ very genealogies point to the longings for the story of his coming. The nature of his conception points to the distinctness of his person. He is not the same son to Joseph that Seth was to Adam in his image and likeness. He bore a greater Image and likeness of a greater Father. Still fully man, the image of Christ stands separate because he stands without the veil of sin (2 Cor. 4:4). This pure reflection then is seen in every facet of his life and death. It is then also the expectation of those who follow him.

Romans 8:29 says that “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” New Testament ethics then may be stated for those in

²² T. B. Maston, *The Bible and Race* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1959), 6.

²³ Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church*, 128.

Christ as that oft-trite question, “What Would Jesus Do?” It is the image of Christ, in imitation and conformation, that the church is called to do and be. The image of God is a task and identity which continues today. The church longs for the vision of Revelation 21–22, wherein Christ will make all things new and will dwell among his people again. This new creation is not the erasure of the Image in lieu of the genuine article, but the completion of the Image, restored to its full capacity as a whole creation before its Creator. If this is the trajectory of the *imago Dei* from creation to culmination, the content of the Image must be fully revealed.

III. IMAGING GOD

Historically, the Image has been marked by three distinct positions: the structural, the relational, and the functional.²⁴ Much ink has been spilled in the various expressions of the mental or moral structure of man,²⁵ over against relational capacities,²⁶ and in its functional expressions.²⁷ To some degree, these partitive notions are each incapable of capturing the

²⁴ These three positions were categorized first by Millard Erickson in his classic, *Christian Theology*, but have essentially been ascribed to in one form or another for millennia. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1983), 498–510. Noted as the first proponent by Stanley Grenz in *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

²⁵ James Orr, *God’s Image in Man: And Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 56–57. Expressed by Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 13.11.12; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, NY: Benziger Bros., 1947), 1.92.1–93.4; and John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.3.1.

²⁶ Andreas Schüle, “Made in the ‘Image of God’: The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1–3,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117, no. 1 (2005): 19; Expressed by Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Vol. 3* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 197–198; and Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2014), 78.

²⁷ Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (New York, NY: W. B. Eerdmans; Friendship Press, 1986), 61. For consequence rather than interpretation see, Francis

doctrine's fullness on their own.²⁸ The following taxonomy understands the image of God as structural, relational, and functional. It is the verbal expression of God's people on the earth, distinct from the rest of creation by essence, relationship, and responsibility, and it begins with the first words of Genesis not spoken over creation but to it.

A. Dominion

In Genesis 1:28, "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" As the pinnacle of God's creation, humanity has been made to fill, subdue, and rule over the earth. This stated intent directly follows the Image and seems to be, in part, the Hebraic understanding of being and doing.²⁹ The *imago Dei* as a concept of dominion or rule is of course not a foreign one to those surrounding nations and peoples at the time of the biblical story. Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of God's image can be seen in pharaohs and kings, as those who were not simply divinely placed, but divine themselves.³⁰ This image of gods, in the pluralistic sense, conveyed a distinct elevation of these rulers above those inferior peoples under their rule. The biblical narrative subverts this idea, by bestowing the Image not upon a ruling class or figurehead, but upon all men, and women.

Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology; v1: First through Tenth Topics, v1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), 466.

²⁸ Karl Barth traces the history of the doctrine through the, at times, myopic products of each interpreter's context and age. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/I* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958) 192ff.

²⁹ Cuthbert A. Simpson, *Interpreter's Bible vol. 1* (New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 484.

³⁰ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 169.

David J. A. Clines explains that “to be God’s image... is to deputize in the created world for the transcendent God... to represent God’s lordship to the lower orders of creation.”³¹ This is not a task given to man or to woman independently of one another, but to man and woman together, giving an inherent dignity to all people, and setting creation apart from its creator. Moving then through the verse’s picture of this dominion, humanity rules in fruitfulness, in cultivation, and distinction.

The first element of this command is to create in the way God has created—to bring forth life. This is not unique to humanity, as those same fish and birds, beasts and crawling things, even trees and plants, bear a similar responsibility and carry it out, sexually and asexually. The distinction, once again, is that humanity bears the image of God, male and female. Human procreation, over against all other types, is the one creative function that reproduces the image of God in the world—a literal, creative task. Unlike the God whose image men and women bear, humanity is unable to create alone. Male and female, he created them. Male and female, they create. Together, the two image bearers create new image bearers. This is not an essential function of the Image—lest it negate the personhood of children, the barren, or Jesus himself—but the ordained means of increase. Biological gender stands then as one reminder that humans are not God. God creates out of his capacity. There is no partialism or composite nature of his person or ability. God speaks and creation springs forth *ex nihilo*. Humanity is, as the bearer of God’s image, also called to create, not *ex nihilo*, but *ex creatione*. This leads to the second task: to cultivate and subdue.

³¹ David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 101.

As God delineated between land and water, fish and bird, beast and crawling thing, so humanity mirrors these creative tasks in farming, ranching, and life-giving practices, but also in art, music, and the cultivation of beauty. This is to work the earth and to rule over other creatures, not as domineers, but as custodians.³² It is the task of creating, cultivating, and caretaking. Any calling or vocation becomes a godly calling so long as it is bound up in the moral pursuit of bearing God's image in the world in accordance with these tasks. The image of God is more than this, but it is not less.

B. Ethical Action

The second facet of imaging God can be expressed in ethical action. This is to say that bearing the image of God is not a vocational reality alone but bears outward moral and relational expressions. Perhaps, this is some part of the distinction made between the image and likeness by Gregory of Nyssa. He writes, "We possess the one by creation; we acquire the other by free will. In the first structure it is given us to be born in the image of God; by free will there is formed in us the being in the likeness of God. ... this is so that you might complete it yourself and might be worthy of the reward which comes from God."³³ Humanity reflects the image of God no less than to the degree that its ethical action is consistent with the action of the Creator. This is seen in the inaction of sin and the active pursuit of righteousness. It is to do justice, and not merely speak about it. It is to love mercy, and not boast in distortions of the Image. It is to walk humbly,

³² Wilma Ann Bailey, "The Way the World is Meant to Be: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:26–29," *Vision (Winnipeg, Man.)* 9, no. 1 (2008): 52.

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Origin of Man*, in Hadwiga Hörner, ed. *Gregori Nysseni Opera Supplementum* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 10.

and not in an arrogance which would subvert the Image as anything unfit of a creature before the God of heaven.

But ethical action cannot simply be reduced to that action done by the image. It must also be a responsive concern for those that bear it. This implies a distinct relational component as God's people are called to bear his image to one another not as witnesses but as coheirs. Each believer polishes the mirror of the community with ever increasing glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Ethical action is to bear the image of God in love and good works. T. B. Maston explains that this is "the responsibility of man ... an innate sense of oughtness, [which is] an evidence and expression of the image of God within man."³⁴ In some sense, this ethical action is the fulfillment of what the Image was meant to be and will be, soteriologically and eschatologically.³⁵ Humanity is thus not simply to focus on those tasks of dominion alone, but to do so in a community which recognizes the dignity of others and pursues flourishing as defined by the moral outworking of right action. This is the structure of the prophet's concern for the marginalized—seen most in the disregard of the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the immigrant. It may be framed today in the Image's bearing on conversations of gender, race, economics, and status.

The Image's ethical action is one of personal and corporate responsibility. Personally, men and women image God in their individual lives by moral action consistent with his actions of redemption, mercy, justice, and love. The expressive nature of God's communicable actions are to be mirrored by those bearing his Image. Corporately, this is to recognize that moral action is impossible to do in isolation. God is a relational God, within the persons of the Trinity,

³⁴ Maston, *The Bible and Race*, 8.

³⁵ See, P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse*, Secrétariat de l'Université, Neuchâtel (1940): 175.

towards humanity, and in the expectations of humanity towards the social other. This morality is the outward expression of the inward reality of God's character and virtue. To image God outwardly must be rooted in an image of God inwardly.

C. Ethical Being

It is not enough to consider the image's weight of vocation and relationship, it must also be seen in the inward, structural reality of virtue formation. This is the teleological component of an *imago Dei* ethic. This is to say that humanity images God by the characterological traits it exhibits. Ethical being, in this regard, may be restated as an inward Christlikeness. As the Athenians groped at some knowledge of their creator, Paul assures them that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 NIV). This being is a consequence of the Image. It is the reality of human personhood. But it is not static. There is along with this being a measure of becoming. Jesus, at every stage of development, was the very imprint of God. Jesus, as man, learned to crawl and walk and speak and grow. Jesus, as the perfect image of God, had no need for growth towards holiness.³⁶ There was no becoming for the eternal Son, no marred state to overcome, no pangs of regret or brokenness in his soul. This is the Image to which the believer is conformed—the object of its becoming.

This characterological concern evaluates the formative practices of the Christian life. Liederbach and Lenow describe this as "[God's desire for] his image-bearers to glorify him through habituated obedience that flows reflexively through [their] transformed character."³⁷

³⁶ This is not to deny the descriptions of Jesus' humble submission in Hebrews 2–5 where the author describes Jesus' learning obedience through suffering to a point of having been perfected (Heb. 5:8–9). Rather, these passages demonstrate the submission of Jesus' human will, not a becoming in the sense of a move from sinful to sinlessness.

³⁷ Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics As Worship: The Pursuit of Moral*

Formation, rightly considered, will naturally examine the ways the believer is formed and deformed by spiritual disciplines, ecclesial liturgy and community, and life in the world. Consider, for a moment, the role that just Christian worship has on character. Liturgical worship, as a work of the people, bears a formative task in the life of the Christian. Even those traditions which deemphasize liturgical expressions of their worship services in favor of modern expressions are forming distinct liturgies, even if said liturgies are untethered to historic practices of the church. These expressions often pursue each element of the service in seeking excellence as unto the Lord in ways which are winsome to the culture around them—a talented band, stunning audio and visual effects, and an engaging speaker—but what are these expressions of worship forming in those who participate in them? It may even be unfitting to describe attendance here as participation. Instead, the liturgy has become not participation as an act of the people, but consumption. If this is the formative reality of ethical being within the Sunday gathering, how much more is at stake outside of it?

The believer then has a distinct responsibility as it relates to the cultivation of the Image in their inward parts, to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). This is impossible without the Spirit of God, who forms the believer into the virtue of Christ. There is a tension here between rule and end which need not be broken. The result is a deontological virtue ethic which embodies fully the image of God in clarified responsibility and character.³⁸ But there is still one final consideration of the Image’s ethic in a functional representation of the Godhead.

Discipleship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), 197–198.

³⁸ See Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics As Worship*, 197; and Paul J. Morrison, *Integration: Race, T. B. Maston, and Hope for the Desegregated Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick

D. Functional Representation

The final element of this taxonomy is the consideration of the Image's role in the *missio Dei* by creating a distinct people imaging God in mission and purpose. This is an embodied evangelism not only to those other image bearers, but even "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). The global expressions of the church in all her denominations, traditions, liturgies, and languages may well demonstrate the profound difficulty in this task. Infighting and controversy seem to have led to an infinitely growing number of Christian sects and services, each claiming some measure of moral and epistemological authority over the others. But the centrality of God's work for his image bearers, made known through the true image of Christ, offers a united and embodied evangelism in the mission of God.

This fourth facet is what distinguishes this framework beyond general ethics and into an ethic explicit to the people of God. To some degree—as functions of general revelation and natural law—dominion, ethical action, and ethical being can be seen and expected, in varying degrees, in secular ethics. But the functional representation is a task which is distinct to those who not only bear the *imago Dei*, but are being conformed to the *imago Christi*. Lesslie Newbigin writes that the church "offers to all peoples a vision of the goal of human history in which its good is affirmed and its evil is forgiven and taken away, a vision which makes it possible to act hopefully when there is no earthly hope, and to find the way when everything is dark and there are no earthly landmarks."³⁹

Publications, 2022), 75–83.

³⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 198.

The people of God continues to image Christ in her ecclesial functions as well as her ethical ones. As the gifts and signs of her gathering, the sacraments of baptism and communion visibly reflect Christ's work.⁴⁰ The table, in particular, is a visceral picture of the subversive nature of Christ's image. Like Adam, there is a breaking of the image of God in Jesus. Unlike Adam, the breaking of this image is no longer the sign of the breaking of fellowship, but the breaking of bread in communion with God and the ecclesial other. Christ's body broken and blood shed are the restorative signs of the Image restored—relationally, structurally, and functionally. Relationally, those in Christ have been restored to communion with God by the means of his grace. Structurally, the Spirit forms his people into the image of Christ. Functionally, she embodies the posture of the crucified Christ to the world.

IV. CONCLUSION

The good is determined by its proximity to its source in the goodness of God. This goodness is expressed in the eternal nature of God's moral character. In creation, this is expressed in a creative and ruling work, goodness in act and being, as representatives of the Godhead in creation and to creation. This is the expression of God's moral nature to creation, to the communal other, to the self, and to the world. These aspects are not at odds with one another but are each part and parcel of what it means to be human. To be human is to image God, and by so doing, to glorify and enjoy him forever.

⁴⁰ Walls, Vanhoozer, et al. "A Reforming Catholic Confession: A 'Mere Protestant' Statement of Faith to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation" (2017), Baptism and the Lord's Supper. <https://reformingcatholicconfession.com>.

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